

PRESENTING THE POEM:

I Can't Forget You.

BY LEN ROBERTS

SETTING THE STAGE: Today's poem tells a story of graffiti. The official, primary sense that's tapped here is the visual. But if there is such a thing as a sixth sense, I think it's what the *heart* perceives. This poem taps that sense, too.

SOME FEATURES TO NOTICE:

How almost the whole poem is visual
The specific details of the visual images
How the poet describes not only what he saw—the graffiti—but what the sight inspired him to imagine in his mind's eye
Hyperbole (hi-PUR-bo-lee) means exaggerated for effect

RESPONSE STANCE: Please go back into "I Can't Forget You." and mark the lines and phrases you can see.

BENEDICTION: There's a lot to be said for careful visual imagery, combined with the poet's imagination. Again, begin with the *thing*—the visual perception; then bring to it your poet's vision and invention.

I Can't Forget You.

spray-painted high on the overpass,
each letter a good foot long,
and I try to picture the writer
 hanging from a rope
between midnight and dawn
the weight of his love swaying,
 making a trembling
N and G, his mind at work
 with the apostrophe—
 the grammar of loss—
and his resistance to hyperbole,
 no exclamation point
 but a period at the end
that shows a heart not given
 to exaggeration,
a heart that's direct with a no-
 fooling around approach,
and I wonder if he tested the rope
before tying it to the only tree I can see
 that would bear his weight,
or if he didn't care about the free-
 fall of thirty or more feet
as he locked his wrist to form such
 straight T's,
and still managed, dangling, to flex
 for the C and G,
knowing as he did, I'm sure,
the lover would ride this way each day
until she found a way around,
a winding back road with trees
 and roadside
tiger lilies, maybe a stream, a
 white house, white fence,
 a dog in the yard
 miles
from this black-letter, open-book
 in-your-face missing
that the rain or Turnpike road
 crew
will soon wash off.

—Len Roberts