

CHARLES HARPER WEBB

*Corn*

I'm slurping lemon yogurt, straining at my crossword  
when sound surges in like liquid diamonds, or sunlight  
mixed with honey and titanium—so sweet and ringing,  
delicate yet strong-as-continental-drift, I can't  
describe it without sounding corny and wanting to cry.

It glides inside me, soft as the vapor-hands of a girl  
who died. She loved her hamster, Lemon Jello,  
and watched him gallop in his yellow wheel for hours.  
Her parents wanted everything for her, but then one day  
a garbage truck... Oh stop! My composure's

tottering after this week's-worth of bunker-buster bombs.  
And now this sound—all right, this *voice*—human,  
I guess—this woman, singing—shifts blocks inside  
my chest, yanks pulleys, twirls knobs, spins gears,  
cranks levers gently as Mom's (sorry!) purple pansies

swaying in a warm dawn breeze. I'm groping—"Eight-  
letter vulgarism for *dysfunctional*?"—when the singer—  
barely 5' 3", with curled, platinum hair—materializes  
by the fridge, her every atom pulsing supernova,  
black hole,  $E=mc^2$  energy. All I wanted was to solve

my crossword, survive my job, drive home and share  
a wine cooler with my wife—no fights, no loathsome  
discussions—as my son does homework without a fuss.  
Wanting much keelhauls the soul. Mine can't endure more  
flaying barnacles, shark-chompings, brine instead of air.

Sure, it was great to scuba dive with green turtles  
and yellow tangs, young myself, my wife so sexy  
in her mask and fins, our every touch was making love.

But now, when adult life roars, *Atten-HUT*, drumming  
its fingers, demanding discipline, why does this singer

turn up, ringing like a xylophone of gold? Tears  
assault me—like my father's that he brushed away  
as the bus to college gaped to swallow me. *I didn't*  
cry. The Legions of Good Sense and Industriousness  
plugged my eyes when they burned my childhood,

crucified its pleasures, and salted the earth. Now  
that salt's washing away as song shocks open  
the clogged springs. A bumper crop of corn leaps up:  
long green leaves weeping in the wind, ears swelling huge,  
each kernel sweet and bursting with the woman's song.