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MEDITATION ON OUR NEW CEILING FAN

On Low, its four outstretched palms
pass over our heads, blessing us
continuously: Father, Son, Holy Ghost,
and something I can't quite catch.
On Medium, it begins to withdraw,
humming mournfully to itself, its blades
disappearing, sighing up a breeze
as it shudders slightly on its axis.
It turns belligerent on High, strains
at its mounting: Jehovah's inverted Huey
about to auger straight into the basement,
pulling us, carpeting, appliances,
all toward the earth's preheated core
— bluster from a household god I found
on sale at K-Mart, though I hear a whirring
back in Sunday school, where Miss Ada Beeks
explained how God put a switch in His head
attached to what we think or even
dream, that He can draw your soul
to bliss or slice it thin enough
to fall through steel, or simply float
above it like a halo of spinning scythes.

William Trowbridge

BACK BY THE SPRING

He treks back by the spring with me,
striding to keep up, and
having to leap up the sedge clumps:
if no longer knee-high to a grasshopper—
they explode in yellow,
staccato flights all around us —
he's eye-high in abrading grass,
but wouldn't be carried if I offered.
Pickerel frogs vault on ahead
to his maximum delight
in a dew and sun-spattered vanguard.

I lift the cedar cover off —
and there is the lucid shaft
stabbed deeply into the ground;
and there are we,
shimmery and somehow brightly touching,
wreathed in cumuli like popular gods,
an academy confection of Zeus and the infant Apollo
cast on sky and leaf-flecked water,
with the divine birches flashing dreamily
in mysterious arcades under the firs . . .

He teeters, slim hips see-sawing on the rim,
and plops in his thin silver dime —
despite our exchange of warnings and promises,
the lectures on the inviolability of the spring,
the temperamental intake nozzle,
and what can happen to a boy
who, to pitch his obol,
gets in the grab-reach of Charon.

Then the obligatory jasper pebbles
I permit:
his game today is to knock off
the tumor-like slugs that glide,
indiscernibly,
around the glazed tiling.
One goes — its livid bottom
greens cadaverishly at it sinks —
“It’s going to drown, Dad,” then
“Will it drown, Dad? Would I drown, Dad?”—
he’s clammy, trembling —
“Am I going to die . . .?”
— trembling cold-drenched
in the impotent morning heat.
I sweep him into my arms;
I have no speakable solace.

Frederick Lowe

TWO POEMS

**Not Only Naked Indian Girls And Booze
But 10 Point Bucks That Line Up
Just Begging To Be Shot and Bass
In Shoals So Thick A Man Could Walk
Across The Water On Their Backs**

1

Everyone knows the father of our country,
but what about the mother in her early girlhood
with a suitcase no larger than a locksmith's.
Does she not deserve some recognition lost
in the shadows of the recent UFO landing as
out come the stalks of space and everyone glances
just below the neutron belt and says, "Ah,
drinking buddies of the stars."

What chance does she stand against that! Who
was she, anyway, unrecognized then unrecognized
now lost forever in Father's insatiable shadow,
Father being George, of course, who lay in his
bed whittling his teeth and thinking about Martha
who was just his wife and not the country's
sacred loins.

2

Everyone knows the uncle of our country,
but what about the aunt. There are no posters
for her saying AUNT SAMANTHA WANTS YOU, HON.
And her not pointing with a finger like an M-16
but holding open both her arms, calling back
to their sand forts and tree houses all the boys
who rushed off to war, catching them in time
and just like she was dressing someone for church
firmly stuffing their souls back into their
bodies like breast-pocket handkerchiefs into
a thousand Sunday suits.

3

The father and the uncle of our country stand
there in the light which if not failing is certainly
getting a D. The loam is over their shoes
and the simple breaths they take affect the weather
map. They are so weird — that wig, those
striped pants. And tall enough to look out
over the world.

They like being together. They like being alone,
high above the aprons and the smell of fish.
They like to shake hands and pound each other
on the upper arms. If only they had a dog,
the Beast of 50 States! Then the three of them
could take turns protecting the womenfolk, all
of whom are precious in their sight, exceptions
listed alphabetically toward the back.

George remembers when he was only a twinkle
in the eye of limitless grasses, before there
was a map for the bullies to copy from the weaker
kids. "Do you remember back, then, Sam?"

"Nope. I was always flesh. And before that,
blood."

On The Way Home From I.C.U.

It is the kind of motel
where neon makes noise and the girl
in the black Jantzen suit arcing forever toward
the hissing water smokes a little.

