

# La Gallera

Marie Harris

The noise is everywhere around me, like heat. Dozens of cocks crowing. The voices of fifty, sixty men shouting above the loud, scratchy, amplified voice of the announcer. Only the two cocks in the middle of the ring are silent, as they circle and jab, neck feathers fanned, blood beginning to stain their heads and shoulders.

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The men come to Puntas with their birds early in the day. These roosters, which have been raised from chicks on diets of corn and bananas, vitamins and meat—personal recipes designed to make them superbly fit—are fasting today. Their owners carry them tucked under an arm, close to the chest, and stroke and talk to them. The shiny birds seem calm, almost docile. Each bird is weighed and the matches are arranged, up to thirty-five a day. The men draw chips out of a glass jar hoping their birds will fight early, while they're still fresh. The cocks are then placed in small plastic boxes, which are stacked in rows.

The shallow ring, a pit measuring twenty feet in diameter, is filled with spectators waiting for the next match. Some are young men dressed in jeans and fluorescent T-shirts, but most are older, sober in their pressed pants, embroidered white cotton shirts, and shined shoes. The man beside me was a cabdriver in New Jersey. He's back here now for good, doing a little fishing and planting a garden. His wife isn't anxious to leave the States; she may not come down to join him. His friend, Luis, has lived on the island for seven years this time around. He has family in Massachusetts. He goes back up there several times a year. His two daughters are in college. We talk about winter weather.

The men in the ring converse intently, moving about, gesturing like brokers on the floor of a tropical stock exchange. There are two men in their midst with roosters under their arms. They put their birds into two blue cloth bags, which are then hung on a scale to demonstrate their equal weight. The crowd begins to move into the stands. The handlers remain, thrusting the birds at each other. They make kissing noises and the roosters brighten, become alert and wary. All around them the betting proceeds, each man shouting his wager at another until a deal is struck. Then more bets between new pairs. The entry fee is \$25, plus \$2 for the house. The winner earns \$50, if there is a winner.

A man in a checked shirt brings his bird forward. He holds it at

arm's length. The official, who has a whistle around his neck, examines the bird—feet, thighs, head—then dips a square of cloth in water and rubs it along the bird's shaved legs, along its wings, around its shoulders. He takes the damp cloth and, when the man in the checked shirt opens the bird's mouth, squeezes a few drops down its gullet. The bird drinks to its own health, for if its feathers have been poisoned against its opponent, the bird itself will die. The process is repeated on the second bird. Then a clear cage is lowered from the ceiling, coming to rest on the dusty red rug of the ring.

The din is augmented by the voice of the official over the antiquated PA system. He holds a large mechanical alarm clock aloft, announcing the minutes till the fight. The birds are put into the cage, separated by a plastic wall, facing each other. The official blows his whistle into the mike. The last spectators step over the low wall and settle into ringside seats. The cage ascends. There is an instant of quiet before the cocks—one white, one black—fly at each other, attacking with beak and spur. Everyone is shouting.

"Look at that!" my father used to command as we sat together in front of the black-and-white TV late on a Friday night. "Did you see that jab? Look at him move!" But it wasn't the boxers that kept me riveted in front of the set; I could never really tell one from the other as they danced in the ring, dodging and feinting. It was my father. He loved the fights, and I loved to be with him. And he let me; that was all I cared about . . . that and the strange sense of excitement I felt in the presence of something that seemed to have so much power over him. I wanted to learn how to say the right thing at the right moment. I wanted to learn what it was that made him seem so alive and why he was eager to share his excitement with me. It was as though he could reveal something about the mysterious world of men, and if I stayed around long enough, he'd make it all clear to me.

