

## SHROUD OF THE GNOME

And what amazes me is that none of our modern  
inventions  
surprise or interest him, even a little. I tell him  
it is time he got his booster shots, but then  
I realize I have no power over him whatsoever.  
He becomes increasingly light-footed until I lose sight  
of him downtown between the federal building and  
the post office. A registered nurse is taking her  
coffee break. I myself needed a break, so I sat down  
next to her at the counter. "Don't mind me," I said,  
"I'm just a hungry little Gnostic in need of a sandwich."  
(This old line of mine had met with great success  
on any number of previous occasions.) I thought  
a deaf, dumb, and blind nurse, sounds ideal!  
But then I remembered that some of the earliest  
Paleolithic office workers also feigned blindness  
when approached by nonoffice workers, so I paid my bill  
and disappeared down an alley where I composed  
myself.

Amid the piles of outcast citizenry and burning barrels  
of waste and rot, the plump rats darting freely,  
the havoc of blown newspapers, lay the little shroud  
of my lost friend: small and gray and threadbare,  
windworn by the ages of scurrying hither and thither,  
battered by the avalanches and private tornadoes  
of just being a gnome, but surely there were good times,  
too.

And now, rejuvenated by the wind, the shroud moves  
forward,  
Hesitates, dances sideways, brushes my foot as if for a  
kiss,  
and flies upward, whistling a little-known ballad  
about the pitiful, raw etiquette of the underworld.

*I could say Shroud of the Gnome reminded me that the material world is literally smoke and mirrors, or that grief is happening inside me all the time and certain experiences reveal it, but most practically this poem shows me that I can fiddle with verb tense.*

- John Sieracki