It is 11 bucks and these kids are checking in
at noon. I see them from my car,
quiet as an iron lung. I can almost feel
their breathing and the last dollar
in change, hot and sticky as the quarters
Mother gave him when he was 6.

They are sure that sirens will go off
the minute they touch the knob of Cabin #9
and the diving girl will splash at last,
surface and shout their names to everyone
whose hands will fly up to their mouths
like gluttons eating peas.

They go into the office together.
She is thinking of her diaphragm, ringing
the edge with goop like a pastry.
He is thinking about the book he read,
the buttons for all that joy.
I am wishing this red light would last forever.

Ronald Koertge

DEUTERIUM SONNET FOR A CASSETTE-RECORDER

Too bad to have to say so long to letters:
 Oh, all arcana die. We are arcane.
 I can tell you now, I'd hate to have to explain,
 whether to inferiors or betters,
 how much of me is kinked and linked in these stutters
 of knotted ink. What an engine, the pen.
 And there is a rhyme it made: it made the whole brain
 an ear, like those that hear galaxies hiss.

Computers

for information now, and stereo
 for singing and saying the pleasantly said. Of course
 this peculiar code will die, having lost its force.
 No one will write or read, but again, no
 one will need to. I believe, almost, I can let it go,
 this sweet, stodgy method, without remorse.

Mikes sprout like Queen-Anne's-lace, have the same source,
 that long intelligence time fountains from. Or so
 I'd say, anyway, anyway.

We're letters' debtors,
 but who's gonna know how deeply?

We're on the train,
 the train, the train, and don't you hear that plain-
 tive foghorn falling redshift gin-and-bitters
 bluesman hounddog hoot all torn to tatters?

Tear me a new one, he said, oh I would fain
 you tore it: but bless the old, in which the wan
 voice wandered like underground river-waters.

Jack Butler

SECRETARY

"Secretary" is just a cover.
She's been hired to revive
my husband.

Gone are his headaches;
going, his paper shuffler slump.
He swoops into the kitchen at
five-thirty like something that's
been whirled by a dervish.

Just when I was resigned to
being boxed in for my remaining
reclusive years—my enabler and I
parallel in padded recliners,
grumbling cozily over books and
bifocals,

he has this satori.

Our box is buffeted with new
hobbies. Tum tum goes mallet
on chisel. He's releasing devilish
grins from chunks of apple wood.
Sally found him the mask book at a
garage sale, brought the aromatic
wood from her orchard.

His shirt has started to swell at
the shoulders. His hands grip things.
Saturday he spaded two holes in the
yard, which he mulched lavishly and
stuffed with balled saplings.
He's fifty.

Sally's thirty,
married, Catholic, mother of three.
Picnic polaroids plus telephone con-
tralto add up to a country music
performer.

It's platonic.
I almost wrote playtonic.
She's his friend, and that's what
I never was.

They lunch together
in assorted restaurants,
usually with colleagues.
Always, Malcolm relays, it
turns into a circus.

Cloistered in my kitchen
with yogurt and granola,
the table raps with their laughter,
the curtains twitch with a silly aside,
the white wall flushes.

I hate this.
Months after homemade meditation
had made of me a hung sock
into which The Muse was slipping
coiled verbs and metaphors,
I'm switched to this inferior
receptor.

Around two o'clock
when Malcolm phones to inquire
about the mail, my fatigue, my
backache, his voice sounds so
smiley I picture a piano keyboard
talking. "We had lunch at The
Casino —" he trills.
I dare not reply: *I know. I saw it all*

Not *all*. I don't want to exaggerate.
It's not a telecast. It's more of
a single frame, a split second flash,
a snatch, usually with sound.

Clairvoyance it's called.
It's quite common. The cheap
kind of common, and I hate it.

— hate the feelings, I mean,
that boil out of it.

A scrupulously private person,
too self-contained to eavesdrop or
to follow the twists of a spy story,

I find myself hooked into this
noonsy network.

Five hours a week —
Ten. They dally over dessert.
Make it forty-five hours.
I'm a novice in a high wire act
being jounced by a professional
from net to trapeze to net
to tightrope.

I'm all adrenalin.

Not that I'm green to the green game.

Hindsight flashes a shadowed office
where a professor croons literary
suggestions to this sylph with a nimbus
of flaxen hair and violet sash and
sweetly skewed mind.

Outside, in a chilled car, his wife
and children wait. And wait.

Her pangs are my applause.

And now I'm on the pang-side.

You bitch! I blurted the other noon
to my bean sprouts when the snatch
disclosed Malcolm whooping at her pun.
May something bad happen to you.

Minutes later, I apologized.

Too late.