I go to buy a piña and look around. The matches all seem the same. When I return, a contest will still be going on. There's an outer ring behind the stands and a room walled off by slats in one section. In it there are two seats, like a cobbler's bench or a stationary seesaw. At one end of the wooden platform sits a man with matches in his mouth, surrounded by little pots of glue, thimbles of thin twine, a knife. At the other end an old man turns his rooster on its side and proffers it. Skillfully, the man with the matches puts a spur—a natural one or a metal gaff, depending upon the agreement between opponents—deep

into the spot on the rooster's leg where its own spur once grew. The spur is secured by hot glue and wrapped with gauze and twine. This way the rooster will not risk a broken spur in a fight; this one is removable. The smell of the glue mingles with the smell of empanadillas frying in the cafeteria. Another man waits, holding a bird and a can of Medallia beer. No one seems to mind me. At the bar I encounter Eddie again. In response to my questions, he says something to the bartender, who brings us a glass jar of metal spurs. Eddie takes some time showing me.

I climb back to my seat. The fight is half over. La Negra is down, pinned by the white bird's foot. It struggles, lies quiet, struggles again, and frees itself. The white bird seems to be winning. I'm beginning to identify a kind of bird strategy, to notice that one bird trips the other or forces its head under the other's wing, like a fighter in a clinch. La Negra finds new energy. Its dark feathers are glistening with blood. It attacks with its spurs and blocks with its wings.

In the wild these birds would fight for dominance. I've raised enough roosters to recognize the behavior. The contest would be as earnest but almost never fatal. One wins, and when it is clear to the other that it is beaten, it quits.

The handlers leap into the ring to retrieve their birds. This fight did not run its allotted twenty minutes. The black bird has won. The winner holds his rooster aloft. His friends congratulate him. The friends of the loser commiserate. Tens and twenties change hands throughout the stands. The atmosphere is both charged and clearly good-natured. The black bird and its opponent will be petted, ice packs applied to their wounds. They will be fed and pampered. They will fight again.

A school bus comes and goes, leaving off a young girl who enters the bar to buy a single cigarette. A policeman stops by and climbs to a seat next to three men he knows. Eddie isn't fighting a bird today and appears happy to instruct me. He sips his beer and details the ingredients in an ideal rooster diet, the techniques of massage to toughen the skin, the prices of vitamins and a promising chick, the intricacies of betting, the techniques of training and exercising the young bird, the time it takes to nurse a victorious cock back into fighting condition. I'm learning. Eddie smiles when he sees I understand. I'm pleased.

In the next contest, unexpectedly, one cock refuses to continue. It flies to a perch at ringside, where it is caught and brought back onto the rug. It flies again. And again a third time. The fight is called. But

before the other cock is named the winner, a fresh bird is brought in to test whether there is fight left in the victor. The cock attacks the new intruder in a frenzy of feet and feathers. It passes. The cowardly cock has its flight feathers cut on the spot. It will not fight for a year, until it molts and grows new feathers. This way its owner cannot enter him in a fight in another town and, knowing its history, bet against him.

The blue bags are hanging from the scale again when a stranger in a brown suit steps into the ring. Much consulting. The cocks are returned to their owners. More consulting. Now there's a loud volunteering of opinion from the spectators. The official leaves the building with the man in the brown suit and the owner of the establishment, a small stooped man of some age. Minutes pass. The spectators climb down from their seats and head for the bar. Roosters in cages and domestic roosters in neighboring yards crow in turn, making a kind of music behind the voices. The heat is tempered by a breeze off the distant ocean. The sky is huge and pale over the greens of palm trees and the lighter greens of cane fields.

All afternoon I have been at a cockfight, watching bloody birds, watching bright-eyed men, asking questions. The spectacle does not alarm me; I accept it in the same way I accepted the sight of glistening young men pounding each other with their gloved hands. I am curious and bemused. I am filled with wonder. Who are they, men?

The principals are returning. The man in the brown suit takes the microphone and begins to speak. There is complete quiet for the first time today. There have been irregularities. Certain rules, standards. Not enough officials. The establishment will be fined two hundred dollars. For the good of the sport. The protection of everyone. The crowd listens carefully, then breaks into applause and the match resumes.

I leave before the *gallera* ends. Eddie agrees to meet me tomorrow in town to give me a T-shirt like his with a blazing rooster on it. The street is very quiet after the cacophony of the arena. A school bus passes, empty. The woman on the pink porch turns and goes indoors, perhaps to prepare a meal.

