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## Poetry of Rees Nielsen

### A Fool's Bargain

It was the early 1960's  
I must have been 9  
10 years old  
my father gave me  
a twenty dollar bill  
and turned me loose into the midway  
of the Big Fresno Fair  
you can't imagine  
for there are more than seven wonders in the world  
when you are nine  
as I walked past  
the chameleons  
leashed and clipped to your shirt  
and the turtles with painted shell  
past  
the cotton candy booth  
and the canisters filled with  
all kinds of plastic swords and ray guns  
above in the vast night  
huge creaking contraptions  
spun neon cartwheels  
into the heavens  
whirling with the screams  
of the faithful  
riding the October stars  
as magnificent as God  
in his turban

A man called me  
specifically  
out of the crowd  
"You, boy, three throws,"  
and he pointed with a cane  
to a plethora of stuffed toy  
and various plunder  
"wins any of these!"  
he winked and added,  
"You look like a boy with a strong right arm"  
I had promised myself all along  
to show some control  
my old man didn't shell out  
twenties  
every day of the week  
but the barker had appealed to my vanity  
and the concept,  
just three throws  
knock the dolls off the ledge  
It wasn't that I wanted that cheesy five foot tall  
turquoise panda  
already split at the seam  
but three measly dolls!  
On the first two throws I took them down

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but I missed that third  
and so it went  
through the entire  
twenty  
on the last three I took two off the ledge  
with authority  
hit the third doll square on the nose  
but the dam thing didn't even rock  
back and forth  
the ball bounced back  
like I was throwing at a stone wall  
before I could object  
before I could demand  
to examine that doll  
the man was hawking up another fool  
out of that salmon run  
of fools  
right then and there  
I promised myself  
that I would never do that again

Today  
after 27 years  
of struggle and endless labor  
I have hit that dam third doll  
again  
it is time to face  
the inevitable  
I will lose the land,  
maybe the house too  
I promise  
I will never do this again

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## Two Selections from "The Valiant Sparrow"

There's a piece of me  
that broke off  
wandered into the crowd  
took up a life of its own  
I can see it  
up ahead  
here and there  
like a child  
with a balloon  
at the fair  
I race after  
This twitching leg  
or hand  
severed, like her reflection trapped  
in a broken mirror  
I can feel it  
as real as rain  
but when I look  
there is nothing there

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the stump  
that memory of her  
on our honeymoon  
wearing my old zarape  
an impending tragedy  
set in motion  
so many years ago  
o baby  
I thought we were going to go on  
forever  
like a waterfall  
before striking the rocks below  
all those hoops we jumped through  
o baby  
31  
years  
3 children  
where did you go?  
We had all the right reasons  
lined up like arrows in a quiver  
and now, after all that,  
these shards in my hands  
are all that's left of my heart

I should have sliced my heart  
so razor thin  
for you to see  
the rings of joy  
you wore into that tapestry  
that you wove of me

There were so many things  
I forgot tell you  
One day  
you said "I've had a long life,"  
resigned  
in a tone you had never used before

right then  
and there  
I should  
have explained  
the ten thousand  
splendiferous  
whys of you?

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**Rees Nielsen** left Callison College while in Bangalore, India, in 1971 to travel across Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey to Europe before returning to Santa Cruz, CA. He was published in *Sundaz* and *Big Moon* magazine and gave a reading at Zachary's restaurant in the poetry/short story series presided over by Morton Marcus. In 1976, he farmed near Selma, in San Joaquin Valley where he married Riina. He farmed for 30 years with Alfred Hanson. In the fall of 2003, the two lost all but 28 acres as a result of falling prices. He worked as a farm manager for McClarty Farms, Parlier, CA. In 2008, Riina died. The last two poems are excerpts from a longer poem dedicated to her memory. He has written his entire life, encouraged by his cousin Nels Hanson. He now lives in Indianola, Iowa, with two wonderful grandchildren, Marshall and Adelaide Taylor.

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