

THE CRAVING

In this, a new millennium, it's hard
to write a verse in Keat's formal style.
And yet, tonight I'm inching toward the bard
who beckons me to ponder for awhile
the music in life's silent solitude.
The mind must empty, body must retreat
from audibles and tangibles possessed--
and worse, possessing-- waiting to intrude
on any fragile song that might compete
with being thingful, stuffwise overblessed.

He'd think those words unfit for poetry.
Agreed, but they express our human state--
obsessed with objects, all-consuming, we
amass belongings we may come to hate.
Just let me hear the quiet of a cave,
a moss-lined valley when no breezes blow,
or stillness in an empty church at dawn.
Convinced the notes are there for me to save,
I'll search out every pianissimo
while learning to be soundless as a fawn.

And when my notebook's treble staff is filled
and pastel sketches shade the once-blank page,
I'll pass it on to someone who is skilled
in spirit artistry, who can engage
the inner ears and eyes so long denied.
From colors that are yet to be revealed
and melodies still waiting to be heard,
an ode will softly rise on morningtide
to soothe the souls who wander far afield.
Perhaps with tones like those of Keats's bird.

A match for lyrics God has sealed inside.

HE ASKED: WHY WASTE YOUR TIME CREATING POEMS?

I write them, I said, to delve, to wonder,
to make the loud world be still awhile.
But create them? More likely they infect me,
colonize in me, take over. I can feel
their cells dividing to claim space
like squatters. It may take weeks to coax
them to surface, work them out of my system.
Still, I'm a volunteer host if the season
is right for certain strains to flourish.

Some poems taunt me; tentative and wary, they
scuttle off like scorpions, stingers raised.
I go after them with a torch and a bare hand,
no creator, not even a capturer,
just a wanton of them, a willingness to suffer
their strikes for the power they transmit:
Spring loaded with chemistry, cornered
in earthy niches. Potent instruments
of thrust, animate with ways to disturb
old apathies. Not meant to finalize
breath or beat--but maybe to make each tremble--
if only for a moment.

"...Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu..."
--John Keats, Ode on Melancholy

DEFYING THE BREAKERS

The truth, two-sided wave of grief
and joy, I intimately know.
One half conceals a stealthy thief.

The other bears elation's sheaf
of blessings which I store to show
the happy opposite of grief.

I focus on the greening leaf
instead of raked-up piles of woe
whose depths conceal a stealthy thief.

Survival of a coral reef
attests to standing in the flow
of truth, one half, a wave of grief.

I hold to this, however brief
the gladness, always turned to go.
The depths conceal a stealthy thief.

With buoyed cheer my small craft's chief,
I sail across the undertow
of truth, two-sided wave of grief
and joy-- one half a stealthy thief.

And I will shelter in my soul's belief.

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EMERGENCE

No relation to emergency. But not unlike
the onset of infection. I feel razorish,
tropical and polar at once. Complexities
stir beneath my surface, just out of reach.
I stare at my skin, waiting for something
to develop, waiting to scratch or salve.

Where did this germ come from?
I haven't been exposed to anything
but hectic living, nothing dire, just
time-consuming daily dilemmas. But wait--
lately at odd intervals, I've been anagogic,
my head filled with pastel images
or reeling red glimpses--
brief shimmers like UFOs on the parallax
of sight. Gone if you look straight at them.

I should have known it was a poem. Fragments
lodged in my creases and folds just waiting
for any shorted synapse, unfocused lens,
unclaimed space. Waiting for the moment
I recognized life-- unpredictable, electric,
diverse-- is really what poems are about.

SHOWING CHICAGO TO BAUDELAIRE

So, Mr. B, everyone's left but us.
This was probably my last production. I'm broke.
I thought Chicago would be a good venue for your verse.
The Lakefront Players delivered it well. But you saw
how your poems played the house. Out of sync
with immortality. Slaying the audience is what we hope
to do but not that way. At least they died politely.

Just as well you aren't available for an interview
with the Tribune critic. He's already fingering words
like passe, rummaging your rhymes, looking to make a pun.
Come on, you might as well see Chicago while you're here.
You were always attracted to big city nights. I own a copy
of Les Fleurs du Mal in French-- flowers of evil-- ripe
with urban musk, erotic alliteration, the patina
of impacted space. Park your demons backstage. Mr. B.
Unlace your strophes, your dodecasyllables. Follow me and
the Jack Daniels. I'm not too drunk to show you The Loop.

This old broad's broadened since dragging her petticoats
through swamping black mud, Indian twilight
and the evil smell of skunk cabbage. Lake breezes flutter
the curtain of Diesel fumes, not a smell you would know.
The phallic towers of the powerful probe the high haze,
challenging low-flying angels. Michigan Avenue fires
millions of rounds of glowing ammo from all angles.
You can't escape the bright shrapnel, incendiary shards
of it, infecting you with a virus that keeps you
coming back for another pelting and piercing. You can see
the aura of millions of souls for miles offshore--
part light, part heat and motion.

Now we're in the outback, still in sight of magnificence--
magnanimity-- maggots. The lower level is pocked
with puddled reflections, shimmering shades of lust,
logic, obligatory beauty. The trumpet playing
in that storefront dive is tonguing out blues-- a color,
a condition. Day workers rehydrate inside, jockeying
barstools, betting on hot-lipped riffs to raise them higher.

