THREE MONKEYS. I AM FATHER

WILL BAKER

Tsitsi, the Faithful

The first two came quick as squirrels,
tails questioning, their faces small
and old as time. Carlos and Cunado hissed,
threshed a branch, teased until they
skittered here, there, through leaves
and crisscross of vines.

Now they are just above. Cunado nooks an arrow,
draws, and with a sudden sigh it slides
through air, through the little body.
It excites her. Her legs jerk and anxious
fingers fondle the hard shaft,
an awkward pendant she drags
this way and that.

Frantically he scurries up, down,
squeaks, plucks at her shoulder:
Come! Come! We must away!

Cunado's eyes and teeth glisten.
Again he nooks, draws, releases.
The arrow rises rapid as a swallow,
slows through flesh, halts, halfway
red. He pinwheels from branch
to branch, forgetting her now
as she has forgotten him, and the hunters
hoot at this slapstick agony,
this silly tale of fidelity.

Oshtero, the spider

She was all afternoon squatted on
Cunado's back, the vine rope under
her long black arms, knees lashed
to elbows. She seemed to nod,
and gaped at me with a stupid lip
drooling blood. Alive she was
an angular, sloping shadow
through green caverns. In death
she did not curl but came down
like syrup through the trees.

Once the vines gave way at a joint
so Cunado did a new knot hiking
an arm high in farewell gesture.
She preserved it so until sundown
when we lay them all on a mat
by the fire. There she seemed to gaze
straight up to heaven and raise
that hand to the next evolutionary rung.

Carlos' wife puts water to boil.
A child brings a candle from the hut.
The blade goes brisk back and forth
across a flat rock. By arm and leg
the carcass is upended, head down
in the steaming pot, then out;
from dark fur the wife begins to peel
an ivory doll's skull. Next pathetic
shoulders, a sunken chest. By trick
of fire and candlelight she seems to duck,
embarrassed, before she goes ass up
into the kettle again.

By the men's fire I am joshed,
offered a tiny forearm already crisp.
They have noted the heavy pelt
on my chest, the fuzz at my cuffs,
the shadow on my chin. Here is your son,
your daughter, they say, running
a brown hand over my wrist.
Their faces are smooth as river stones.
Their eyes are deep and full of light.
His son! they say. It is his son!
Then they only eat and laugh,
with nothing in between.