Her son was struck by a car
while pedaling his tricycle.
When Malcolm phoned at two, he said,
sepulchrally, Sally had been called
to the hospital.

Naturally I grew edgy about my son
at college.
The meditation book warns of *the echo*.
My hackles know.
And being Catholic,
Sally has all that protection,
whereas I'm open to the elements.

It turned out to be a fractured
collar bone.
My son wrote that he was down with
a bad cold.
I hope that wraps it up.

Today is my birthday. Fifty-two.
Oh dear. I saw Great Geisha lunge
across the table and grab Malcolm
by the tie. "Give her something
luscious, you hear?"
A book of poems, please, I telepathized.
Then they were in a greenhouse
where they selected — she selected
this plant with plush leaves and
plump buds and a large crimson flower

like a ruffled funnel . . .
Next they were in Malcolm's car,
chortling back to the office,
the blossom in Sally's lap bobbling.

At five-thirty
that ruffled red thing came
jiggling into the kitchen,
just below sheepish tie
and piano grin.
Bam! went the ceiling.
"What's that?" Malcolm asked.
Jealousy! I almost screamed.
"— sounded like a gun shot," he mused.
Bing! went the wainscotting.
Always in pairs, Jung noted;
one plus the echo.
And I was grateful for the
pause to intellectualize.
"Happy Birthday, Honey!" Malcolm was
gobbling my face as if he'd forgotten
for the moment who I was. "I'll bet —"
he panted, "you never saw a gloxinia
before."

"Well —" I ventured,
firming my grip on the trapeze,
"I saw one once, but I didn't catch
its name —"

Karen Snow

TWO POEMS

The Sharing

On the tundra of the page
a life arcs its meteor shrapnel.
These images are rooms
through which the mind
cleansed of all dream
dreams itself walking
in a white music,
each step writing a grey equation
on the gleaming map of nothing.

When the familiar turns away from us,
it does so in white steps.

In my hand the ghost
of a living negative.
White turns water into stone.
The dreamer's trembling eye is white.
The dead give up the anchorings
of a once touch-bright flesh.

Eyes shut quickly in a well-lit room
to read its violet constellation.
The written page is the whitest one.
When I dream this time
you will think my thoughts
not as yours or mine,
but as those of a color.

The Inventors

The van's painted diver aims his speargun
at a busful of tourists, sunglassed as none
of our own. The dark lines of his mask
and gear against the van's too bright blue
and green, an unreal fish bubbles
expectantly for his death, turns left
at 27th Avenue and brakes
too abruptly at every tide
of traffic and red lights. The driver
sips often from a paper bag, the smell
of his catch reaching us, bass and trout
no doubt, and shrimp that flock to lights
hung over boatsides on the bay,
the nets efficiently reaping the dumb
phototropic crustaceans,
\$7.89 a pound and rising
like the moon and those first stars
that come unnoticed.
That group on the left
seems to stand for something,
the bright red one a shoulder,
three forming a belt at the center,
the great back is a great silence
between starjoints, the void of flesh.
Pursuing and pursued, a lover punished,
let us say a giant buried in the sky
by bright passion, now a catch of glass
and pondered lines. His great arm
and club, he hears the quantum
cry of space that moves him, his face
whitens into novas of anger.
As darkness is his prey, our fish scare
more brightly among the papyrus reeds.
At last our killing has a name,
a guardian, a calendar.

Ricardo Pau-Llosa

TWO POEMS

Potatoes

Gnarled fists
we slice you up
every knuckle an eye.
The knife crosses the palm
through one by one a bushel of you.
We push your chunks
back from where you came
in straight new pleats
crosshatching with last year's.
The blades of knife and plow
know their dullness and limit
like children they recite their one potato two
along the lengths of you.

Furrows cross to black,
an inking complete,
darker than any paper can print.
Potato slices, thin as parchment,
line us together, sized with starch.
Brueghel would be proud of this plate
we're pulled off:
dirt stuck in our toes
from bringing up the dark
and with it the bunches of root
the sweet blind hearts
that break down in the branches of us.

II

My grandfather couldn't read
but tallied bushels of dollars
in the quick slate of his head.
He never saw the buds of my hands.
He seldom held a pen.
The annual count one day counted him,
the numbers that pile up in the dark,
the company of the field.

The blade always magically stops
just at my grandmother's palm.
The peeled potato halves and halves
until the fraction of German left
is "schnitz," a translucent paring.
Even the surname whittled to Smith
in the stack of years like plates
in swelling cabinets.

I've sliced the same finger twice,
expected the old slim scar
to settle its score under the new.
The skin grew back a cover tissue-thin
and under, the faint persistent lip
that won't forget it lent
color to the dark.

