**In the Shadow of the Drowning Mammoth**

Jose Oseguera

Hours before her water broke,

My mind dwelled on the many ways

We could lose him— my boy, my son,

A tusk so deeply entrenched in me—

Life’s cruel limbo of making me love him

Before giving him to me.

As I fell asleep,

I arrived at a park I’d visited once before,

Desolate and gripping my tombstone in its dirt.

An old man approached me and took my hand;

Looking down, I noticed that I too was old.

We walked toward a lake

Alive with turtles, mosquitoes and tadpoles.

His wrinkles of cracked earth

Seemed burdened with visions,

So I asked him how wisdom was acquired

As the stones we threw skipped flat

On the lake’s tarry surface;

He said he didn’t know.

“You acquire it as seconds

Age a child from newborn to adult;

It compiles on your soul

As breaths in your lungs,

By the time you notice it’s going into you,

You feel as though you don’t have enough of it.”

As we watched the awkward transition

Of frogspawn from tadpole to froglet,

My thoughts asked what my words couldn’t:

“Was I a good father?”

A question whose answer I didn’t want to know.

The old man dipped his hands into the muddy waters,

Trapping a tadpole between his wrinkled palms.

He blew into his cupped hands

Intoning melodies of amaranth, capri, and lilac.

“We’re all born with light

And dark inside ourselves,”

He said, blowing a new canticle with each breath.

“We need both, as light feeds on darkness

As darkness is renewed after it dies.

Everyone has some of both—

Some of us more light

And some more dark than others.”

When he opened his hands,

A golden frog jumped out

And into the lake, glowing bright

As it swam deep into the foggy depths.

“We all want more light than dark,

To succeed without failing,

To do good and be told we are good,

To live forever and never die:

But don’t crave more light; seek balance.

Don’t allow others’ darkness,

Or shadows wombed within you

To prey on your light;

Pray on your light

That you may share it with those you love.”

When I awoke, my wife’s fountain

Flowed warm from within,

And we drove to the hospital.

As stars and streetlights ushered our way,

The old man’s words followed me

On Hollywood’s empty, serene streets

As bats singing cassette tape squealings;

The lift of their wings

Wrung my tear ducts,

And I wept the love saturating my bones

As the tar that consumed the mammoths

Thousands of years before

Only to preserve them forever.

The sun lay the moon to bed

As the wind soothed the clouds to sleep;

When the jacarandas polka-dotted the grass purple

And she told me that she couldn’t wait to be a mother,

Squeezing my hand tight,

I felt my heart tadpole

And mature into something

That wanted to leap

Out of my rib cage, into my throat—

A golden aftertaste

Of moments that make you

So happy that they make you sad,

Because you can’t press pause

On a time that won’t be like this again.