Predawn diminishes the reach of hands that open, caress,
point, clap, clasp, make a fist. Giant tools are at rest,
teeth slightly bared. The traffic never stops-- motorized
moving from somewhere to elsewhere. Glass clinks, grease
simmers, sounding like rain, small machines gritch, whine,
close hard on your cash. Neon viscera surround the collage--
geometrics of red beef, frozen fish, potato pyramids.
The man sleeping in the cardboard box is waiting to eat
from upscale garbage.

(cont.)

You nod at parallels to 19th century Paris. Tell me,
how did you bend the edgy shards of yourself
inside syllabic margins and rhymes you called
"lanterns that light the pathway of the idea?"

Oh, you did it so well, but your light
came from passion, rage, not limned thoughts
with flickering finials. Did you impose strictures
on your work in a misplaced desire for discipline?
My old professor suspected you of self-punishment
in tight seams and chafing collar while bowing on paper
to the rigid icon of acceptability, and your mother.

Does the city define the artist or defile him? Or both?
You were like that structure on the corner--
meticulous brick and polished balustrades
fronting a brothel. You were the brilliant rebel,
the doomed genius, the damned. Your poems seethed behind
formal facades. Your lines wept under carriage wheels,
chimney soot. Les fleurs du mal--a cultural gardener's words,
definitive of times, plantings, random reappings.
Or the world's indifference to all of it.

And me? Just a failed producer who knew
the risks, who hoped your genius would come through.
My jeremiad palls like your end-tied pentametrics.
Chuffing semis gather now to disgorge at sun-up.
Nothing is blossoming wicked and wild in cans and pots
on cracked stoops, only forgotten cold-black geraniums.

But look over there-- a night-blooming cereus opened
ghostly rare in a florist's window, its perfume
leaking out to the gutter. False dawn holds in its palms
the white curve of petals like a skull, predicting
the final metaphor, teasing me to borrow from Avon's bard
for amusement. Or lack of farewell words.

All right, I'll say it: Alas, poor Baudelaire.
No one knew him well. Tomorrow-- maybe not at all.

COVERT CABIN, UNMAPPED ROAD TO SUN-UP

Twenty-odd years since I saw the place.
My triumphant shout crazed the green-filtered afternoon
when I found it. First 48 hours a fast blur. Sawing
limbs, salting fish, chinking both windows. Proving
my survival skills to my long-secret self.
Even planted spring hopes next to mother's wolfsbane
(I call it winter aconite, little more than a weed)
now usurping the realm, her once oddly glorious garden.
Just before escaping civilization, I bought bulbs,
certain this swatch of Saskatchewan sky far from humans
never blued over daffodil ruffles before.

Diminishment set in the second day-- as if my being,
my body-- didn't displace the air, the essence of space
I occupied. My feet failed to leave tracks. "Surroundings"
imply you're among things life nature you exist.
I wasn't part of the verb "to be." Forget cogito ergo sum.
Nothing was stretched or hollowed out by my presence.
If anything barely altered the natural superior order,
it was my muddy Jeep half-hidden under spruces and shade.

Third day shadows multiplied, magnified. Shadows
not matched with solids. Shapes not fully fathomed.
My mother would have chanted in three tones for hours.
Omens from old tribal tales appeared early: my hearth
flared, a single orange tongue licked high in the chimney.
It hissed, fell back and died. Sickly sun
plunged wide shafts into the soft earth, sucking it dry,
giving no warmth, only taking, leaving a swath
of cold-parched earthworms and clay crumbs. Strange paws
signed the ground by my door. Day dimmed. A lone bolt
of lightning split a balsam trunk. My calendar
fell off the wall. A wolf wailed.

The first wind pried the shutters, crashed my lamp,
spilling precious oil. Alto afterwind mourned
between slaps of chill and the wavy scent
of wet animals. In a race with decaying light,
my mother's half of me snatched up brittle bunches
of wolfsbane. My other half swallowed a round
of drugstore sleep. I united under the blankets
she wove, each patterned with ancient symbols.

Awakened by blackness heavier than night, I tried
to surface, swim up through it like a cave fish
looking inside its head for its lost eyes. Night pushed
up from the world's old graves. A wolf night, howling.
A night to grow everything old. I lit a trembling candle.
Morpheus had fled, leaving an empty bottle.
I floated in vertigo. My frail flame flickered out.

The charred moon smoked, reversed itself,
revealing a death's head just as she always said,
withholding its downshine, dripping
ice sweat wolf sweat grave sweat.
Black stained the air. Trackless black
where the wolf walked, bearded, breath-stealing black,
silhouette of hills not there, of beasts
climbing moonward, necks fletched like arrows.

I said my mother's name, clutched fistfuls of wolfsbane,
scattered it across the bed. She rose in me like ether.
I groped for her incantations drummed into my childhood,
stumbled and skidded over forgotten roots
my father planted. A trailing tendril snagged and held.
Weed essence opened the flue; friction made a spark.

Still sneezing, I relit the candle, snatched up
the aconite for a funeral pyre
fueled with her hand-hewn cedar medicine chest.

Leftover dark
was stilt-legged shadows on a hearthlit stage,
the usual cast with known names.
Tomorrow, I announced to the sniggering flames,
I will move back among my kind.

