

Herman Fong

Luna

It is a dead thing,

that moon, that sphere of rock
given birth by
a barren woman with a stone womb.
Why do they praise and
lift hands to it,
make love to it
when it has done nothing
but steal and hide and circle mindlessly?

I would bury the thing
if I could bring it down,
loop it with string and pull
until it fell and split like a polished skull,
spilling its shell of dry bone
into a pit dug for nights by moonlight.

It may shine full and pearlish,
glow like burning opal, white and flecked,
or it may smile clean in slices,
but it will always be faraway
and naked and without breath.

It will always be dead.

A Different Fire

I will take the dry bones
of this tree and use them as kindling,
rub them together
the way we used to
rub arms and legs together
for warmth, a different fire.

I will take my poems,
penned neatly on crisp bond,
and rip them to pieces,
drop them like dead leaves
into the flames growing,
these verses for you.

When the smoke has lifted,
the dark ashes curled and delicate,
crumbling into black dust
dark as your hair,
and all my words are
rising to the sky,

I will take a kettle
of your favorite tea,
boiling over the flames,
and dowse our blaze,
hear the wooden bones
snap and hiss.

Train Crash, Summer 1988

for Mark

You were in Paris when I heard
of that city's worst train catastrophe,
a row of train cars striking
another like snakes in combat.

The count is fifty-nine and rising.
The cameras show police
heaving heavy bodies onto stretchers,
into dark bags.

I would look into the face of each dead,
no matter how awful the stare,
how terrible the bloody flesh and stench
of disaster, to make certain
you are not one of them.

In eighty-four, I waited hours for you
to emerge from the emergency room.
Your head loose with slow pain,
your chest squeezed like a respiratory pouch,
you thought you were dying.
The resident prescribed pills
for walking pneumonia.
And last fall, as you left your father's village,
the southern hills of Italy shook and
buried roads you had traveled moments before.

Disaster, you've said, follows you across borders,
boards your train and sounds the whistle.

Hundreds of miles away from the city,
from the station and the torn platform,
I think that you are fine,
but I wonder why
you have not telephoned your family.

You might be dead now,
or you might be rising to a new
morning in southern France,
watching the sun lift slowly
above a restless field of summer flowers
and getting ready for your shave
as I lie awake past midnight.