The Camellia Grill

Waiters pop your straws at the Camellia Grill.
They shake down sugar packs
and pour them in your cup for you.
All eyes and hands, they man their atolls
and ferry the plates and glasses, cups and saucers
in a sail of jacket white
and quick dark skin.

The maitre d' — white shirt, white face,
a seam of tie — ushers you in —
a stool, a menu, a linen napkin,
and those ubiquitous hands, magicians of tips.
Eyes quicken on the dollar handed down,
and quickly, softly comes the wake
of thank you, always ma'am or suh,
from faces smooth, professional.

The Tulane crowd lines up outside.
Wedge-haircuts nod and chat, coming back and back
for chili-cheese omelets and walls a shiny pink
and waiters they think they know.
Camellia pictures and black bow ties remain.
The students change but they remain,
tipping for traditions their parents tipped.

It could be 1955, but for packets of Sweet 'n Low.
The black man in a tall chef's hat assembles plates
the waiters schooner in place.
When they talk among themselves, is it the words
or the silences that matter most?
The slow blacks you don't see in the kitchen
measure food, not speech.
On their aprons their day is plain.

You wonder when anger grows sad,
when sadness grows cold
and leaves you nothing but motion,
the same indifferent sun.
You do what's expected, eat quickly and leave.
The white register-woman takes your money.
Police eat free.

Melody Davis

TWO POEMS

The Party

for Ann Lewis

whole pears skinned like fish float in their liquid
Chinese porcelain and silver the polished table in
candlelight

my friend serves at one end her face soft and smiling
the room itself a painting we have entered
with our noisy lives our impertinence

she gives us this one clear cold night
a warmth with a shape we can settle into
in her hands the hours become bread
they rise give off delicious odors
we can hardly believe that our hungers wait
like our boots at the door

when it's over I embrace her
her body trembles against mine and not with laughter
so strange I think after such ease such perfection
so familiar I wonder if it's not myself
and am grateful relieved for this final touch
like the fire burning down now and the stars so far away
also trembling
giving themselves that way

Pure Song

for Dorothy Purves

at last
you have died
no more of that body that caught you
like a weed in a windy fence
no more the inarticulate words
the burned-out bridge between mind and tongue

I don't even cry
I applaud you
just when we thought you'd never do anything
you did it
you left
and I imagine you now hiding your laughter behind one
 hand
as your new body moves/each airy limb
you try it out
tentative as when a girl
the first time on a two-wheeler
you wobbled down the road
but you learned the trick
as now
look at you
big show-off

Barbara Hughes

TWO POEMS

Alexandria, 1982

We have been four days on the second floor.
Four days since the brown water
entered our home.
It is three steps up, and rising.
Roberta's small fingers frighten,
even in my palm.
Her braids pale around her face.
Hush, I tell her. Can you hear it?
And when she stills, we hear it.
Not with our ears,
but with the parts of our bodies that know.
With our knees, with our low places.
Snakes, swimming.

Wings**i Patagonia, 1850**

My dear Melissa, Mother tells me you are there,
a little English cousin, fifteen like me,
with skin as pale as virgin's tears
(the flower—pick it and its petals fall,
like your dog-rose perhaps though here
it grows closer to the earth)
may I talk to you?

I am Henry, outside called Enrique
for at home we speak one language,
outside another. But further than this,
I have my own tongue. And when I speak
in my tongue, no one can understand.
They say—*Oh yes, Henry, but would you
say that again please? or como?*

It is as though I am another species entirely,
a bird whose wings they cannot see;
or an armadillo, like the one that pulled me
nearly into his hole, digging ferociously
as I would not let go its tail,
until my nose and mouth grew so full
of the dirt he was scratching up
that I could not breathe. I was five.
It is worse now. There are so many things
I want to tell besides—*Pass the beef—*
and—*Is there salt—*and—*Are all the sheep together?*
And I thought that perhaps a true foreigner . . .
One who does not expect. Perhaps you, Melissa,
whose horses are all polite, who think
that knives are for table, and the sun
to avoid, you in a country of tamer birds,
can accept this seed from my hand.

ii Thistle Year

Some years, Melissa, the cardoons burst their locations
and spread, touching, ten feet high
across the plain. And from my front gate
I can hear their leaves release,
like great green cramped arms,
whose sudden stretch cracks,
like a joint in a limb held too long still.
In these seasons there are murders.
Women in their low mud huts cannot see
who comes. And fires, hot Novembers
when the stalks die but do not fall,
there are so many. One year neighbors
lost their home, and a child, a slow
daughter whose voice I think I hear sometimes,
crying among the thorns.