ACT VI AT ROWLAND HOUSE

Glenn Holloway

Rosalind My dear Orlando, did you never once
 Perceive beneath the clumsy umber smeared
 Upon my face these porcelain female pores?
 The lack of lurking beard to match my wit
 And worldliness? The coarse-culled shepherd girl
 Espied my subtle hue and turn, then fell
 In love. Yet you, already lover, failed
 To feel vibrations from the very self
 You claimed had conquered you. How could this be?

Orlando Sweet Bloom, my mind remained upon that spot
 Where first I dropped my jaw and gazed. My all
 Became a thrall to space you warmed, to grass
 Your small foot blessed: A man sans faculties
 Is not observant or responsible.

Ros. And yet, should not the countenance which made
 Him thus be shock enough to whisk him whole
 To any country street or foreign hill
 By dint of eyes and smiling mouth when met?
 Imprinted as you were, it should have hit
 Like lightning, made you gasp my name despite
 Disguise. Did you not see the likeness, dear?

Orl. Fair Swan, I thought you brother to my pearl
 At first. But then your guiling talk revoked
 My eyes, led me to join you in that play.

Ros. You now admit your role required some thought
 and eyes, who just before vowed such were lost.
 And since they truly weren't, good husband, mine,
 Then tell me, are you always gulled by guile?

Orl. I wasn't ready for it from a boy.

Ros. Did not my lilt and pitch betray the same
 That first had left you speechless? Limp? My notes
 Resolve no manly chord, no matter how
 I tilt the scale, yet plucked no knowing string,
 No sympathetic bell was struck in you...
 Why, any man should know what doublets hide
 Is realized in hose. My curve of calf
 Was never granted boy! It takes a dolt
 To practice wooing mindless of the wooed.
 A dullard would have guessed my prisoned hair,
 Detected silken hands. I was a fool
 To feel your credibility would mend
 With marriage. Would I'd cast my irises
 On Jaques. He has a drollsome slant of view.

cont.

- Orl. Lament your lot no more, old girl. You're mine
And I am yours. What happened in the woods
Was fate. We're calmer now, released from plot
And ploy of Hymen's vassals in the spring.
I can forgive you for the farce you staged;
Forgive my lapse of sensitivity.
- Ros. What's that? You pardon me? Dear sir, no flaw
Have I presented you! Just all my youth,
My girlhood wasted on a barn-boy. Oh!
My cruel maker warped my life. My fret
Is not with Hymen but stupidity.
I sniff the perverse will that paired us now,
And kept me captive in a biased pen...
Perhaps your brother Oliver would make
A better match for me—mature, well-schooled,
Repented of his villainy, so wise...
- Orl. Enough! Recall our meeting, madam, do.
Recall a wrestling match in which I felled
The well-known champion. I later killed
A lion and you swooned. Likewise I'll break
All suitors you encourage, and if needs,
Shall pinion you to flutter like a fern
Amid the forest refugees. I, too,
Recoil at our creator's tongue and cheek,
And all those viscous verses mouthed and treed,
My furnace sigh, my sickly public whine.
The audience has grievance as do we.
His comedy has cadence, but thin swill
To serve belief. He cast us all as fools.
Still, you and I are aptly mated, Roz,
And thus we'll stay, though fashion bids us switch.
We've lasted long, we'll go the gamut now.
I'd rather keep your passion for myself.
Your brine-cured tool encased in rosy blush
May sand me to the luster you desire.
Meanwhile, content yourself with brawn that won
Your lusty favor. Oliver is flabbed,
And Jaques, a wet-nosed dreamer. We deserve
Each other, shrew of Arden. Speak no more,
For by my ardor flexed around your throat
Forsooth— Yes, that's the way I like it, dear!

THOSE SENSUOUS WRITERS SHOULD BE ASHAMED

Glenna Holloway

Gold tasseled menus overwhelm resolve
With every highly seasoned epithet.
Cold crisp suggestions dipped in tang revolve
The pith and piquance skewer-aimed to whet
Each tasting bud, to silence moderation.
Broiled tender phrase, spiced syntax, creamy riot
Breach my barriers. Anticipation
Coiled inside each cell defies the diet
Prescribed by Dr. No-No. I'm seduced.
I will have Langostino Casaloma
Described au verve. The poetry reduced
My won't to puree smothered in aroma.
There's one last round to lose and much to gain:
"Where's dessert?" I cry. "Serve it with champagne!"

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NIGHT OF THE SURGEON

Wilderness witch-man,
always somewhere beneath my lids,
lingering under an ancient moon, waiting
in the shallows of snatched sleep, waiting
in the secret afterbeat of systole, diastole,
whispering forgotten incantations my blood remembers.

We are not strangers, shaman, minus our masks
in this breeding dark. I understand the language
of your hands rehearsed in sleight, the constant drum,
the fetish bone and feather in your bag made of skins.

We are not so different, devil-doctor,
moving to wild harsh cadence that quickens
with the questions, the unknowns in the shadows.
My hands have held the same thin chances up to light.
Sorcerer, healer, leech, how far through the jungle am I?

Somewhere in the forest you defied endemic demons,
sowed the covenant seed, swore with your own blood
to reach above the smoke, to raise the order.
Sharp stone incision, humble herbs and purifying fire
begot a sterile lineage of wizard steel,
bottled nostrums, licensed magic.

A siren punches through my dream. Skulls and scarabs
recede on walls of waking; you pass beyond
the parallax. But never far from now or from arriving
pain and asking eyes, always near the fleshsmith's tools.

Sure shadowless light supports the fragile promise
of my hands, anointing my sacred scalpel.
Morning is a little nearer.