## Interview with Paul Auster

Deborah Michel

Paul Auster looks the part of the hot young writer straight out of college or one of the top writing programs. He first gained the public spotlight a few years ago with the publication of the "New York Trilogy," three short intricately and mysteriously connected novels. Unexpectedly—perhaps because we are so used to hot young writers straight out of college and writing programs—Auster is 42 and has been writing, in some form or another (including translations of French poetry) for over two decades. His most recent novel, *Moon Palace* (Viking, 1989), was actually begun almost that long ago. He talked with me about that, and writing in general, from his studio in Brooklyn, New York.

PAUL AUSTER: I started *Moon Palace*, and also the book before it, *In the Country of Last Things*, a long time ago; both took over fifteen years to finish. So, in a sense, they are the newest books, but also the oldest books. Old and new at the same time. Over the years, of course, they were completely rethought, redone, rewritten. And then there were long periods when I didn't work on them at all. With *In the Country of Last Things*, for example, I wrote

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①  
^ The noise is everywhere around me, like heat. Dozens of cocks crowing. The voices of fifty, sixty men shouting above the loud, scratchy, amplified voice of the announcer. Only the two cocks in the middle of the ring are silent as they circle and jab, neck feathers fanned, blood beginning to stain their heads and shoulders.

Animal baiting is an old sport, still practiced legally in some countries and illegally in many. Cockfighting originated in the Orient and reached Greece and Rome in the 5th century B.C. It had its heyday in Europe throughout the 17th century and was brought to the New World by the Spanish explorers where it still flourishes. The bird itself--the gamecock--has as its closest relative the Indian Red Jungle Fowl. Gingers and Shropshire Reds, Pollicats, Pirchin and Blackreds have all been fought in the pit. The modern gladiators are of more plebian origin, but today, as has been true for centuries, extraordinary sums of money ride on the ability and the will of these small combatants. more  
to p. 3

Friday afternoon in Puntas, a tiny town in the hills above Rincón, Puerto Rico. People have come from all over the western end of the island for this match, called a main in English, a gallera in Spanish. Cars are pulled off the twisting road at angles under falls of purple vines and wild hibiscus. Thin hairless dogs thread the traffic. On a cement porch painted pink, a woman rocks and watches.

There are cockfights almost every weekend, e each as important as the other. And this small cement block building with its blue and white grandstands, its smokey cafeteria and the bar with bottles arranged beneath a mirror in bargello fashion accomodates many of the same birds and bettors as a ring in San Juan. The same amounts of money change hands in a constant free-for-all of wagering all done with shouts and gestures around and above the battling roosters. why I'm here

The men <sup>came</sup> come early in the day with their birds. These roosters, which have been raised from chicks on diets of corn and bananas, vitamins and meat--personal recipes designed to make them the fittest and the gamest--are fasting today. Their owners carry them tucked under an arm, close to the chest, and stroke them and talk to them. The shiny birds seem calm, almost docile. Each bird is weighed and the matches are arranged, up to 35 fights in a day. Out of a glass

jar the men draw chips for the order of the fights, hoping their birds will fight early while they are still fresh. The cocks are then placed in a small plastic box; they are stacked in rows awaiting their moment.

↗ There's something familiar here, though I've never sat on peeling bleachers in another country waiting for a cockfight to begin. *more*

The shallow ring, a pit measuring 20 feet in diameter, is filled with spectators waiting for the next match. Some are young men dressed in jeans and fluorescent t-shirts. But most of the people here are older, sober in their pressed pants, embroidered white cotton shirts and shined shoes. The man beside me, Eddie, was a cabdriver in New Jersey. He's back here now for good, doing a little fishing and planting a garden. His wife isn't anxious to leave the States; she may not *come down* join him. His friend, Luis, has lived on the island for seven years this time. He has family in Massachusetts. He goes back up there several times a year. His two daughters are in college. We talk about the winter weather.

