

PHILIP DACEY

LITTLE FUGUE ON FOUR VIETNAMESE PROVERBS

The meat has been brought to the tiger.
There's no river without its bend.
The meat has been brought to the river,
where each basket leans toward its owner.
Bet on the ants, not the elephant.

Let the elephant be brought to the tiger
when he leans toward a basket of meat.
Each river of ants has its bend.
Who owns a river of ants?
Who owns the meat in the basket?

Every elephant, tiger, and ant
bets on the bend in the river.
A river without a bend
is a tiger without meat,
a basket without an owner.

An elephant in a basket
brings all owners to the river,
where ants and tigers
bet on the elephant, who leans,
or on the owner, who bends.

Let the river be brought in a basket
to the ants, those owners of elephants.
All owners must bend toward the river.
Bet on a basket of owners.
Bet on any river of meat.

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Some street-talk I overhear can make my day:

“Why should I worry? I’ve got nothing to hide.”

“If you think I’m a terrible person, that’s okay.”

“It’s not happening.” “My personal trainer died.”

“The Catholic Church is the best of all pirate ships.”

“Listen--I’ve got a phenomenal memory.”

“They have 100-layer lasagna.” “We stayed up
and watched a stupid movie on TV.”

“Do you see numbers in your sleep at night?”

“I’ll defend with my life your right to like merlot.”

“They don’t understand each other’s humor yet.”

“That’s the guy I didn’t hire a year ago.”

“And then I said, ‘Your honor, that’s why I’m here.’”

“Do you know you have a leaf in your hair?”