YOU SHOULD KNOW SHOULD I SAY YES

Glenna Holloway

I've never understood her well.
She comes and goes at will,
sometimes more than once a day.
Now and then I turn and do
a double take to make sure it really is she.

Her voice is alto soft; you called her shy.
She's the one to marry, she's the one
who doesn't have to win
or even compete; she'd be satisfied
with a bungalow, a hatchback, and simple country food.

This place is always crowded; I didn't see
my other friend come in. I say
"friend" because she's been so close--
all through school in the same class,
so many nights in the same bed.

Fantasizing about some boy she wanted bad,
she never spared details. Her imagery would wheel
through my head, center in my lower half and while
I lay thinking how a slow hot cure would feel
against my aching, she'd begin to fill

her mental shopping cart with perks and goods
her favors could harvest-- as if the gods
designed her just to be rewarded for her beauty.
I'd call her nasty names and say her body
was not meant to be used that way.

I'd shame her, make her promise to behave, then we
wouldn't speak till the next night
when I was studying, my stomach in a knot,
and she'd bring up clothes or yachts; she wanted it all.
Next day I'd hear her laughing as I rode the El,

(cont.)

struggling with theses and a twelve pound book,
her "degrees won't get it for you, babe," in the back
of my head. So of course, you've met her,
a cunning child with trailing scented hair
looking lies from under lashes long enough

to blow in the wind. You've heard her voice, sometimes a knife
out of its sheath. You've seen her eyes, wild
and craving as a hawk's, cool fire like a cougar's willed
to the art of pursuit, always weighing, always hiding
something. And you've fallen into their orbit, unheeding.

But watch. The lids lower and raise and she's gone.
Here sits a middling woman with nothing to gain
by telling you this. I wonder why I did.
Yet you must have noticed when daisies died
and orchids bloomed on a hollyhock stem.

You've seen fawn eyes transmit praise and trust, then steam
with sudden rage, and back again to blue-greened
layers of velvet empathy, deep ingrained
with kindness, reflex lenses of compassion. Right now
she who cares so much is past tense, how long I don't know.

I share these eyes with her and her. I've confessed
the complexities of woman. A blink. That fast.
The change can happen with a syllable, a color,
or slowly like the build-up of a chafing collar.
Part of this trihedroness should be kept

in full sun; part needs to be tightly capped
like fulminate of mercury, never stirred.
The less definite one needs to be steered
with a modicum of persuasion, a steady hand.
Sometimes the hand must be my own, my conscience hound,

or just the basic elements of selfhood.
Are we so different after all? If you had
a psychic scalpel would you sever
all your prisoners, or keep them in the brew for savor?
Think how each taste will flourish with more than one receiver.

QUITTING

Tomorrow is the great awaited Smoke-Out.
Today I'll implant steel rods in my spine,
Rev up the old will power, chase off doubt,
Command my grody craving to resign.
I started on the countdown when I woke:
My leather case contains ten weeds I broke
In half. I'll ease up on the dawn's taboo
Dispassionate and calm, sans ballyhoo.
These things are simple if well planned; I'm set.
Just keep it cool, that's all I have to do.
Tonight I'll have my final cigaret.

I won't be like those terminal bores who tout
Their victory over habit's fist. I'll shine
With sheer example, careful not to sprout
White wings and halo, gracious and benign,
Not spewing advice, just a quiet stroke
Of genius in the fumes of frenzy. An oak
Against temptation. Maybe if I chew
Some gum this urgency will pass, this corkscrew
In my brain demanding ransom. Gee, I bet
Myself I'd last till breakfast. I've had two!
Tonight I'll have my final cigaret!

Now drop your voice an octave; please don't shout.
Don't jump so far ahead, don't undermine
Resolve before you've started on the bout.

Relax. This system's gonna work just fine.
When I feel weak I'll give my pride a poke
And hole up in my office— maybe stoke
The bod all day with candy bars in lieu
Of lunch. And coffee up with stronger brew.
Relax. And do whatever seems to whet
Determination. Is it really true?
Tonight I'll have my final cigaret?

It's times like this I'm glad I have some clout.
I'll work alone today. Those sorry swine
Across the hall will puff cigars and flout
Good breeding, gesture with their full packs, dine
Amid the burning of the leaf, provoke
Me past endurance. Hopefully they'll choke.
My ashtray's nearly full of residue
And this makes ten. I'll never make it through.
But hey, hang on, they're halfies, don't forget!
I'll save my next for someone wearing blue.
Tonight I'll have my final cigaret.

Our head of advertising is a lout.
But all his suits are navy. "Get me Hackstein,
Please Miss Pitts." He always reeks of sauerkraut.
"Yes, ring me when he's off his other line."
What sheep dip! Stop this mullet-gutted joke;
Pull the act together. Guzzle more Coke—
Faster! Get hiccoughs! Eat another Goo-Goo!
My stomach feels wretched. Like I'm getting flu.
Well, that would do the job. I've never yet

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
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Quitting

Smoked then. With luck pneumonia may ensue.

Tonight I'll have my final cigaret.

Now see? It's not so bad, this rendezvous

With grave decision. I've pulled off a coup

To free this realm of nicotine. My sweat

Has made me strong. I'll rule the corporate zoo!

Tonight I'll have my final cigaret.

