

To a Fighter

Invocations

From Dartmouth-Hitchcock

Chemo

Picture This

The Champ

## Invocations

### I. CAT Scan

And just what does the cat see  
with his shining green eyes  
as he skulks through the dark  
warm jungle of your veins?

Let him pad silently back  
to report that the wet, pulsing  
miracle somehow continues.

### II. Biopsy

May the surgeon  
in her spotless apron  
emerge smiling  
from the kitchen  
saying:  
I had a little look  
you're not ready  
the oven's not  
even hot.

### III. PET Scan

It sounds so gentle — just a light caress,  
nothing intrusive, nothing rude or rough,  
just a feathery touch, a lover's kiss,  
a whisper barely there, barely enough  
but enough all the same — you can't say no.

Or a light knock on your door: open it.  
A nice young man, clean as a Mormon, stands  
there smiling brightly and asks: How many kittens?

Puppies? Tropical fish? And he hands  
you a pamphlet, a rose — you can't say no.

Think of these things when you're in the machine:  
the brush of a heron's wing, the soft knock  
of knuckles that have never known work, clean  
sheets, clean slates, clean blood. And one day we'll talk  
of this and laugh, or cry — you can't say no.

From Dartmouth-Hitchcock

I want to tell you:  
they look like they know  
what they're doing here.

I want to tell you:  
the man we met today,  
he'll be a sculptor in reverse —  
a poet of perfect excision.

Just the one little pea, no more.  
And then we'll go back  
to West West, to wood thrushes  
and red-eyed vireos and the great  
blue herons rising like pterodactyls  
from ponds shaded by maples.

Maples —  
they know how summer heals  
those neatly bored tapholes  
from early spring.

I want to tell you:  
we wouldn't have a damn  
thing different.

## Chemo

By now we know a thing or two about fire, how it quickens everything alive or dead or flickering between, and how to conjure it from nothing, how to give it what it needs, and no more — just enough oxygen, just enough life. We love fire, love to exult in our mastery, love to amaze ourselves with borrowed power. By rights we would be gods. But gods, they have their troubles, too — all that incense, all that dark insufferable mumbling, all that rain. Why do we put up with it? We just do. Star-crossed, marked for the burning at birth. Pain? By now we know a thing or two about pain.

## Picture This

Do you like a beach? Okay, then, a beach —  
in fact, your favorite beach, favorite because  
you've never been to this beach before — each  
sensation beckons you, opens you, draws  
you in, welcomes you to *your* beach — the sand  
envelops the bare contours of your feet,  
sunshine pours over you, *here*, where the land  
yields itself to the sea. A waiter greets  
you, hands you a glass of exquisite wine,  
the taste is an aria, it unfolds  
itself in your throat, your belly, the line  
between you and universe is gone, golden  
light floods through you, heals you, holds  
you, whispers everything's going to be fine.

## The Champ

The Champ is down, cold-cocked. Seven. Eight. Nine.

( *two heads faces backlit floating in smoke  
floating in warm wet gauze unending wind  
choirs of voices choirs of bells one face broken  
one barking numbers the other gone*

*the other* ) The Champ stirs, shakes, slowly rises,  
staggers, steadies, blinks hard twice, unfreezes,  
nods all-clear. By God, the Champ fights on,

tapping the gloves as if to strike a spark,  
as if to pray ( *the other* ) and the crowd  
is delirious, a heaving sea of darkness  
and fists, cigars and fedoras, now  
rapt, now roaring, now howling like a raw  
nerve, electric, as the two of them dance  
the dance of circling beasts, now grappling, now glancing  
blows, now thunder — by God, the Champ fights on,

unrelenting (*the other*) a quick left,  
a right, darting jabs, starting to connect,  
at last the Kid is on the ropes, a deft  
feint from the Champ, dauntless on the blood-flecked  
mat (*the other*), that bed of mortal conflict,  
the crowd's madness is love, uppercut,  
the Kid's head flies back, rock-a-shock, eyes shut,  
nimbus of sweat and blood — the Champ fights on,

by God ( *the other* ) and the Kid is through.  
Carted off. And now the ref does his shtick,  
the big-mike announcer does his bit, too,  
the crowd trades backslaps and greenbacks. *The fix  
is on*, someone mutters gravely. ( *gone*

*never gone* ) Echoes and laughter, house lights.  
Janitors appear, disappear. The night  
is over — and by God, the Champ fights on.

*for Marti*