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Primordial Curse

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PRIMORDIAL CURSE

As mountains hang in the air over a city,
 Blotting the dark, bleeding the water-color
 Wash at sun-set,
 The Himalayas of childhood
 Lift a red rhododendron heaven
 Vertical over every Roncevalles.

Those hills were the first home of his longing,
 Where great exotic apples, eaten by forest-fire,
 Terraced to a brook
 That leaked the eternal snow;
 And a red insect moving across a stone
 Died when he touched it with his finger.

Such was the first death, on a wide slab of stone,
 In the tropic sun, between the world's heaviest rains.
 When the insect died
 The mountains never quivered.
 He circled the world westward from the Himalayas.
 Twice a finger stooped and touched him lightly:

Once in the private pass, where time and again
 The horn blew forlorn and no one came.
 This we expect:
 The private expulsion from the garden,
 Or the rending cry prepared by uneven odds
 When the fool is self-sufficient in his folly.

This we expect and extricate, limp and glad,
 A morning of blood; the recent clamor frozen
 In peaks of silence;
 Friends dead in a circle;
 But the Christians had right and the pagans wrong
 And an evil sword shall not be grasped by me.

When the finger touched him again, afternoon
 Wavered in the valley, though the mountains stood still
 With a loving shadow

In which the forests slumbered.
 Traveling birds kept their usual distance.
 Suddenly the black apples had never been green.

Suddenly snowview and the buttercup rill spouting
 Through the child's looped finger curled black
 Like a scorched picture,
 Where now the pitiful apples,
 That always bloomed in a mystic smell of pines,
 Fell to that forest fire before he was born.

Touch of a finger and Nanda Devi crumbled.
 Foul treason, no longer an episode, burned
 The cold cisterns
 Before they reached the valleys.
 Only the birds take the long journey
 To find a small grave, a blackened hill.

JOHN THEOBALD

MORNING LIGHT

I: AFTER LOVE

. . . And then the quiet, then the sound,
 As of dark serpents underground:
 Two breathings loud against the glare
 Of naked bulb, clothes-tumbled chair.
 And then, oh then the desperate dawn:
 Day's golden teeth, day's yellow yawn.

II: FUGITIVE

Abed he lies, the midnight raper,
 The jackanapes, the lone escaper;
 Hands innocent above the quilt,
 (The sin without the sinner's guilt.)
 The fellow lies in passive state,
 His limbs arranged as cold as hate,
 His body lost, he hopes, in fate,
 Till dawn strikes like the morning paper.

JOSEPH CHERWINSKI