*And father ropes his horse, and rushes
in the direction of the smoke. Unseen,
I follow. They are dragging slaughtered
sheep to make a break, white fighters
turned negro by the sparks
and the flung black sticks—such an odd rain.
They are beating horse blankets
on the flames. Now there is only smoke,
rising, and a dark circle,
as if a mouth had opened among the cardoons.*

We are waiting for the pampero,
for the far gloom of cloud
and the cool wind that rises just before
rain drives sideways into the house,
spattering dragonflies against the walls,
and even small birds.
Afterwards I ride out
over the flattened land, and my pony's hooves
crack the bones of enemies, as I
proud conqueror, gallop on.

iii Among the Marshes

I have spent the morning waking the dormilones,
who flap in panic from the camalote
a short distance only, then settle back,
as if close hiding were of no consequence.
You would call them painted snipes.
Their eggs are blotch-black, and always two.
Lazy even in this, they lay sparsely
in the marsh-sedge through which I ride,
splattering Planchito's flanks with mud
until he turns pinto.

It's such fun Melissa,
you can't imagine, all these miles of lagoons
and different birds arriving every day.
Why should I love them so?

Perhaps because
they seem the only creatures worth the time,
rising again and again from the water,
the grass, always on new wings.

iv We Visit the Capitol

The water of Buenos Aires is alive.
With each glass, we drink worms.
But better the cistern's catch,
my parents say, than the red clay stuff
they hawk from door to door.
So we drink what there is,
and no one thinks it strange.
But sometimes I wake suddenly,
as something shifts position
just underneath my skin.

v I Have Typhus

Nights I steal out of the low rancho
where William and Rachael and Mary sleep,
and into the alamos beyond,
where the moon falls on grey leaves
and casts a sheen over the pampa,
like a lake where no water is.
And sometimes trembling sets in.
My hands, that do not know what to do,
trying to do all things at once.
And then subsides, the way an ibis
might settle, white on that dark lake.
This is the hour of the owls,
who fall deeply on any small scurrying,
crying out like children
who have just learned a terrible thing.

vi I am Sixteen Today

and past death, the rising cloud of doves
that falls back among the rushes.
The no-secret that can be seen
without crawling like a snake
or dirtying the knees. Not like
discovering the milk-blue clutch
of eggs that I could find
only by looking up under the two foot
durasmillo stems while troupials sang,
all purple, to lead me from the mark.
The dove migration, arriving in the heart
of my birthday, fills the air
with lovely coo, and even William,
who never thinks of birds
though I lead him out and turn his head
says — Look at all the doves, Henry.
How beautiful they are.

vii

Melissa, an incident so you may understand
how far we are from England here.
Last week William and I were playing soldier,
driving forward on our ponies
(at a distance from the house
so mother could not see—and stop—
the game) with lances cut from poplar limbs
to strike each other down, if we could.
And Basilio was there, and Eusebio,
when Basilio rode beside me in a rage
and slapped the skin from my face
with his stick. And then, as I could
not see for blood, when Planchito bolted
I fell, and could not mount again.
So I tell you what I will do.
Before this black crust that splits
my face can heal, I will find Basilio.
And when he asks me what I plan
for the bamboo pole I am swinging
around my head, I will tell him—
Something to make you laugh.
Soldiers are riding from Brazil.
They say that Rosas will fall,
Rosas el ingles whose cold eyes
stare from our sala wall, Rosas
who once pardoned a condemned man
because he knew the lost ballad
of the bien-te-veo, that crafty bird
whose song goes—*I can see you
see you see you, wherever you are.*
But the canto is again lost.
I can find no reciter who knows it.
It is such a long story, they all say.
Who can remember so long a tale.

viii The Retreat from Buenos Aires

Oh no, said father, They won't hurt us.
But he concealed our horses among the trees
and shut us all inside, as if it were a holiday,
formal, to prevent our riding freely.
And when the first group of soldiers
reined in at our gate, he sauntered out
and said—I'm sorry sirs, we have no horses.
Ours were taken yesterday. And lazily
poured the last of the water from his clay
jug, so that it fell in thin patterns
on the dust. And he smiled. At that,
the biggest man half-drew his broadsword.
His front teeth were gone, rotten at the root.
And we noticed the only officer, pale
and silent on his spent piebald. And
we remembered what happens to officers
in retreat. Then father said again, Truly
friends, we have no horses. But the broadsword
caught his lie in the air, then peered at us
through the thick of father's neck.
And I ran blindly to the back of the house,
and set the horses free.

ix Mother

Mother won't tend the flowers.
All those little pieces of father's green carpet
she abandons now, with a hopeless look.
And the horehound dies, whose sweet drops
he loved to suck. And the tansy. And now
the verbena, in slow yellow languishing
in the heat. She will leave the Argentine.
She will take us away. Her footsteps echo
on brick floors, measuring the length
of the house, and back again.

x

My Dear Melissa, so much has happened since we first began our correspondence between my wild Pampas and your Shropshire life. And you have come to know, or say you have, my odd tongue, and I to recognize your sweet low voice.

