

## History

It got into everything, always did.  
It clung to our hands, sucked at our feet, crept  
into our homes, our beds, our food. The grit  
of it broke our teeth. Even when we slept  
we dreamed it — there was nothing else to dream.  
Then the whispering began: *higher ground*.  
We'd never thought of that before. It seemed  
impossible at first, but soon the sound  
of those two words alone was all we heard —  
*higher ground*. By day we followed the sun,  
by night the stars. The wind was bright and stirred  
our hearts. By God, we would not be outdone.  
We drank and sang, we danced and fought. And then  
we watched the clouds close over us again.

## The Art of the Steal

Don't pity them — they're losers. Gotta seize  
opportunity by the throat. Success  
never starts small. Don't smile, don't say please,  
and always get more so that they get less —

leave nothing on the table. You need fuel,  
dry kindling, some kerosene, and a spark,  
just enough to make it start — beauty's cruel  
truth, truth's cruel beauty. Keep them in the dark,

reserve your light for later. Know that trust  
understands nothing — it's all bluff and buyers  
might be sellers, it's rigged. Sometimes you just  
pretend, and that's the art of building fires.

## Uncle

He's up there — Uncle in the attic, under  
the chimneypots. We hear him at night,  
enraged at things we've never seen. We wonder  
at his funhouse laugh, his schemes to brighten  
up the dark, his incessant tap-dancing,  
his unbecoming sense of command.  
Sometimes he stomps down in his underpants  
and shiny shoes to give us guff, demand  
outlandish rents and whatever we've got  
in the icebox. We don't like him. We fear  
his sulks, his quicksilver moods. When it's hot  
he complains, and when it's cold. Does he hear  
us when we laugh at him? Do we disturb  
his dreams? Does he ever sleep? All our noise  
comes to nothing — he gives us magic herbs  
to make us think next time he'll give us toys.

## The Goobers

It does no good to mock them, true, but mocking  
them is irresistible — we've always  
made fun of fools. Before there was talk,  
there was derision; before there was politics,  
there was the desire to shame. Why  
pretend otherwise? But these people, you  
just can't shame them — they won't listen, they fry  
the wrong fish, they think the wrong thoughts, they do  
their fandango of unreason and love  
themselves for it. They want their kakistocracy  
— a word from Greeks who'd seen enough  
of monkeys to know how they scream and squawk  
and crown the monkey most without a whit  
of sense, then shriek and smear themselves with shit.

## Vichy

The reckoning came after, after lines  
had been crossed, choices had been made that could  
never be undone — blood betrayals, signs  
twisted toward the wrong roads. There were good

reasons — so it seemed at the time. “The war . . .”  
some would mutter, after, their voices trailing  
off vaguely, wanting to shut that door  
and keep it shut — rebirth behind a veil

of memory made dim. Some lied and felt  
ashamed, some lied until they could forget  
they’d ever said yes. Some forever held  
their lies like rosary beads, silver strings set

with precious stones, fingered to a dull shine  
and mumbled in empty rooms where they sought  
absolution. Some drowned their lies in wine  
and smoke.

The others, they never forgot.