

Classic Poetry Series

**Jean Monahan**  
**- poems -**

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## Jean Monahan()

Jean Monahan is the author of two books of poetry, *Hands* (Anhinga Press, 1992), and *Believe It Or Not* (Orchises Press, 1999) and *Same Difference*. She is in the process of completing a fourth collection, *18th Century Zebra*. She has appeared in many journals such as *The New Republic*, *Orion*, *Graham House*, *Shenandoah*, *Seneca Review*, *Columbia*, *Chelsea* and *Nimrod*. She has won numerous awards, including a recent 2nd prize in the River Styx magazine 1998 contest and the Open Voice Award from The Writer's Voice of the West Side YMCA. She lives in Salem, Massachusetts.

# Rough Beast

Don't tell a camel about need and want.

Look at the big lips  
pursed  
in perpetual kiss,  
the dangerous lashes  
of a born coquette.

The camel is an animal  
grateful for less.

It keeps to itself  
the hidden spring choked with grass,  
the sharpest thorn  
on the sweetest stalk.

When a voice was heard crying in the wilderness,

when God spoke  
from the burning bush,

the camel was the only animal  
to answer back.

Dune on stilts,  
it leans into the long horizon,  
bloodhounding

the secret caches of watermelon

brought forth like manna  
from the sand.

It will bear no false gods  
before it:  
not the trader  
who cinches its hump  
with rope,  
nor the tourist.

It has a clear sense of its place in the world:

after water and watermelon,  
heat and light,  
silence and science,

it is the last great hope,

Noah's ark,

Virgin of the oasis  
who brings forth milk  
under a deadly sky.

Year after year  
it follows the bright stars  
east, falls to its knees  
for the lowliest king.

Except, of course, when the top lip  
lifts like a curtain  
on a mighty sneer.

Then you may hear,  
out of the mouth of that rough beast,  
the walls of the wide world  
collapse.

Anonymous submission.

Jean Monahan