In presence only do we lack and this may soon be remedied if the promise you have made to me holds true.

Day on day Mother bemoans the barbarity of this land in same melancholy notes which bring to mind the cries

of the tyrant bird, which always seem to come from great distance though the bird herself may be concealed within steps. And I have guessed a strange thing.

It used to wonder me that flocks of swans should always appear flying past after a storm, as if the rain itself

or the wind, could call such creatures forth which had not been seen for a long time, and must have come from far places.

But then it came to me: *They are always there.*

It is only the brilliance of the sun on their formations of whitest feathers against the dark background of cloud that makes them visible. That I see them after every rain can only be proof that they are almost always passing.

And gulls the same: driven together and forced downwards by the violence of the great dust clouds that follow drought, they are conspicuous. Yet as the waters drained from their customary lands, must they not also have been flying?

Think, Melissa! The excitement! Over
our heads at this moment, inconceivable
flocks of birds, unseen, are passing!

Lola Haskins

TIGER TIGER

take heart the tiger
thunder roar thunder roar the
tiger has claws sharp
and steady the tiger take
heart in the heart little
brother your tiger got crippled
and died no more flesh and
blood of mine little dark
spirit conspirator
in a forbidden language now
forgotten confined
to billboards for liquor and sport
for you somehow a victory
mispronouncing your
own name making
making bombing airplanes with
your little coward brain
in the name of defense oh
little brother
you turn your back
the little crimes little one
you stand by the wall
by the wall being cool
you don't dance you don't dance to
our conga drums drumming

out the voices that fill in
that come in to tie tie
the tiger you let them tie
you

the victims the
boys with no mother too many
fathers too much advice
not to cry when crying the
river out would keep
the dam the damned from bursting
jorge y eduardo
(un)becoming george and eddie and
the too many names
of the people they split into
snow in the veins tie tie the
tiger by the paws it was
your weakness exploited

of little sister take the
slow ride the syrup
train to the heart of the matter
take the ride slow y
habla español es tu
lengua your tongue el
sabor the gentle moves that
you hide in your hips
set them free read your books on
women get getting
off on more womyn
get off come around
so you're laying down
your escapes licking
salsa from the original
source you'll be the one to
defy them when they come to
tie tie the tiger
by the paws the teeth the fangs

the taste on your mouth
will defy them

I'm washing
my hands my hands bringing
my lips round in a circle
the O the black hole the vacuum that
in a split second
roars and destroys take heart the
tiger still roars still
roars with the fever congas
tumbadoras the
skins are my chest filling up
with the sounds so
purposely drumming out the
white noise that comes humming
with chains to tie tie the tiger
by the paws the teeth
the fangs but no one can kill
this tiger tiger heart

Achy Obejas

TWO POEMS

Doctrines of the Pineal

Herophilus of Alexandria thought he'd hewn his way
to the mind, pinecone-shaped yet tiny as rice-grains
flung at flesh of fleeing groom and bride, a prayer.
Descartes knew it as the soul, *ergo sum*, the door

that opens between spirit and thing, cells where
we can go to dance with angels, demons, meet our God
face to face. To mystics and believers it's Buddha's
third eye, stained glass window through which
every lover views truth, alchemist's seething retort

where we brew the human elixir whenever light declines
and we fall headlong into dream, wine that intoxicates
with every instant, hour, year, all seasons weeping
in us, time's seeping, what we are simmering hot

from our glands. Greenland Eskimos can't make it
during their endless night, but spend all love
in frantic spasms during four-month light. More than
600 years ago the Chinese learned to feed songbirds
two hours of extra light each winter night to make

their love-parts grow so they could move to music
all year long. Japanese warlords practiced *yogai*
on their favorite birds to stir martial passions
even out of season. Today we light hen house and barn,

church and bedroom, greenhouse and library to make
our miracles, egg and sperm, lymph and blood, sap
of thought. Light prolonged enhances yearning, ache
for more, belief there's a way to outlast dark,
gallons of ova-dew and potent milt bubbling together

like thunderheads of steam over January sulfur springs.
 Fish and birds with severed optic nerves can't bring
 themselves

to love. To coiling snakes, light's pure thought.
 Every human alternates between cold and fevers to be.

