

WE WERE STRANGERS

We were strangers, but,
“Thank you,” he said, “for keeping the vigil.”
Completing the laying on of hands.
It was as hard to meet his eyes, taut, controlled,
As hers burnt out, measureless in misery
Behind the dark glass.
The shimmer of pain clothing her as visibly
As the sheet waves of heat outside the bus.

Yesterday she'd said,
“Her name means ‘Blessed of God.’”
Lips curving gently on the damp, downed
early morning head.
The mother's eyes distant, dreaming of love.

There was no warning.
Even the deep throated, predator growl,
Pads sinking into the gritty sand
Was a muted prelude.
And then the cry.
Wrenched in agony from the silence.

No refuge from the gaunt, shadowed faces
of the searchers,
No refuge from the well meant gestures
of compassion.

Only the stark disarray of the tiny tent,
defenseless on the road.
“We can cope,” he said. “We're people of God.”

Dawn washed the night's misery
back into our bones.
The search is ended.
“The birds will find the body now.”
Flatly, from the tracker.
“Not everyone will see it as you do.”
Flatly, from the child.

Only the memory of the night,
torn with pain.
“Thank you for keeping the vigil.”
Humanity's claws.
The Word. Our only solace.