

DAVE CASERIO

Chicago, Year's End

At 25,000 or 26,000 feet over Cleveland
And Lake Erie, over a sullen watery blotch welling
Into a rim of light, our captain breaks in:
“If you look northward, to your right,
There is a spectacular shot of the Aurora Borealis.”
This is the first time in my life to see such a thing.
And I fudge my nose up against the Plexiglas
Just as I would when a child
In the winter-dim light of Chicago's Shedd Aquarium
As the dolphin, porpoise, and whale went their liquid ways.
I longed to be that flesh, that oil,
That christened sign of the wave made visible,
To roll in the deep birth moan and rise
On the high, unwinding, undulation of their cry.
But in this season of death,
Of dying and near dying,
Of one friend fallen
And one father falling,
Towards the bitter, holy night
There comes no writhing harp of polar light
Only the pulse-darting flash of wingtip,
A few stars and the general dark.
In which I remember Rexroth's
“Love Poems of Marichiko,” how the lover's
Tongue thrummed deep into the moist cleft,
Deep into the under-dark,
Yet into radiance they turned,
Into a vast expanding pearl of light:
Lover and Beloved.
And that this is how close I must live my life.
Then kindly it begins—Aurora Borealis—
That careful, lilting hum
Of a pearl being formed.
Slowly, in contagious arcs,
It fills the sky.
And what has been lost
To these mortal hands
Returns.