

Pattabi Seshadri

Our Fathers

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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.