The men in the ring converse intently, moving about, gesturing like brokers on the floor of a tropical stock exchange. There are two men in their midst with roosters under their arms. They put their birds into two blue cloth bags which are hung on a scale to demonstrate their equal weight. The crowd begins to move into the stands. The handlers remain, thrusting the birds at each other. They make kissing noises and the roosters brighten, grow alert and wary. All around them the betting procedes, each man shouting his wager at another until a deal is struck. Then more bets between new pairs. The entry fee is \$25, plus \$2 for the house. The winner earns \$50, if there is a winner.

*A* The man in the *checked* shirt brings his bird *forward*. He holds it at arm's length. The official, who has a whistle around his neck, examines the bird--feet, thighs, head--then dips a square of cloth in water and rubs it along the bird's shaved legs, along its wings, around its shoulders. He takes the damp cloth and, when the man in the checked shirt opens the bird's mouth, squeezes a few drops down the rooster's gullet. *fw* If the feathers have been poisoned, the bird will die. *fw* It drinks to its own health. The process is repeated on the

second bird. Then a cage is lowered from the ceiling, coming to rest on the dusty red rug of the ring. (lost)

The din is augmented by the voice of the official over the antiquated PA system. He holds a large mechanical alarm clock aloft, announcing the minutes till the fight. The birds are put into the clear cage, separated by a plastic wall, facing each other. The official blows his whistle into the mike. The last spectators step over the low wall into ringside seats. The cage ascends. There is an instant of quiet before the cocks--one white, one black--fly at each other, attacking with beak and spur. Everyone is shouting.

"Look at that!" my father used to command as we sat together in front of the black and white TV late on a Friday night. "Did you see that jab? Look at him move!" But it wasn't the boxers that kept me riveted in front of the set; I could never really tell one from the other as they danced in the ring, dodging and feinting. It was my father. He loved the fights and I loved to be with him, and he let me; that was all I cared about. That and the strange sense of excitement I felt in the presence of a phenomenon that seemed to have so much power over this man. I wanted to learn to say the right thing at the right moment. I wanted to learn what made him so alive.

I go to buy a piña and look around. There's an outer ring behind the stands, and a room walled off by slats in one section. In it there are two seats, like cobblers' benches or stationary seesaws. At one end of the wooden platform sits a man with matches in his mouth, surrounded by little pots of glue and thimbles of thin twine, a knife. At the other end an old man holds his rooster, turns it on its side and proffers it. Skillfully, the man with the matches puts a spur--a natural one or a metal gaff, depending upon the agreements between opponents--deep into the place on the rooster's leg where its own spur once grew. The spur is secured by hot glue and wrapped with gauze and twine. In this way the rooster will not risk a broken spur in a fight; this one is removable. The smell of the glue mingles with the smell of empanadillas frying in the cafeteria. Another man waits, holding a bird and a can of Medallia beer. No one seems to mind me; I'm almost invisible.

7 Now la Negra is down, pinned by the white bird's foot. It

7 A woman among men - preoccupied about their business -

then back to the fight.

struggles. Lies quiet. Struggles again and frees itself. The white bird seems to be winning. The betting continues with men covering their early bets with new ones as the fight progresses. It's possible to identify a kind of bird strategy, to notice that one bird trips the other or forces its head under the other's wing like a fighter in a clinch. I begin to see their tactics. La Negra finds new energy. Its dark feathers are glistening with blood. It attacks with its spurs. The sound of wings is audible.

In the wild these birds would fight for dominance. The contest would be as earnest, but almost never fatal. In the old days one might witness a Battle Royal with a pit filled with fighting cocks attacking until there was only one survivor. Or a variation called the Welsh Main in which eight pairs were pitted, the survivors matched in four pairs, then two and one to determine the victor. Today, roosters seldom die in a cockfight. One wins, and when it is clear to the other that it is beaten, it quits. The winner, after a few desultory pecks, retreats. *unlike bulls & bears & dogs*

The handlers leap into the ring to retrieve their birds. The winner holds his rooster aloft. His friends congratulate him. The friends of the loser commiserate. *saves a* Tens and twenties change hands throughout the stands. The atmosphere is *both* ~~still~~ charged, *and* but clearly good-natured. *and* This fight ~~has~~ not run its allotted twenty minute course. The black bird has won. *did* ~~Hundreds and hundreds of dollars have been wagered. The black bird has grown more valuable. Its progeny will fetch large prices, even as chicks.~~ The black bird and its opponent will be petted, ice packs applied to their wounds. They will be fed and pampered. They will fight again.

