

Walt Peterson

KEY WEST: FEBRUARY

Evening fans out against the sky
iridescent as gamecocks' feathers,
and you are the white cat dancing
en pointe in Mallory Square.
I, the dog in dark glasses
who waits on the Harley for hand-outs.
Tourists come, laugh, snap shutters,
cast dollars in up-turned hats.
Their nights are the crisp white linen,
amaretto lacquered lips in staterooms
of *The Royal Sovereign*, but

our night comes on as a black-flak
fighter. We straddle the throb of the V-twin,
two-up, cruise back streets,
lights veining alleys past clapboard
chapels while white-gloved negro women
sing "Lord Make Me Your Vessel,"
and fingers splay above our Tarot
like the mangrove root.
Over these streets, Hemingway catwalked
from Pauline toward wife three, and
the smell of deep-fried blackeyed peas
and rice tumbles from windows
on pillows of bougainvillea.

Above the Southern nun buoy
hibiscus stars explode, dying angels,
while the *Issac Allerton* rocks her keel
five fathoms and years beyond
green ripples of the cay.

I can see her tacking west
through the Straits of Florida,
Saint Elmo's fire cracking from the spars
before she broke on the reef.
My love, what could wreckers find
diving into the hold,
her ribs blooming rosettes of calcium?
What will they find in a hundred years
of us, our garish nights
on this spit of coral and palm.