I REMEMBER SHAD

He led the "Hell no, I won't go" part of my classroom, the boy with saddle-colored skin and big brogans tracking in barnyard smells. He spent his last term sparring with grammar and spelling, living on the edge of anger, sometimes aimed at me like arrows flying from his Choctaw eyes. His name was Luther Shadbush and I kept him after school again when he refused to write the essay I assigned on patriotism. "You think I'm gonna gush about rights and opportunity and how I wish I had more lives to give this country?" He struggled to clean his words and unclench his big hands.

"Don't you feel anything for America, Shad?"
"Sure. I got a big urge to paint New York before I split for Canada."

But there were later words. He sent me this letter when he shipped out for Vietnam:
"You know I'm not much at writing stuff but I don't want you to think I let myself get herded off like a stupid sheep not caring about anything or remembering anything you tried to tell me. Finally it did sink in. I'm part of this land, going a long way back. Sort of like a needle on a lodgepole pine. I know the limbs are blighted and the trunk's got borers but it's still the tallest, straightest tree in the forest. And it's my tree. Guess I can't help wanting to hold on to it. I don't see nothing better anywhere else, don't see other kinds propping up falling trees without taking the lame tree's land in the process. The lodgepole pine don't operate that way. Maybe if enough needles hang tight and do what we're supposed to do even if we don't like it, our tree will get well and put out some new branches. Bigger and better ones. I guess that's hope. So that's what I aim to do. Maybe that's loyalty. And if I die doing it, somebody ought to know I'm not leaving bitter, and I'm glad to be part of this old tree. I guess that's pride. And maybe all of it together is that word you wanted us to write about last year in school. Remember?"

I remember, Shad. I remember as I read your name between reflections on the shiny new monument, remember the medals you won before you finally fell all the way to the forest floor, one more needle to nurture the roots of the lodgepole pine.

DENOUEMENT: FLYING THE JUNEAU ICE FIELD

Glenna Holloway

Given a choice I'd have picked the tropics.
Maybe the warm would begin to work on you,
make us wrap our possibilities in the smell
of frangipani and the certainty of tides.
Maybe I flew the Honolulu honeymoon run too often
and some of the hype seeped in my chinks.

But here you are, sweaters, boots, coffee thermos,
being my Alaskan hostess and guide. I always wanted
to show you the north but I thought you'd hate it.
It's surprising you stayed. I thought you'd come home
after two or three weeks. What holds you here?
This is heathen beauty with chewed edges. You look
wonderful against it. But you wear all latitudes,
all climates well. Will our differences
magnify in frozen lenses and lingering light?

Pilots are the world's worst passengers.
I've never been in a float plane before
but you've planned a special tour for my first morning.
You charge me with camera gear and smiles so
I can't ease my itch to inspect struts, rudder, prop
before we're committed. All I know of the man
at the controls is plaid shoulders, hair, beard

cont.

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no stanza break

and Air Force shades. You seem to know more.
The vintage craft wallows in the thick water.
You point to ptarmigan already losing their brown;
they blurt from dwarf willows on the bank.
You hand me film to load.

We started coming apart last spring, you and I.
When you took the job in Juneau for a season
you said you'd know your answer by the time I arrived.
Do you know how many hours aloft it's been since spring?

We lift off, fat, sluggish, loud, while you tell me
you saw a beluga whale last time. And suddenly
we see a pair of them arcing whitely. They move
side by side, pale quotation marks
introducing verses I've never read.

we ride low and slow over goldmine ruins, wiry brush
and rocks. Your cries of look oh, look!
make me stop listening for the stall warning.
There's a moose with a rack like a park bench.
I still love seeing with you.
Are you going to leave me when we land?

You tell the bushman you want a shot
of Mendenhall bulking bluey to the northwest,
a grimy grimace on its freeze-dried face.
The moraine is plushed with spruce and hemlock
splashed with fireweed blowing puffs of seed.
Thoughts of ailerons, fuel and pontoons fade;

cont.

no stanza break

my arm falls on your shoulder
as we press toward your window. A braided river
flounders in the silt looking for the main part
of itself without current or compass.
I'm a braided river.

The mountains are fingerpainted for fall.
I'd forgotten how many shades of red
the tundra owns, how many Tlingit legends
shadow the hills. Remember how you thought
Alaska would be drab? I watch northern lights
play your face as you nod.

Pocked remnants of centuries bend the light below.
We approach the ice cap. A hundred mile mother lode
forty miles wide and flat. A huge shelf of loneliness.
No one's sure how many thousand feet deep. I planned
to fly it once. Never did. We need time alone.
A cleared stage. No walls, no props, no noise.
Part of our trouble is we were never still. You always
had something going when I wanted to be. Up here
we could learn. Just learn the verb to be.

You're down there on the ice now, as easily
as if you'd stepped out without saying goodbye.
Take me with you when you go.
Down there has the look of silence. But I know
that arctic leftover creaks with age, cracks
like a rifle shot with constant change, growls at wind.
Life support for the glaciers, keeping them hale

no stanza break

enough to bully mountains, gouge holes for lakes
and slough off bergs the size of ships. Even
the Nunataka groan under their scars,
those great granite chess pieces castling
the empty board where pawns and knights were lost.
No roads. No animals. No living. Except glaciers—
kings— queens— bishops— pompous beyond the passes.
You once said I could use a little humility. Is that
what you're trying to teach me? Alaska would humble
King Kong. That's why you're not saying much. Why invest
in communication with someone you're through with, right?

