

The Mall At Christmas

Coming toward me is
one wide column of shoppers
dressed in motley.

They are coming to the concrete
Big Top:
three floors of merchants
and their wares with names like Dillards,
Younkers, Sears...
(notice how all store names sound possessive?)
and the people walk in line, faces
fierce and children on leashes.

I am here on this bench by the trash can and
I'm thinking about last
Christmas,
each of us was smiling--- such a
picture.

Carols were playing,
Bing was on the loud speakers,
Santa and his elves were set
up in the
middle, near
Frederick's of Hollywood---
we got pictures of the girls
on his lap,
I got a watch
that quit around
Easter,
you got a red furry teddy
from Freddie's...
(what else would my Mrs. Santa wear?)

Then, it happened---
the moon whirled into place, covering
the sun.

We looked up through the broad
sky-dome over the skating
rink.

*Was there sposed to be
a E-clips today?*

uncle Benny asked.

And all the people looked up...
the music stopped, Bing was
silenced,
Santa's head turned
and he pulled his
beard down
around his neck,
mouth wide open,
the clerks at
Frederick's came out,
Rudolph's left
blinking, and unshelved...

We all stood there in
the dim holiday
shadow and knew
how small we
really
were,

and we craned our
tired necks into the
darkness, listening for the
angels...

and we peered past
the towering candy-cane fountain
looking for that one single star...

I began to scan the sky,
nervously searching for some
sign, some hint..., of a sleigh...
some reindeer. or something...

but the moon slid
uneventfully to the
side and the sun reappeared
and
we all looked
pale as our eyes readjusted
and
Benny remarked
simply,

Huh, I guess so.

Now my bench has become
uncomfortable---
the trash can is full
and I have decided
to join the column of shoppers
again,
each of us marching to find
some quiet, clean-smelling place
to break ranks.