Thought flares at retina, each day's signature of beauty,
 enters the pineal through labyrinths of spinal cord,
 carotid, mid-brain, where ideas are filtered
 from matter, meander of the flow whispering to us
I can be forever, language of wind in pines, sea-foam

spewing over mossback rock, rain's tick and slap
 on bristlecone and thistle, flat oak leaf, hawk-soar,
 deer-spore patterning snow crust, noon's purple shimmer.
 Miracle planted in ancient seasons, seed of ecstasy.

The Singer

This is God's voice!

—Mario Lanza, grabbing at his throat

Those Italian boys, raised on her alone
 and a distant father's ravings about goddesses
 of his own, his last great war, dreams that come
 from cheap red sauce and wine tart as sweat

between breasts, how they love their mothers.
 As only only sons can. Born Alfredo above father's
 produce store the year Caruso died, he took
 her name, first and maiden, Maria Lanza, to hurt

the ogre-rival who'd gotten to her first.
O sole mio. Sundays all of South Philly
 turned out to hear him make an art of praying
 simply. *Ave Maria, gratia plena*. Suspended

from school for punching the Irish coach who'd called him *Wop*, he'd fight the young hoods who ogled her, still small and dark-eyed, when the two of them went shopping, laughing

like lovers. She worked two jobs then to help him chase skirts and scores, though to hear him tell it, he never had to chase them far. He'd hide his wife at the movies when Mamma

came to call. *Be my love, for no one else can end this yearning.* He'd stand like an oldtime fighter when he sang, or like a Jersey shore beach boy, chest outthrust,

feet apart, a perfect balance. Couldn't act a lick, but no one with an ear gave a damn. Once he came, he claimed, while recording "Beloved," so close to love was every note:

When I'm singing it comes right out of my balls.
They fattened him to 240 for recording,
drove him back to 185 when it came time to film.
He couldn't find himself in any mirror.

MGM dressed him in a girdle toward the end. In Italy it's not the custom to embalm. They need to see their dreams decay, a life's great tragedy. For three days in the villa

in Rome steamy as her busy kitchen, laid out for the packed house of weepers come to gasp at death's clown face, in perfect silence he rose like Mamma's Sunday bread. To

put him away the undertakers had to break his shoulders and ankles, so confining had the coffin grown from that one voice. Still, though he's thin now as a plastic disk

I hear him, a call beyond the time of day,
the beauty we carry splashing like bright wine
in this bony goblet, and I think how good
it can be, this need to sing for those we love.

David Citino

THE DROWNING OF CHRISTOPHER FRENCH

1

He'd fallen in in the middle,
a good fifty yards from shore,
and from Whitaker's parking lot
it was a hundred yards to the lake:
across the road, along the edge
of the baseball field, and down
the service road to the beach.

So it was of course too late
from the beginning, given such
godawful cold — thirteen degrees
and an inch or two of snow
that crackled as you walked,
ice on the lake like a metal vest.

Sid showed good sense and stayed
rooted under a dying pine,
his eyes like burned-out lights
and his face a slash of white.
Above him the frozen branches popped.
Dragging a limb, I started out.

2

My Christ, it was cold out there!
I'd shucked my coat, and a stiff wind.
Crouched low, I shuffled, walked, ran,
the limb flipflopping like a broken leg.

The lake detached itself from shore,
the trees and rocks receded to a blur,
the ice began to spin. As best I could
I went a straight line to the rink.
From it I could see him thrashing,
I could hear his shouts for help,
the light cavorting about the hole
and next to him the red rubber ball.

At ten yards I could see his face.
At five I went down on my belly.
Pushing the limb ahead, I inched
to within a half foot of the edge.
My God! As if glass-blown, he was
encased in a thin skin of ice,
his hair matted against his skull
and from his forehead tiny shards
strung like lights on a Christmas tree.

I called, I offered him the limb.
He tried to grab it but, like
the webbed foot of a crippled duck,
his arm flopped this way, that.
Eyes were the only things that worked.
They were bluer than any I had seen,
transparent murals of bewilderment
and agony that hammered, hammered me.

Then something snapped. I tore
my eyes from his and looked left.
The ice! The ice was giving way!
From shore a voice broke in

and I withdrew. The cracking stopped.
Again I inched ahead, again the limb.
Too late. All I could do was watch
as he went down, the red ball bobbing
in the backwash like a fallen sun.

3

Across the ice three men approached.
As they came near, "He's gone," I said,
explaining, "Nothing anyone could do."
But one, whose face was flannel, said,
"My ass," and went down on his knees
and, like a legless man with stumps
set firmly on a dolly, shoved himself
ahead, then back each time the ice
began to crack. His name was Doyle.