The crevasses are the color of California sky
and morning-glories. Your eyes have more lavender.
If we crashed down there somehow I'd save you.
I'd put myself between you and the ice. Somehow
I'd will you all my blood strength breath mind.
The mind— what fool flights it takes.
Fills up like a windsock when left untended.
Or ravel at both ends.

We're passing a small glacier. Rough spiderweb turquoise
in matrix. Look at the top— one perfect cabochon
some lapidary's frozen fingers had to abandon
before he could cut it loose for a ring.
You smile. I'm glad you're still a romantic.
Is that what I am? Only with you.
Are you glad I talked you into doing this?
Of course. I wish that didn't rhyme with divorce.

cont.

We're nearing an evergreen rain forest
slanting away to a meadow rimmed with aspen gold.
I glimpse wild cranberries as we slip into a river valley.
Bald eagles circle and sail like wooden totems
freed from their poles. I can feel how they excite you,
feel it building. I can almost catch it.
Look, they're feeding on salmon. Let's join them!
You're pointing ahead. There's the lodge! Already
I can smell the alder smoke. Can you carry this bag?

A damn nice landing on the river.
I didn't know we'd be putting down anywhere—
Your ungloved hand is warm, even your eyes,
although cerulean is a cool color. On the dock
you poke your head back in the plane and speak
to the pilot whose face I've never seen.
I gather he'll tie up and join us for lunch.
Instead he hands you another bag and calls out
See you two next week then starts his turn for take-off.

DENOUEMENT: FLYING THE JUNEAU ICE FIELD

Given a choice I'd have picked the tropics to warm you,
some place we could wrap our possibilities in the smell
of frangipani and the certainty of tides.
Maybe I flew the honeymoon run to Honolulu too long.

Here you are, sweaters, boots, coffee thermos,
being my Alaskan hostess and guide. I always wanted
to show you the north but I thought you'd hate it.
This is heathen beauty with chewed edges. You look
wonderful against it. But you wear all latitudes
and climates well. Will our differences
magnify in frozen lenses and lingering light?

Pilots are the world's worst air passengers.
I've never been in a float plane in my life
but you charge me with camera gear and smiles so
I can't ease my itch to inspect struts, rudder, prop
before we're committed. All I know of the man
at the controls is plaid shoulders, a hood of hair
and beard around Air Force shades. You seem to know more.
The vintage craft wallows in the thick water.
You point to ptarmigan already losing their brown,
blurting from dwarf willows on the far bank.
You hand me film to load.

We started coming apart last spring, you and I.
You took the job in Juneau to buy time and space.
Do you know how many hours aloft its been since spring?

We lift off, fat, sluggish, loud, while you shout
you saw a beluga whale last time. And suddenly we see
a pair of them arcing whitely, side by side,
pale quotation marks for verses I've never read.

We ride low and slow over gold mine ruins, wiry brush.
Your cries of Look! Oh, look make me stop listening
for the stall warning. There's a moose with a rack
like a park bench. I still love seeing with you.
Are you going to leave me when we land?

You tell the bushman you want a shot of Mendenhall
bulking bluey to the northwest, a grimy grimace
on its freeze-dried face. The moraine is plushed
with spruce and hemlock, splashed with fireweed.

(cont.)

GLENN R. HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
Naperville, IL 60565

(no stanza break)

Thoughts of pontoons fade, my arm falls on your shoulder
as we press toward your window. A braided river
flounders in the silt looking for the main part
of itself without current or compass.
I'm a braided river.

The mountains are fingerpainted for autumn.
I'd forgotten how many shades of red the tundra owns,
how many Tlingit legends shadow the hills. Remember
how you thought Alaska would be drab? I watch
northern light play your face as you nod.

Pocked remnants of centuries bend the light below.
We approach the ice cap, a mother lode of loneliness.
We need time alone. No stage props, no noise. Time
for synchrony, for just learning the verb to be.

You're down there on the ice now, as easily
as if you'd stepped out without saying good-bye.
Take me with you when you go.

Down there has the look of silence. But I know
that arctic leftover cracks like rifle shots, creaks
with age and growls at wind. Life support for glaciers,
keeping them hale enough to bully mountains, gouge holes
for lakes and slough off bergs the size of ships.
Even the Nunatak groan under their scars,
those great granite chess pieces castling
the empty board where pawns and knights were lost.
Glacier kings, queens, bishops-- pompous in the distance.

You once said I could use a little humility. Is that
what you're trying to teach me? Alaska would humble
King Kong. Tell me what you're thinking. Maybe
it's why try to communicate with someone on his way out.

The crevasses are the color of California sky
and morning-glories. Your eyes are more lavender.
If we crashed down there somehow I'd save you. Somehow
I'd will you all my blood breath strength mind--
The mind-- what fool flights it takes.
Fills up like a wind sock when left untended.
Or ravels at both ends.

Look at that smallest glacier-- rough spiderweb turquoise
some lapidary had to abandon before he could cut it loose.
You turn and smile. I'm glad you're still a romantic.
Is that what I am? Only with you.
Are you glad I talked you into doing this?
Of course. Why did I notice that rhymes with divorce?

(cont.)

We're nearing an evergreen rain forest slanting away to a river valley rimmed with aspen gold. Bald eagles circle and sail over the water like wooden totems freed from their poles. I can feel how they excite you, feel it building, feel myself catching it. Look, they're feeding on salmon. Let's join them. You're pointing ahead, saying There's the lodge! I can almost smell the alder smoke. Can you carry this bag?