*Move to the bar* The school bus comes and goes, leaving off a young girl who comes into the bar to buy a single cigarette. A policeman stops by and climbs to a seat by three men he knows. In the next contest, unexpectedly, one cock refuses to continue. It flies to a perch at ringside where it is caught and brought back onto the rug. It flies again. And again a third time. The fight is called. But before the other cock can be named the winner, a fresh bird is brought in to test whether there is fight left in the cock. It attacks the new intruder in a frenzy of feet and feathers. It passes *the test* The coward cock

*Ferdinand the Rooster*

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has its flight feathers cut on the spot. It will not fight for a year, until it moults and grows new feathers. This way its owner cannot enter him in another town and, knowing its history, bet against himself.

~~I'm learning.~~ Eddie pulls at my sleeve, points to the <sup>(clipped)</sup> shorn bird. He smiles when he sees I understand. Why am I pleased?

A new match is beginning. The blue bags are hanging from the scale when a <sup>stranger</sup> man in a brown suit steps into the ring. Much consulting. The cocks are returned to their owners. More consulting. Now there's much loud volunteering of opinion from the spectators. The official leaves the building with the man in the brown suit and the owner of the establishment, a small stooped man of some age. Minutes pass. The spectators climb down from their seats and head for the bar. Roosters in cages and domestic roosters in neighboring yards crow in turn, making a kind of music behind the voices. The heat is tempered by a breeze off the distant ocean. The sky is huge and pale blue over the greens of palm trees and the lighter greens of cane fields.

*The games men play*

The principals are returning. The man in the brown suit takes the microphone and begins to speak. There is complete quiet for the first time today. There have been irregularities. Certain rules have been broken, standards not met. Not enough officials to handle the cocks, work in the ring. The establishment will be fined two hundred dollars. For the good of the sport. The protection of everyone. The crowd listens carefully, then breaks into applause and the match resumes.

It is Eddie ~~Carol~~ <sup>Eddie</sup> Expensive who explains all this to me in English: the supervision of the quality and composition of metal spurs, the ingredients in an ideal rooster diet, the techniques of massage to toughen the skin, the prices of vitamins and a promising chick, the intricacies of betting, the techniques of training and exercising the young bird, the time it takes to bring a victorious

*like my father*

*telling a  
part in our  
men's  
stories*

cock back into fighting condition, the fate of the loser, over a beer  
and a cigarette at the bar between matches on a bright Friday  
afternoon in Puntas where the men come to wager and shout and pass a  
companionable few hours while iridescent roosters battle diligently  
and the school bus passes and the woman on the porch goes indoors to  
prepare the meal.

*We talk easily, like —*

LA PLAYA

"I'm retired. The wife has three more years,  
then we'll both be here for the whole winter.  
We like it a lot better than Florida."

Up to his peeling shoulders in the Caribbean,  
my new acquaintance fills me in  
on how-it-is-down-here, and he should know,  
this is his fourth January.

"They don't know the meaning of time," he begins...

red & yellow fishing skiffs  
palms making a mild clatter in a morning breeze  
the ocean pulsing gently on the beach

...if you float on your back with closed eyes,  
all you hear is your heart beating.

LA PLAYA

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LA 6471

"I'm retired, but with me, it's not  
then we'd both be here for the whole winter.  
We like it a lot better than winter."

to be his darling shoulder in the car, and  
my new acquaintance with me in  
on how it's done now, and we could know  
this is his fourth birthday.

"The, I don't know the meaning of that," he began.

and a yellow fishing skirt  
then making a wide circle in a morning dress  
the ocean rushed gently on the beach.

