CRICK, WATSON, AND THE DOUBLE HELIX

by Christopher Southgate

A single insight made the Book of Life cohere,
Sent two men shouting into a Cambridge bar.
More slowly there steals upon us the power, the fear.

The X-ray from King's, and Chargaff's pairs,
Not one helix, but two, fugues on a common air;
A single insight made the Book of Life cohere.

An amazing future, suddenly laid bare -
New drugs, cheap insulin, strawberries all the year.
More slowly there steals upon us the power, the fear.

They were to find the grammar of genes trickier
Than expected, the syntax harder by far.
But a single insight had made the Book of Life cohere.

They could see the Nobel, and the patenting wars,
The complex hunger for profit, healing, honor.
More slowly there steals upon us the power, the fear.

It was all there, in the thin Cambridge beer,
The Text of Texts, laid ready for the sequencer,
A single insight made the Book of Life cohere.

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Harder to take in the tears at the screening center,
The many deaths of unborn others,
But slowly there steals upon us the power, the fear.

Now we face the uninsurable cancer,
Anticipate the repertoire of the baby-tweaker.
A single insight made the Book of Life cohere,
And slowly there steals upon us the power, the fear.