I didn't know we'd be putting down anywhere-- I thought-- Your ungloved hand is warm, even your eyes, although blue is a cool color. On the dock you step back in the plane to speak with the pilot. I suppose he'll tie up and join us for lunch. I'll have to commend him for a damn nice landing. Instead he hands you another bag and calls out See you two next week and starts his turn for take-off.

THE GARDENER'S CURSE

(On My Neighbor's Green Thumb)

Glenna Holloway

May your shovel break, may your fertilizer bake,

May your droughts be long and dusty.

May moles make holes, may blights take tolls,

May your pruning tools get rusty.

A killing frost on the hybrids you crossed;

May your pink chrysanthemums sicken.

A pox on your phlox, may your seeds fall on rocks,

May your aphids and mealy bugs thicken.

And to add to your woes, may you slice up your hose

When you run your power mower.

One last incantation: While you're on vacation

May stinkweed grow up to your door.

Next Garden Show they'll surely know

Just who should get first prize.

My brow of sweat was twice as wet,

And twice as green were my eyes!

Guest Star

He strides toward the piano with poise,
Making the gestures each artist employs,
Bowing and arching and smoothing his tails,
Suiting his seating and flashing his nails.
A lot of attention he gives to each hand,
Then finally and gravely he nods to the band.
His wrists rise with grace, his fingers unclench—
He planned to play now but his score's in the bench!

GUEST STAR

He strides toward the piano with poise,
Making the gestures each artist employs,
Bowing and arching and smoothing his tails,
Suiting his seating and flashing his nails.
A lot of attention he gives to each hand,
Then finally and gravely he nods to the band.
His wrists rise with grace, his fingers unclench—
He planned to play now but his score's in the bench.

THE HUNGER MOON

Summer is sweet on the tongue,
soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,
unlasting as the corn god's shades of green.

Yesterday when the sun centered on my roof,
the red-tailed hawk reeled round the hot yellow
forcing shut my eyes, tightening his circle
and hurling down his cries on my doorstep.

He is back with the dawn.
Down and down he throws his keening
like splinters of cold.
That hawk is a prophet of the hunger moon--
The time of no more corn, when the deer goes,
making no tracks to a place no man finds.
And before he sleeps, the bear
eats bark and things that crawl.

None of us will starve, not even the hawk.
For me, famine is of the spirit
while the body fuels on dried fare
and sweets that come in jars.
The wings are first to wither,
then the deep singing.

Someday I will follow the hawk. I will climb
past wilding mounds of dead-gold buckwheat.
My foot will rattle shards of ancient lava,
startling a pika into range of beak and talon.
I will face the he-wind
angering in the cinder cones,
prying at broken shadows of the sacred peaks.

There in the secret heights I will master
the proper maintenance of wings.

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
Naperville, IL 60565

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Summer is sweet on the tongue,
soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,
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the red-tailed hawk reeled around
the hot yellow forcing shut my eyes,
tightening his circle and pouring down
his cries on my doorstep.

He is back with the dawn.
Down and down he hurls his keening
like splinters of cold. That hawk
is a prophet of the hunger moon--
the time of no more corn--
a time when the deer goes far,
making no tracks to a place no man finds.
And before he sleeps, the bear
eats bark and small things that crawl.

None of us will starve, not even the hawk.
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while the body fuels on dried fare
and sweets that come in jars.
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of dead-gold buckwheat. My foot
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CHAPTER ONE, JOURNAL OF A JOURNEY

We slept so little, nervous as sweat bees. In the thick dark I wondered if there was enough blood painted on the doorway. At first light, a sound like desert thunder rolled over the sand, hundreds of people came running through our alleys like berserk shuttles in a tangled loom. They pounded on our doors, shrieking. When my father opened ours, Egyptians poured in laden with wine, robes dyed their finest blue, even bracelets of carnelian and gold. They flung these on the floor, shouting: "Take this and get yourselves out of Egypt!" A girl came with bolts of cloth; she was young and smooth as I, and as she turned, we knew each other from childhood when the role of slave to playful mistresses was willow fronds tickling me before I learned the stinging flail. I called her through the din and saw how red her eyes. She hissed like a cobra in my face: "My beautiful brother is dead." She twisted a silver scarab off her knuckle and thrust it at me, then ran crying: "Hurry! Leave! Take that horrible God with you!" My mother was rolling kneadingtrough, raw dough and all into a rug. She spoke to me twice before I could move.

My next memory is of grinding feet and hoofs, curtains of churning grit attacking the sun, sealing our throats with sharp fire. My father kept prodding me to keep up, finally tied my sash to his. Late in the first night of our fleeing, my friend Sariah crawled beside me as I lay unblinking under foreign sky. "We're going back" she whispered. "Come with us. Anything is better than wandering this desolate place till we starve." I sat up. "But they don't want you now, they may kill you!" She said, "No, my mother's needle flatters Hatsut too well; she begged us not to go, wanted to hide us till the chaos ends. And I please Thutmose. I can show you how if you come." I didn't want to know of her and Thutmose. I closed my inner eyes and snatched her hand. "My father says the Lord caused us to be freed. To better serve Him. We must do His will and follow Moses to a land of our own, a bountiful, glorious—" She shook her head. "Surely you don't believe such lunacy." My tears held all day began to spill. "I saw piles of frogs and flies—misery—everywhere but Goshen. How can I not believe?" Impatience twitched her fingers. "There is fearsome magic about and who knows what waits ahead? Little fool, don't you see? Goshen is always spared. If we have a God, He lives back there!"

