

Valley Girl

by Regina Buccola

Gray dawn down on the river, Dad snapping pictures
 of the Big Four—
 A labyrinth of rust that spans the river and
 just stops—
 A bridge that goes nowhere, only across.

Me playing on the pebbly bank,
 Watching the greenish-brown current sweep seductively by;
 Bounding over beer cans and hubcaps and twisted coat hangers
 that had struggled to shore;
 Smelling the fishy, coaly, industrial waste
 of the River in the City;
 Spying an orange tabby kitten flopped across a mossy moldering log.

Listening to the current—murmuring incantations,
 conjuring memories:
 fireworks exploding high above,
 dappling the black with bursts of impossible brightness;
 picnics at wooden tables hewn with hearts and
 added-up initials
 on nights when the moon went swimming;
 tenuous trips out onto the glassy surface,
 stiffened by the breath of January—
 the current an ominous vibration
 somewhere under the wide white expanse
 that seared your eyes in the sun.

Grandmary remembered it creeping on quiet gray feet over the flood wall
 and down the city streets,
 taking the museum mummy hostage;
 ravaging her shredded shroud, sucking at the dried-out flesh that
 clung like cellophane to the blackening bones of her cheeks,

 Leaving her, finally—discarded and spent— in the branches of
 a tree;
 Just like the tiny drowned kitten
 That I held cold and quiet in the palm of my hand.