

Pattabi Seshadri

### **Our Fathers**

\*

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth  
This continent of sand  
Peeking out from prairie grass,

Where all men are created equal  
But the deer mouse *Peromyscus maniculatus*  
Is the most populous mammal.

Our fathers truly believed that all men  
Are dark mice on pale sand,  
Testing whether mutation can lighten their fur.

\*

Four score and seven years ago  
Our fathers brought forth on this continent  
A supermassive black hole

From which magnetic fields squeezed  
Life, liberty, and property  
Out into space like toothpaste.

We have come to dedicate this galaxy  
And its tiny, heavy heart, a resting place  
From which history cannot escape.

\*

After collecting the tears of women  
Watching four score and seven  
Sad movies in a lab,  
Our fathers smelled the tears and found the women  
Less sexually attractive.

This depressed their testosterone to such levels  
That they locked themselves in a room  
In downtown Philadelphia  
And cried forth a new nation.

\*

Years ago our fathers brought forth  
A handwritten recipe of 11 herbs and spices  
Dedicated to the proposition  
Of coating the Original Recipe chicken.

We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate this recipe.  
It will be slid into a briefcase  
And handcuffed to a policeman,

It will be tucked away in a vault  
With vials of herbs and spices for the dead.

\*

When our fathers finally cracked their eggs  
The whites formed a skin of protein  
Conceived in a bowl and dedicated to the proposition  
That any trace of fatty yolk  
Ruins a soufflé.

Now we are engaged in a tremendous beating,  
Testing whether these towering peaks,  
Or any whites so hand-whipped,  
Can long endure.

\*

We are met on the great battlefield  
Of Black Friday's price wars.

The shoppers who bravely struggled here  
Have consecrated the retail blitzkrieg  
With their bleeding cuticles.

They will no longer finger the sample chocolates  
Nor remember the cinnamon smell  
Of these retail interludes,  
This buttery soft leather.

\*

Four score and seven pounds later  
Oprah looks back at her thinner self and thinks  
`How did I let this happen?'"

She remembers how she once brought forth  
A wagon of fat to represent her weight loss  
And dedicated her body to liquid protein.

Now she is testing whether  
The seams of her inauguration dress  
Can long endure.

\*

We the People of the United States,  
In order to reduce our carbon footprint,

Do unplug the family refrigerator  
And build a composting toilet.

We do establish this reusable bamboo flatware  
And acquire three chickens  
To secure the blessings of their ordure.

We spill these bags of cut hair  
On the lawn for the crows.

\*

We the People of late night television,  
In Order to form a more perfect Erektion

Are watching an unidentified woman  
Get mortgaged to the hilt  
And have her bubble popped.

In Order to establish justice among Dicks  
And weather this period of emasculation

We do sign this informed consent form  
And maintain this Boner Diary.

\*

We hold this local cocaine  
Which comes in a straw to be  
Self-evidently shitty.

Remember how we said that someday  
We'd move to Colorado and raise horses and shit?

That Governments would be instituted among Men  
To tell us what to do  
With our precocious baby  
Standing up in his crib saying "me, me, me?"

\*

We hold these truths to be self-evident,  
That if you look around the table  
And can't tell who the sucker is, it's you,  
That we're here to get drunk, fuck bitches, and get paid.

We've been well-endowed by our Creator.  
If you haven't been, well,

Try to weep softly while you think about your life decisions.  
Bundle that fucker up, put it in a garbage bag,  
And sing "good night Irene."

## **The Comedy of George Bush**

*After Dante*

1.

“This is my last maiden voyage as President,” I said.  
I put my arms around  
My spirit guide, George Washington.  
I smelled his smell, the fatherly smell of jet fuel.

Mujahideen in the backs of pickup trucks  
Were shooting into the air,  
Singing songs and slaughtering a sheep.  
But in those cavernous depths  
It sounded peaceful,  
Like the tinkling of a teaspoon.

Then Washington gripped Saddam’s shaggy flank  
And from tuft to tuft we climbed  
Through all the hair and sand,  
Until I could see light coming down  
Through the spider hole.

2.

Above us, I could smell the fields of Tikrit.  
Now I knew what Laura meant  
When she used to say she loved the world.

I'll never know how she managed  
To make such good use of me,  
How she extracted me like tar from the sand.

“Love is lighter than rock or water,” she used to say.  
“It has bubbled forever upward, darkly, silently  
From the jawbones of great beasts  
And the teeth of mice,  
Gathering beneath the desert

So that we may discover it now,  
A million years later,”  
She softly whispered to me,  
As if her mouth was full of crushed seashells.

3.

Laura was a self-sufficient child,  
Immersing herself in books.  
Her favorite story  
Was the story of Sinbad.  
She liked to play make-believe  
That she would travel to Baghdad  
And dine in his house.

Thin glasses would be brought out,  
Filled with sugar and dark tea.  
She would plunge her fist  
Into the greasy rice, just like an Arab,  
Tearing shreds of meat  
And eating them from her fingertips.

Then Sinbad would laugh good-naturedly  
And push her back into the bottle.

4.

Laura pulled me by the hand  
And flew like a rocket over the water.  
In the air I could smell sweet cardamom,  
Coffee, ballistic copper, the sea spray  
At Kennebunkport, gunpowder.  
When we neared Guantanamo  
I heard the words "Purge Me" sung so sweetly  
That the gates began to swing open.

It was a voice like those summer mornings  
When Laura would put on Marvin Gaye  
And we would sit together on the porch  
Reading the newspaper.

It was a voice like thin steel,  
Like a spring-loaded safety lever  
That keeps a grenade from exploding.

5.

I floated in her arms.  
My soul no longer needed to hide  
In an animal carcass  
By the side of the road,  
Waiting to be lit from afar.  
At last I had been sent to her,  
A molten bolt of metal propelled by love  
Across a no-man's land.

She reminded me that once long ago  
She had asked me to decide  
Whether I wanted to drink  
Or be a productive citizen.

Then she embraced my head  
And drew me under the river Lethe  
Until I was forced to swallow.