take the strain as you stoop, grasp
the rock in an act of love
for granite; keep your back straight
and hope your Pisan tower
of stacked up chairs won’t totter.

It is now you may lie back
and think of your queen, or claim
good fences make good vertebrae.

SHARING
(for L.P.)

Suffering: it is a real woman’s task
to take finally the harder road
while someone listens to the pipa
far, far away from that music’s home.
They say such tunes are food for love.
But what sustenance is this? When
thousand after thousand ocean miles
drown out the singing of plucked strings
with sea’s rough work of waves and howl
of driven salt winds across the crests.

After the song has ended you walk
on broken paths in the desert silence.
Over granite rocks air shimmers as heat
rises. Strange mirages show plates
of darkness like the shapes of demons, 
dragons, avenging spirits of torment.

But the light changes over the land
and rain showers follow. Then in
warm sun brilliant desert flowers bloom.

¹ Pipa is sometimes called the Chinese lute.