...if you float on your back with closed eyes,  
all you need is your heart beating.

See  
6/29

LADIES' LOCKER ROOM

When June releases me from winter  
like a schoolgirl, the memory  
is bright as summer's new bathingsuit:

we trampled the long lawns,  
roiled the waters  
and, in the hour put between lunch and death  
by drowning, we discussed  
Sins of the Flesh.  
Which ones to commit.  
And how?

## LADIES LOCKER ROOM

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~~XXXXX~~ Landscapes with Figures

(Beach Woods Desert)

Joshua Tree

In a Biblical country  
the grown sons  
become brothers again  
clambering the rubble  
to arrive at the top  
in air so clear their voices  
and the voices of coyotes  
bounce like toy trumpets.  
And the space shuttle ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ fractures  
the \_\_\_\_\_  
walls of Jericho.

Newcastle Beach, NH

The surface is a dividing line:  
above, kites and windsurfers,  
volley balls, pails, blankets, buoys,  
lugubrious fishing boats (lobster),  
masts and chimneys; below--  
silent, deep--  
the restless subs.

Woods

These are the noises that pass unheard:  
jay, chainsaw, cranky car, distant little league,  
splitting maul, bell, horn, \_\_\_\_\_.

And still, unheard, the thunder(?)  
of the fighter jet.

LEMONS & ONIONS, ETC.

for Wim & Jonell  
June 27, 1987

We are the immigrants  
in your country of surprises:  
rugs on the tables,  
oils that glow like afternoon sun  
on the pond,  
tall stories & old stories  
with tea or cocoa  
in thin china cups,  
hot wine.

We come to you  
at all hours of the day or night  
looking for all the world  
like we had just got off the boat  
and you bundle us  
into ~~your bulging~~ family  
~~just the way you've been doing~~  
for forty years.

*you have been making*

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like we had just got off the boat  
and you bundle us  
into the family  
you have been making  
for forty years.

Letting Go,

Gusts

~~Leaves Falling in Late Afternoon Light~~

Here, in the transient light of this room which reddens from the sun's reappearance between breaks in the swift clouds and the flying leaves, I am continually mindful of the lost, of the wavering connections that break under stress, that always eventually falter and ~~fail~~ <sup>fall</sup> and are replaced by others which come as surely as Jesus came once and then had to go on, or as Buddha <sup>who</sup> ~~is~~, who never gave dinners, whose hand ~~was never held or betrayed.~~

I am mindful of the soft 'klunk' that you ~~only~~ hear if you are in a quiet place at the time--a blue room, say--that signals the retraction of one's landing gear and the ~~shift from the closely held to free yearning~~ and the rush into the devastating and exciting windflaw.

Jesus came back because there were so many requests for suffering that God could not bear to disappoint.

And so he showed the worst he could for himself at a time when only sons mattered because of the clinging to the land, to the known,

and if, after all, we wanted to learn it that way, then we could, though it was not the easiest nor what he had thought we would choose. <sup>slave</sup>

And so I can pull on a sweater, or turn the heat up a little, or build a small cozy fire to take off the chill.

I can make hot chocolate and spike it with a little booze, knowing that outside of all ritual runs the real excitement from which I turn.

windflaw: a sudden usually brief windstorm or gust of wind; a short spell of rough weather; obs. a burst of feeling, fury, etc. (Scand-Icel: flaga--- sudden onset; Norw: flaga- gust; MLG: vlage

flawy: characterized by gusts, as wind.

LIFE EVERLASTING

On a boat that is no more  
than a board and a stretch of sail  
I ride my dreams for myself  
on a long tack across the Sound.

Red nuns genuflect in the whitecaps.

I could walk  
on this water.

