To a Father Stewing about His Sons

Ann Darr

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The Hippopotamus Can Also Sing

The hippopotamus can also sing,
His hot blood sings beyond the human ear;
Would say, if worded, mercy builds forever:
Under the armored hide the caroling.
This is no formidable beast, for all
His fortress, and he will not exercise
Himself in things too wonderful. He lies
Light as unthought, like thistle on a wall,
Cooling himself in concrete summer tanks.
For all his mass, there’s no solemnity:
Under his ribs lies what the children see—
A comfortable grace, a simple strength
That feeds on hay and swims a river’s length:
His eyelids rise and fall in lazy winks.

—Allen Kanfer

To a Father Stewing about His Sons

Old man, old man, you cannot taste
the soup in all the kettles,
Nor serve nor ladle each.
Do not despair that they are out of reach,
Nor yet presume to preach.
Their tongues will tell them;
Trust in their taste.
Born of you
Thorn to you
Thrown from you
The seasoning not done in haste,
The finished feast is theirs to waste
Or savor. Stir yourself.

—Ann Darr