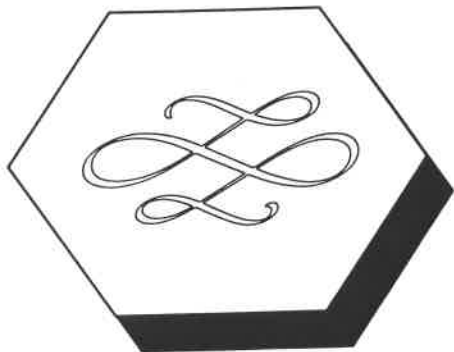


Phlox

Flocks!
Flocks!
I thought you said
in midsummer.
Their purple
and white burst
like cotton candy
or caramel balls
wrapped in yellow
cellophane packages.
They're cheap! gaudy!
and a little bit sleazy,
but I love them just
the same.
Now in mid-September
the autumn wind
has rudely bitten and chewed most
of the petals off the stem.
I miss them still
and feel I've crept
out from the side door alley
of some seedy burlesque strip joint
still guilty over
seeing the bloom slowly taken
from the rose,
one petal at a time.



The First Lesson of Beauty

—To Lizzie B.—

Never turn
away from
your own beauty.
It may gently
tap you
on the shoulder
one day and
you'll look back
to a total
stranger wondering
what she wants of you—
if you are in
her way or just
blocking her view.
Step aside in deference
to let her go by
yet her walk and
form, black curly head of hair,
and air will look
just like you
moving farther ahead.
You may
think it an
odd coincidence
that you should
meet someone
so beautifully reminiscent
as to have just walked
out of one of your own dreams.
Don't hesitate—
from a distance she turns
and suddenly
recognizes
you like a long lost friend.
Go ahead
while she pauses there
a moment—
waiting for you
to catch up with her again.