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# DESTINY

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Philip Levine

A July morning of frightening heat. You take the garbage to the curb. You feel dirty, you feel maggots have invaded your slippers, you need a scalding shower, you even need a shave. All your allergies have returned in a rush, your hands are disgusting, you're afraid to touch anything. At the threshold of your house a cat is waiting, a tiny black & white creature you've never seen before, perhaps a gift from destiny itself. (Ever since you were six that word, "destiny," has haunted you.) The cat demands water in a china cup, cold water from the ice box & not from the tap, she demands as little chatter as possible, she demands her own place in the shade of the sycamore. In your mind you go over a series of appropriate names for her; none seems right until you hit upon Caesar. Later at dinner she lurks under the table; even your sons fail to mention her presence until your youngest remarks that now you're a family of six. That night in bed you hear the house creaking in the summer wind, the bamboo by the open window rises & falls, & you know the six of you have set sail for an unknown shore, some foreign land beyond the dark harbor of sleep. Little by little the house pulls farther from its anchor & further into the unknown while the waves work gently at the edges of your dreams; you've never before felt so totally yourself, so comfortable in your body. If you could speak you would say, "I am my soul." The odor of your own breath—which now is regular & sweet—tells you that one of you has gone so far there's no turning back.

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# THE LAST WORD

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Philip Levine

“From up there the fat barber—the Falangist—was thrown,” the Guardia officer tells me. “It is all in the book by the American communist.” “The communist?” I say. Yes, the friend of Fidel Castro, Comrade Hemingway. “The tourist comes because of him, that is why you are here.” Who can argue with this young, balding lieutenant who has come out from his barracks with only a small sidearm into the wet streets of Ronda in felt house slippers to show me his town, he who prefers his English to my Catalan-accented Spanish. “On those rocks,” he continues, pointing to a ledge half way down the gorge, “he hit first & his belly explode. Then they rape his beautiful daughter, the film star that is Swedish, & when they have finish using her they shave her head. That is why we execute them all.” Does he mean why they executed them in the book? “No, no, here, up on the bridge” —& he points again—“one at a time, properly, where the whole town must witness & learn the lesson. It is educational.” But, I insist, that was just a novel; it made no effort to be true to events, a roman, a fiction, not even truly serious literature, in my country a best seller. The lieutenant enjoys this repartee, he smiles at my innocence, he shakes his head, he is discreet & patient with this visitor to his ancient city that boasts the first *Plaza de Toros* in all the world. “You Americans,” and he sighs, “you think because he was a red he could not tell the truth. They do not give Noble Prizes to liars.”