

TORERO

Incarnadine dawn came before Santos slept.
Day of the corrida!
A dark mountain sprouting stiff red and yellow flowers
and reverberating thunder waited behind his lids.
He must strike lightning into a certain crater
between the damp ridges before thunder passed him through.

Early to the rites of preparation, steeping
in the vow to avenge his brother Miguel.
Long prayer before the Virgin. Hot laughter
with his comrades, fear encased in brocade,
superstition covered with colors of scorn.
He had even looked at his bulls and learned
one was twin to the hooking horn-wise engine
that routed Miguel's soul with a splintered thrust.

Last notes of La Virgen de la Macarena flared from trumpets,
edded through the heat in his head. Shrill corkscrews
pulled the cuadrillas into the circle of ferret eyes.
A thousand prisms paving his shoulders ignited in dusty sun.
The circle hailed his name, caressed it, intimate
as a lover with the sound of it. Something else--
treble breeze perhaps, pitched to the trumpets--
hissed his name, paced his march step, clung
to the afterbeat. The two flashing semaphores beside him
were silent, fierce-smiling their aficionado faces.
His name wound back in the bell of a horn or the wind's mouth.
The musicians played with too much pathos today.
It was better when they blasted, pompous and bawdy,
like ponderous heralds of Caesar.

"Dios, we have a gale," growled an assistant.
"We will have to drown the capes!" The wind
examined the folded colors, the hair of men and horses.
"Don't work so close, Santos," his banderillero pleaded.
"You don't have to paint your belly with the bull's blood.
You're here. It is enough."
Layers of eyes probed Santos's pores;
the wind stuttered his name. He made no reply.

Santos did not hear hoofs pulverizing sand,
 sounds of the watered cape, the olés. His first bull
 was a mountain, an armed freight train, bold and honest
 blood-mate to Miguel's damaged and devious one.
 Santos heard only wind instruments deciding his dance,
 humming his mind like wires, then the racking force
 of his will arcing the ring, entering the pic,
 bracing it against the picador's old sin
 of twisting and stealing the best of his bull.

A trilling time jam, a man unhorsed,
 and finally the God-lonely bugle
 retiring the picadors, trailing the man/animal cry
 of all who live awhile in the center of the centrifuge.

Santos placed his own banderillas, planted them close,
 claimed only shallow blood and hide enough to hold.
 He watched the adorned idol carved from legend,
 raised from a Minoan frieze, watched him size the arena,
 yellow bouquets bobbing against his blackness.
 Saw his talent without latent flaws,
 already certain this bull would not covet the quarter
 where he quenched his horn in a picador's horse.
 Saw him suddenly a handsome pander, parading,
 saw himself the same, the two of them
 in irresistible collusion, peddlers
 of a nebulous puzzle, together a dark matching piece
 for the niche behind the ferret eyes.

Santos took the sword and muleta for the last act,
 the faena. Wind snatched aside the cardinal cloth.
 But this toro chose greatness. Waited. Shared.
 Santos designed a new pass:
 Slow ballet of cerise wing and silver pivot,
 a celebration-- black mass of muscle, turning, winding wide
 to spare his partner's spine. The pimpling wind bared him
 again, boring into a brief shimmering hate for Miguel
 and his curving tricks to crimp his bulls' backs.
 The pase de la muerte fed the rising circle of fever,
 flared the ferret eyes. The wind gasped,
 held its breath, puffed away thought, gusted
 between passes, reeled across the circle gone hoarse.

Let no ears or tail be taken from this bull.
 If the other ubiquitous beast wished to bestow trophies,
 nothing less than a trident of horns
 and the point of his maleness would do. Once more
 Santos heard his name as the bull smeared by,
 redding his spangles, honing his senses on horn,
 the memory of it stored in his scars.
 Certain as stench and bone-rattling sideswipe,
 he heard it--the voice of another avenger.

Through his years of bulls only Santos spoke,
 his fluent muleta commanding the charges, punishing
 the pale-hearted, persuading the worthy ones
 of their chances to plunge their eagerness,
 telling them at length to bow their heads
 for the offering, the ritual communion.
Veronicas ago Santos would have laughed
 or called it a prank of weariness or wind.
 Did Miguel's bull announce his name aloud?

Santos spat dust from his mouth. He must not succumb
 to overawe. This was el toro de bandera
 every true bullfighter hoped for-- measuring the man,
 rationing his rage, keeping his courage and form
 to the end. The matador could do no less.
 Nostrils and eyes streaming grit, he sculpted
 the short cape, made it vault, caress, made it flow.
 Ads and signs tore off the walls; Santos defied
 the blowing, moved to the brass song in his brain.
 Perfect parones, spinning, people thunder, levitating.
Pase de pecho. Perfect.
 Bull dancer and minotaur.
 Time reverted then raced back. Stumbled. Coiled.
 Santos sighted down his sword.

A bull to take recibiendo-- the ultimate tribute and risk--
 waiting like a figurine, committed to that stand, waiting
 for the dint of the deified charge to sink the espada.
 Holding down the triangle head with serge on a stick,
 leading it past his sledging chest, trying to remember
 the kill would be for Miguel.

The cloth swung forward, beckoned.
The bull came. Santos leaned over the horn with a name cry,
rescued his lungs by a sequin, feet still as stones.
A flawless execution
except steel and bone collided; the blade bowed and sprang
out of its hot sheath, out of crazed thunder.
The withered flower patch bloomed with new crimson;
the bull mastered desperate legs,
flailing his tongue on the taint in his mouth.
Santos refused to heed his wrist, the wind,
the shrieked advice. He retrieved his sword, cursing.
The centrifuge screamed and silenced unheard. He calmed
himself in his bowl of sweat and whiplash chill:
"We will have total perfection, si, Diablo?"
A bugle played in his head, an aviso.

The bull summoned him,
poised like his bronze kind on the parapet,
posing his invitation low and ready.
Sun flashed along the sword edge, rolling
images, icons of the Virgin, faces of his brother,
el toro, his brother. Santos moved
to the blossoming spot, light with new speed.
A bright swatch of last Sunday's poster of Miguel
spiraled toward the matador's eyes.
Triumphant horn lifted as steel drove down,
a compound arch. Santos heard his name, heard
the wind inside him, heard them fall together.