**The Mad Girl**

**Whispers  
of islands  
pickled  
water melon  
rind  
fingers full  
of pebbles  
and eyes  
pulling tides  
around her ankles**

**senses  
a love  
without  
promises**

**Marie Matthews**

Manny / ~~The First Visit~~ <sup>ARRIVES</sup>

...so for want of another way  
 to help you pass the time  
 I hand you a huge wooden spoon  
 and set you to stirring  
 the cauldron of applesauce  
 at the stove by the window  
 which opens onto an orange wall  
 of woods and sun setting  
 because it's always easier to talk  
 when you're doing something  
 other than having to look someone  
 right in the eye  
 and answer and answer and answer  
 what's your favorite  
 and who's your  
~~and when~~  
 and you must wonder if there are right  
 answers and you suspect  
 that there are wrong ones  
 and when you say  
 It's quiet here I like that  
~~noise~~ confuses me  
 it must feel risky  
~~to say~~ I like it here  
 makes it that much harder  
 if you have to leave  
 so stir the thickening pink fragrant slush  
 and keep at it  
 as it gets heavier because  
 for the time being  
 what with the steam  
 and the smell and the talk and the need  
 to keep the bottom from scorching  
 there's nowhere else...

MANNY ARRIVES

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to help you pass the time  
I hand you a huge wooden spoon  
and set you to stirring  
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and the smell and the talk and the need  
to keep the bottom from scorching  
there's nowhere else...

Manny: ~~later~~ <sup>HIS PLACE</sup>

~~This is the place~~  
 where you skate in circles,  
 your moves polished  
 on a wheel of music and longing.  
 Alongside you, leaning in, is the most beautiful girl.  
 Last week she noticed you. This week  
 you will discover her name  
 from her girlfriend.  
 Soon you will extend your arms to the side,  
 she will advance to parallel  
 and you will fly in the circle,  
 acknowledged.

ster

under lights that dissolve  
 like snowflakes.

MANNY:HIS PLACE

You skate in circles  
under lights that dissolve like snow.  
Your moves are polished  
on a wheel of music and longing.  
Alongside you, leaning in,  
the most beautiful girl.  
Last week she noticed you. This week  
you will discover her name  
from her girlfriend.  
Soon you will extend your arms to the side,  
she will advance to parallel  
and you will fly in the circle,  
acknowledged.

Maple I

Warm days. Cold nights.  
Cold feet, Warm heart.

The trees bleed  
unpredictably this year...  
cold days, cold nights.  
Ice all day. Icy night.  
The sap freezes in the buckets,  
the trees inhale their sugary breath.

Neither sap  
nor love  
can be summoned  
without sun/cold rotation  
beyond our power to control  
~~or predict~~  
or wish for, no matter what  
we intend.

## Maple II

Once it is decided  
that the finishing  
will happen indoors,  
the sap assumes (asserts)  
its ~~own~~ terms: the boil  
exhales its(own)atmosphere: (special)  
maple ambience: the air  
we breathe.

Unhappy the house  
with wallpaper.  
Restless the homeowner  
who watches the electric meter.  
Impatient the housewife who calculates  
time against money.

The amber syrup coats the pot.  
The dark jars challenge the competition:

TONIGHT! ONE NIGHT ONLY!  
THE BROWN BOMBER VS. GEORGE THE ANIMAL STEELE!

The night Joe Louis stepped into the ring  
in Manchester, NH  
to 'referee' a wrestling match-- his heavy arms  
swinging useless at his side--that was the night

I determined that only the best  
would ever be good enough...

...which is what I instruct my aching shoulders  
and my careless hands  
as I haul buckets of maple sap  
to the boiling pan,

## Maple II

The night Joe Louis stepped into the ring  
in Manchester, NH  
to 'referee' a wrestling match--  
his heavy arms swinging useless at his sides--  
between George the Animal Steele and the team  
of Fuji & Tanaka, was the night

I determined that only the best  
would be good enough.  
You don't suffer  
through the Friday Night Fights  
with your father, (after your own  
Friday night,) without learning  
something.

Though often it takes a month  
of Fridays  
to discover what that something  
is.

And this year, a bad year  
for maple sap (cold days,  
cold nights), (it's syrup.)

Which is why I instruct my aching shoulders,  
my clumsy hands, to haul buckets  
of maple sap  
to the boiling pan...

You keep doing  
what you have learned how to do  
(until you get it right.)

