The Dream of the Hyacinthine

Nestlings of hyacinth macaws are taken
and sold illegally. Only 2500 to 5000
live in the wild today.

Nest robbers think macaw feathers
are currency, the young are loot:
they wait for the noisy overhead
rattle clatter of the parents, climb
a jury-rigged ladder, cherrypick
the unfortunate brood, and kidnap
them to some air-picaroon. Wild-
ness matters most in the universe
of the hyacinthine macaws, captivity
makes for impostors, drains color.

Swathed in palm shade, he scratches
field notes in ink: the black eye
marooned by yellow; beak a pair
of tin snips; tip a massive curved
dagger; tongue inlaid with gold;
tail feathers are a tapering mast;
rope-like toes rotate palm nuts;
upper head lighter cobalt; wings
and coverts, intense ultramarine,
a dream of electric blue or of jewels.

Barren Tree

In pantanoso field, the dead tree
is a hand cradling the heavy nest,
mudpacked and waterlogged.

Other couples brave the chuva
torrencial, heavy rains; a chusma
of friends gathers upstairs and down.

Words spoken seem uncertain
and flimsy, a thin curtain separating,
doors and windows varnished shut.

Grief burns in the gut, a pasture's
controlled fire, a hand smacking
the stove's flame, the tumbling

pan, full of hot grease. The pair
is stunned, shellshocked; the pain
heaves and buckles their knees,

hunches and curls their papel wings.
Their silent language drip drips
from beaks, deluges the vacancy.

Grow Up, Cecropia

In the dead spaces of terra firma,
the cecropia squats and homesteads,
settles and covets more blank sky,
sends the bulk of its children
across dried allevium to die.

A lucky few grow up and stretch,
gangly as teenagers, awkward with acne.
They rebuke the world. Whorled,
their hands are sticky, haircuts a puzzle,
lives a sprint, a straight line of sight

to the light, no junked up trunk,
always outcompeting peers, shrugging
off any and all distractions, socially
isolated, warming in solar brilliance
inside their own greenhouses.

Drain

Zebu are humped taurines,
lean, grass-guzzling machines
bent on grazing crazily. Skin
flaps, dewlaps sag, and ears
flop; their legs are weird stilts.
Heifers and calves are light-
coated like Charlois. The bulls
are darker grey, horse-dwarfing,
black-hummocked behemoths,
bred for humidity and wading.

To raise well, have pantaneiros
ride alongside; don't damage
their hides with whips; give
them salt licks; drive to fresh
pasture as the rains shift; keep
them high and dry; cut palms
and make pasture; drain the soil
so they won't get stuck or drown;
the more pasture, the more Zebu,
the more pasture, the more Zebu.

Alarm Whistle

Capybaras use a series of noises
to communicate with each other:
whistles, grunts, squeals, and coughs.

When he was small, he rode high
on his father's back to see faces
of the angry crowd. Coaxed
and coached him how to float.
Scampering and freewheeling,
he froze, hearing pai's whistle
carrying across the expanse,
immediately run for home.

When he was old enough, he left
to travel rivers, to stake his claim,
to form his own kinfolk. His was
transitory, distance separated:
he feigned preoccupation and time;
some made miraculous escapes.
He worked diligently to conceal
his weaknesses; hoped no one noticed.

He tried to keep them safe each day,
but they are dragged away, body
by body: they served their purpose.
There was nothing more to do.
He checked downriver searching
for him, ears pricked, intent.
He waited to hear it on the wind:
the clear note of his father's whistle.

– Paul Brooke*

**Professor of English, Grand View University, 1200 Grandview Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50316, USA. Email: pbrooke@grandview.edu*