I threw the limb down on the ice,
screaming at him, "You do it then!"
The others shuffled their feet,
averted eyes and counseled tolerance:
"That's how he is." I looked once more
at where the boy and I had been,
at Doyle still sliding back and forth,
at them. I started back to shore.

George Drew

A TEACHER'S STORY

In Korea, three of us went to Seoul on pass.
We walked the pocked and rubbled streets
until our nerve broke twice:
first, when pots rattled in a hut,
next when a jeep backfired.
Both times we took cover,
slinging carbines forward.
Our minds grew safely urban then,
calloused to the yells,
the noise of tanks and half-tracks' clatter,
and the sight of seven bodies hung
beneath the Han's main bridge,
where Justice dangled them.

We walked beyond the city's edge, until,
lifting gradually with the hills,
we were miles from city sound
and those pendulums synchronized to wind.
They were faint, remote as swallows
gliding beneath that bridge,
birds who swung their range of shore
feeding on what water bred for them or war,
clinging still to ancient arcs of grace.
We decided to go higher then,
for we had heard of temples above a thousand steps
up the largest of the hills the city was surrounded by.
We walked until we found the steps
and started up,
stopping often to look back,
watching our past grow smaller until
the steepness flattened
and we were on top,
ringed by carved benches of stone
and altars parallel to horizons.
All were interspersed on remnants of a walk.
On each a liquor bottle stood
or cartons of some nation's cigarettes.

We looked through wonder at that scene,
and as we did, from behind each rock and bush
small forms crept out, tentative
at first, some singly, others in small groups
moving slowly toward us and the pedestals.
Children, all of them.
Each face and body wed
to hungers we had never known,
inheritors of this height of ground
because Command had thought it valueless,
left it unpoliced and unpatrolled.
They moved toward us and the stock
we knew they had arranged for visitors.
Some tugged our coats and kept as close as speech,
whispering promises and prices for what they had
or any sex to fit our natures.

The sky was clean,
a clear and brilliant blue,
the kind we had been taught
backed Greece and classic poems.
It gave shape and shadow to the plain,
to every rock and artifact
and every face and thought, until we saw
each etch itself with daylight on our minds.
But we said No each time they tried to sell.

And more came on as if
from fissures in the weathered rock,
until of fear of what their numbers told
and what that horde of faces made us feel,
our reasons for not buying lost their tone.
Now, we would not buy because of what we were
 beholden for,
as instruments of a war that put them here,
yet trying to retain something inside
we knew that buying would profane.
And so we talked of cholera in the scotch
or Asian VD and the flu.

And at each stone we passed, more children came
with whisky, wine, or foiled cigars
at prices we would haggle on and they would meet.
They let us know with each reduction we
could buy at any cost exchangeable for rice.
By then they haunted us
until the hilltop's mass of mobs
breached our private space with body lice and sores
brushed near our hands, and sticky mucoused eyes
that focussed us upon what it was
we kept inside and wouldn't sell.
And then we'd come completely round,
back to the steps up which we climbed,
our hearts grown tighter than their smiles.

And out of room to move, we stopped.
They drew back,
tightly packed and still,
in a clotted sprawl.
A long quiet hung, until
one bird shrieked half its song.
And then their eyes went past
what they had seen us through,
past fear and past the innocence we'd shaped
our commerce in, which
they knew now we would not sell,
and were less human for.
Their hate peaked their shrieking into yells
and in they moved,
surrounding us with all they had:
scabied heads, rickets, pustuled eyes,
crusted noses, running sores and ears,
scars and torn limbs and cries and hunger
chanting the pure hymn of what this height of ground
had now become. And we communed
with all their fear, and in
one timeless move unslung our guns
and backed into each other's back
screaming in each direction

the first Korean word we had been taught,
"Chungee! Chungee!" Halt.
But still they came, inching
up like futures to our pose,
until I, the first born on that height,
slammed my carbine's bolt to raise its firing pin,
and they were stricken by the sound.
My two friends did the same,
and as they did,
that horde pressed back into itself,
returning to our space our private wills.
We walked backward to the path,
and reaching it, formed a line,
our barrels aimed at what their eyes had seen.

After a hundred yards, we broke our rank
and each ran quickly down,
and as we did,
the whole plain erupted into screams
that hurled a meaning no wounded bird
or animal could know.
It pierced me then
as rocks or bullets never could,
and sieves me now with knowledge I'll never understand,
but is the backdrop of each classroom I walk into
and the light
behind each child's raised and questioning hand.

John Judson