TONIGHT! ONE NIGHT ONLY!  
THE BROWN BOMBER. LIVE! & IN PERSON

Joe. Dad.  
: Good luck. You can do it.  
~~Apple~~ or burn up  
trying.

- the tedium -

MATER ADMIRABILIS

I am lying on a hotel bed.  
Two brown chairs make stirrups.  
The doctor goes about his business  
practiced as a priest at the weekday altar.

There is a woman in the window  
across the street--a seamstress.

I am very young  
and without skills.

Marie Matthews

We are poorly  
translated in  
thin clothes;  
we did not anticipate  
the climate.

The couple on the curb  
are talking.  
Another language  
sounds  
very important.

a poem by

Monuments celebrate  
some triumph: this  
city, this fossil  
of a revolution  
built on gold.

We track down the  
red circles  
on our map. Each  
circle encloses  
a sight  
and a beggar  
with a beggar on his back.

Mexico, D.F.

I have no freedom  
here, waiting  
in the rain  
for the bull to die.

## MEDITATION

They say,  
"I don't mind the commute;  
it gives me time to think."  
Or, "I do my best thinking  
folding towels and tee shirts."

Last July the blueberries came in  
on high bushes around the pond,  
under redwing blackbird feet,  
among dragonflies,  
in sprawl beneath oak and pine: blueberries  
enough for birds and breakfast,  
for muffins, for eating on the spot,  
for--no!--the boys are having a blueberry fight!

I passed hours alone in blueberries  
and I remember  
every single thought:  
One blueberry. Two blueberries. Three  
blue berries.  
And so on.

MID-SEASON

for Sebastian

The roadsides are filling with chicory,  
ringing with lilies.

The air is a skein of mosquitos  
and caterpillar ghosts.

Spidery black creatures pad across the pond's lawn.

Everything is climbing, changing  
color.

My son grows,  
like the swamp heron,  
less startled.

MID-SEASON

for Sebastian

The roadsides are filling with daisies,  
ringing with daylilies.

The air is a skein of mosquitos  
and caterpillar ghosts.

Spidery black creatures pad across the pond's lawn.  
Everything is climbing, changing.

My son grows,  
like the swamp heron,  
less startled.

MOCA, PUERTO RICO

They know where to tell you to find her--straight ahead, todo derecha--because she's always been there, spider woman, rattling her polished bambao sticks, weaving filaments. I step out of the white afternoon into her tiny cool world with its brown light. She springs alive when she sees me, races back and forth among the web of shelves and glass cabinets. "Mira, lady! Look!" She pulls delicate collars and tiny booties onto the counter, unwinds long lace trim. Everything is spread before me. Her grandson scoots past and disappears through a curtain. (Where are the women to sit at her side, teaching their fingers to knot flowers?) I hesitate, unable to choose a single delicacy from the foamy piles. She feels it, like the tremble of a fly on the silk. "Mira, lady!" She scuttles behind a windowed case, opens a little door, snatches a plaque from its place next to the Virgin of Guadeloupe. "Bar-bar-a Boosh!" she shouts exultantly. And there it is: a laminated thank you note, bordered in presidential blue, proof that this work is beautiful.

MOCA, PUERTO RICO

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I hesitate, unable to choose a single delicacy from the foamy  
piles, ~~of lace~~. She feels it, like the tremble of a fly on the  
silk. "Mira, lady!" She scuttles behind a windowed case,  
opens a little door, snatches a plaque from its place next to  
the Virgin of Guadeloupe. "Bar-bar-a Boosh!" she shouts  
exultantly. And there it is: a laminated thank you note,  
bordered in blue, <sup>presidential</sup> proof that this work is beautiful.

## MY LAST CONFESSION

was a romantic affair: Paris. Notre Dame.

Alone, and dressed for the occasion

in something Piaf might have worn,

I poured out the whole story

from my point of view, in English;

the good father listened in French

and forgave me.

I absolved myself

and the last prayers I would offer

for the life I was leaving

ascended like candle soot,

adding another layer

to the darkened Stations of the Cross.