

Pema Chödrön

Ringling Brothers 1985, Row E, the center ring
Pema Chödrön watches
clowns romp, fall down, stare a frown
the boy next to her stares too
at the line of elephants trunk to tail
lumbering through the canvas flaps
Oh he ohs, Oh Oh Oh
a gentle whisper
Be sad my child, they are slaves
of human dreams
her eyes dew dropped, nose asnuffle
yet carry salvation on glittering lights.

Kongo sighs
another night of apples, screams and blank applause.
He craves the boxcar's rattle
the only mantra he has ever known
Then sharp *herauf*. Sheila groans
a thousand pounds digs into his back
bleibst du, bleibst du, Kongo bleibst
gentle noise he's heard before
schon Apfel kommt
and swishes nose above an ear
Apfel kommt

Pema shakes her head
Enough!
I want to scream!
Kongo eyes the crowd
for the voice he hears in dreams
blitz lights clatter on iron rails
clickity clack
the elephants dance.
Kongo rises to clap his feet
for the boy he cannot reach
Pema breathes through
the tumbling beasts
into the lungs of him beside her.

Wood And Glass

I

This house is old
full of dust, dirty pipes
and strangers' parting sighs.
Ghosts as well but hard to count
slung from shallow hangers
left orphaned in the roofing ties.

Of all the houses I have owned
only this became my home
with children, lover, doting dog
and peripatetic boarders in and out.
A refuge from weary times
less in welcome than resigned.

Each night the ghosts clatter and wait
behind the bedroom wall
for our bickering to quiet in the alcohol
then slip from rafters to the floor
and dance at last a gay caprice
to rhythms of our bitter war.

But here my memory stutters -
what color was the bedroom shade
in that room we fucked and slumbered?
gone in crumbled shafts of mourning hues
like sea salt flung in boiling water.

But you remembered everything -
the poisoned lies, the worn out dreams
old lovers that could never leave.
About the things that really mattered -
Spring's robin songs
the children's patter
your mother's gentle laughter?
be honest, you've no recall
buried by the vitriol.

II

Memory fades the past remade
by silent auguries and stale rage
the kids are old, the dog long dead

so what is left?

Smashed china strewn across the floor
a sofa stained with semen/piss and blood
In the end it never mattered
the earth sweeps clean
its detritus whether grief
or lust or endless dreams.

Episcopalians

There is a fable Billy Graham would tell:

Episcopalians don't like guns
any more than

Catholics do the wooden stakes
they used to burn witches
and their heretics.

Quakers dream a world
without ballistic missiles and Phantom jets
where Muslims and the Shamanists
are left in peace with their beliefs.

I have to share the truth you know -

The Pope once said to me in prayers beneath the consecrate:
God be merciful in these times
but let the heathen callow, the sullen die
in depthless pain, divine despair

The Pope's the worse of course,
befouls both God and little boys
with omni this pro nobis that
in white pajamas and scarlet hat

Billy paused and shook his head:

Bullshit every bit of it
all your prayers, goodwill towards men
holy shit and Catholic schools
just rigmarole to hoodwink fools.

The crown's the only thing that matters
the Lord's reward for saving souls
mine's more jewels than all the rest
whether Papists, Dunkers or Methodists.

That's His deal - tit for tat
salvation sold to any clown
for diamonds, pearls and holy gown.