

A fly
walks across the bone wedge
of the viper's skull, pauses
over a lidless eye
and cracks its knuckles.
Calm and still as rock,
chin resting on the coils
of its own body, the copperhead
watches lions across the corridor
stalk their cages
and roar for the African hunt.

The Captive

At his capture a gunstock cracked his skull
but the Jap lived, God be praised, for ten days.
The Philipinos forgot their tropic leasures
and labored industriously at a vise in which
ten successive knuckles were crushed. Then,
after some deliberation, hot lead was poured
into his nostrils, sizzling vomit and blood.
The blowtorch and battery acid, however,
proved too much. Broken bone probing skin,
eyeslits sagging over hollow sockets, the Jap
died. But not before he had been hung on hooks
dug under his ribs. When they found the remains
they arrested fifty or sixty people in Manila.
Each died by similar means.

The sergeant told this story, with variations,
for the amusement of the men. It does not
matter that the poor Jap never existed, save
in the dungeon of his mind. The story,
like a deck of Mexican cards whose pictured
perversions challenge possibility, brought us
to a response so dark that even our genitals
shrivelled with shock. Oh, sergeant of excrement,
how many times have we strapped that fellow
soldier naked to a table, howling in the hell
of each man's jungle.