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Cattails

Susan Happy Herbert

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*We don't see that, without truth, we do not live.
Instead, we fight desperately to grab onto anything,
however fleeting, that tells us, "we are happy."
In our hearts, perhaps, we know, but
we are unwilling to forfeit the comfort of our facade.
In the end, though we could make an art of life, we choose to make a life of art.*

*In art lies our collective facade.
If we are to live, best the world see us happy,
Though, really, we are anything but.*

From: Susan Happy Herbert <sherbert@richmond.edu>
Subject: Cattails
Sent: February 18, 2000, 10:12 am
To: Messenger <messenger@richmond.edu>
Cc: Zinc Design <etownsend@zincdesign.com>

*I imagine that the cattail came to town on a pick-up's front fender
when its driver, off with his rifle in search of game, parked in a ditch.
On the way home, the pod fell off at Libby and Broad to lie where I
saw it -- a swollen brown finger, overused the way Grandma's were after
she scrubbed my childhood clothes against her washboard and hung them
to dry in the winter air. They froze into stiff silhouettes that looked
like my paper doll's clothes -- flat and hard and cold as Grandpa's
heart when he drowned the new litter of kittens in the horse trough.
The cattail lay on city pavement till a passing tire broke it open, spilled
seed that lay useless on the asphalt that grows nothing but potholes.
A sudden gust of air swirled the fluff into a giant puff-ball, blew
displaced bits into whorls like dust-motes looking for sunny places
to settle. Wipers brushed my windshield clear of what looked
like the down of chickens, like the feathers Grandma plucked
from bloody birds and sewed into the pillows I'll sleep on tonight.
Now, far from the farm where I once lived, I try to set down
shallow roots in my tidy, city apartment.*



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