

## Chaty Lorens

Chaty Lorens, born Alberto Romero, majored in journalism at Rutgers University and earned a law degree from Seton Hall. He practiced law for six years before his father's illness caused him to move to Spain. After his father's death he began writing poetry, as his father had done. He now works as a translator and legal advisor to the merchant- and fishing-ship business in Basque. He is married and father to a young daughter and son.

### Little Evil River

A river moon rises behind the steel nettles of a junkyard,  
where boys play the games they've always played around  
prehistoric fires. The conversation tonight is commonplace:  
Everyone's been a little bad on this river that knows a little evil.

Off the bank a body bobs up and down,  
floating quiet as flotsam.  
A boy shudders at the sight,  
while others stand, spitting butts out  
where ripples die on mud.  
A dead body heads their way,  
skin shining bloated like a seal's.  
It stops near by command  
where boys commune with evil fire.  
"Some fucker's fallen off the bridge.  
Probably been stabbed."  
The body floats high on water  
still desiring escape from evil hands.

But the river keeps what it was given.  
"Wanna beer, nigger man?",  
says a boy as others spit and splash  
beer on the cadaver's face.  
"You sure he's really dead.  
Poke the bastard and see what he says!"  
Stones thrown on skin  
sink beneath skin swallowed by quick-flesh.  
"Poke the bastard with a stick."  
Smiles alight as skin melts into ribcage.

A kick on the dead man's head sets him free  
and freedom flows down river ever quiet.

Human monsters peak from the banks.

Not a caring star dares shine overhead.  
Greater monsters still, turn their heads,  
sharpening the claws of silence.  
In the distance the ocean roars indifferent,  
wave after indifferent wave.

Somewhere Mother swims, dolphin-dressed, her voice a building gale.  
The moon fades pallid, sighing in shame: Our children do get to be men.

### **Crocodiles**

Someone buys a house in that neighborhood  
of colonial grandeur and perfect locations.

This big old beauty, someone else's pride, say,  
for argument's sake, was once a doctor's house;  
a decent man who one day just got up and died

(of apparent and welcomed natural causes),  
long-awaited by children as thankless as things.  
"Raise crows and they shall pick your eyes".

Empty houses, those picked clean, sell well.  
Their holy gardens and prayer-filled pools  
help someone else's children now as then

discover the danger of intimacy shared  
in knee-deep waters filled with guilt.  
"What beasts slither thus so shallowly?"

Newer owners that never wanted sacred pools  
that came with houses blame others for their choices:  
A small child of twelve, say, that loves celestial games.

Power at such age given is ageless power that prevails.  
Owners thus indifferent end up selling all the books  
in a doctor's library just to make spirits toss,

then turn, by selling all, yes all that could be sold,  
including the Harvard Classics Library Collection  
for \$15 USA Dollars worth of yard-sale-bargain

to the learned mother who appreciates colors  
and covers that match it all. Mothers thus never tell  
of a doctor's scribbled notes on page 61 of Volume 12:

*My son? He lives; a man he had been long,  
But that the harlot-mother did him wrong.*

Mothers dear and dear mothers never notice shelves of blue  
except on Saturdays when dusting while gardeners prune  
love songs about sin in the land of lily-lies and dreams.

A small child of twelve thus ill-blamed may spend summers  
idling sacred in a pool empty of friends except, should one notice,  
for the inflatable crocodiles that bob up and down in fake turquoise water.

The child's mother, allergic to the sun of life, spends summers hiding,  
while dad arrives later still from the city of late arriving dreams.

The child is happy thus: swimming friendless in crocodile-infested waters.