We flatten the earth's face with endless walking. My parents are too weary for my questions when we stop to sleep. Hunger is always in sight, tracking us like an old lean jackal. It has been three days since I saw my friend. One of the elders says there are 600,000 of us. I only know I can't see our beginnings against that strange burning cloud nor our endings disappearing in dust. So much to ponder... I like to think Sariah is not far back, her mind changed. And I wonder if the Lord God of Israel knows I am terrified...

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"My beautiful brother is dead." She twisted a silver scarab off her knuckle and thrust it at me then ran crying: "Hurry! Leave! Take that terrible God with you!"

My mother was rolling gourds, kneadingtrough, raw dough and all into a rug. She spoke to me twice before I could move.

My next memory is of grinding feet and hooves, enormous disorder, curtains of churning grit attacking the sun, sealing our throats with sharp fire. My father prodded me to keep up, finally tied my sash to his.

Late in the first night of our fleeing, my friend Sariah

crawled beside me as I lay unblinking at the foreign sky.

"We're going back," she whispered.

"It's better than wandering this wilderness or starving."

I sat up. "But they don't want you now, they may kill you!"

She said, "No, my mother's needle flatters Hatsut too well; she begged us not to go, wanted to hide us till this madness passes.

And I please Thutmose. I can teach you how if you will come."

I didn't want to know of her and Thutmose. I closed my inner eyes and snatched her hand. "My father says the Lord caused us to be free. To better serve Him. We must do His will and follow Moses to our own land, a bountiful place."

She shook her head. "Surely you don't believe such lunacy."

My held tears began to spill. "I saw piles of frogs and flies everywhere but Goshen. How can I not believe?"

Impatience twitched her fingers. "There is fearsome magic about and who knows what waits ahead? Don't you see?

Goshen is always spared. If we have a God, he lives back there!"

We flatten the earth's face with endless walking. My parents are too weary for my questions when we stop to sleep.

The third hungry day is almost gone and I have not seen Sariah.

One of the elders says there are 600,000 of us. I only know

I cannot see our beginnings against that strange cloud, nor our endings disappearing in dust. So much to wonder...

I like to think Sariah is not far back, her mind changed.

And I wonder if the Lord God of Israel knows I am terrified...

MAJOR RHAPSODY IN F# MINOR

You didn't expect him here
with silk hangings and life-size classic sculpture.
He made no entrance, he suddenly was
onstage, easy as moonlight, fitting with fountains
and topiary as if here had always been his background.
But when he moved and smiled, you knew--
you knew he was a trumpet man.

Son of a thin rumpled line inhaling used smoke
mixed with applause to blow from balloon cheeks--
son of the hard-molded case followers,
those rolled-up bus riders down the streaking nights,
closing their painted eyes and seeing brass
hanging over them begging to be snatched and hidden
for a couple of nights' peace-- watching it
turn to an armored snake in their jealous hands
then hearing it tongue out tarnished laughter
on three ribs, belling out morning and a hangover
in some town they mispronounced.

You didn't see this loose-angled one pick it up,
the instrument came like quick cell division
from his lip. And the sound began--
uncoiling slow, coming for you, crawling
into your head, changing the texture of your bare arms.

You know that sound, mama. Nothing as simple
as ever-popular heartbreak or phantom train whistles,
nothing as definite as a tenor sobbing Eili, Eili
or wild animals moaning up the moon.

His eyes ignite. Lightning arcs from his hair,
striking the conductor zapping it into your gravity center.
The sound, mama, leaching tones out
of the marble statues, out of your wine glass, rearranging
molecules, making them glow like neon fog,
fulminating red and purple.

How much is music, key lowered now half a step,
gone minor again, flowing that little groove
where pain runs convex to the surface?
How much is the glint of cut-crystal hanging
from mirrored arches, moving barely
with audience breathing, striking flints in his pale eyes?

He is a prophet-- forecasting ruin, forecasting rain,
predicting your heartbeat, willing it, playing

your spine like a keyboard, electrifying your long red guitar strings. He compresses a grain of hot salt in every pore, starts small internal combustions, all pistons at odds, then one enormous turbine synched with him, generating enough current to throb down the marble columns, revving the riderless carriage outside the fourth dimension, holding a seance with Gabriel and Gershwin, DeBussy and Berrigan.

His grin is sudden. He flats his fifths and goes south on a short bridge, tootles to the carved unicorn, blows out the chafing dishes along with the illusions so for a jigger of time you can stand it, draw your breath on the afterbeat, see that he is a real live trumpet man, not a sorcerer, not a fakir pulling the cobra out of your basket.

He is a child-- blowing bubbles of incredible light, each expanding on its own spectrum, merging with bobbing sixteenth notes.
He is Imperial Rome-- an announcement of gladiators, Caesar chariots, a boast of soldiers, an ancient fury.
He is Africa-- black hunter cry, leopard stalking, impala bleeding, eyes looking out of water, eyes burning and curling edges of night, smoke rising, winding winged scales, sucking back into the bell, recycling.

He slams a fist in your throat, turns you on a spit and hamstrings you with blades of ice. He hustles the horn, wrestles it, shares it, his mistress and mentor, a panpipe saved by his kiss.

Feel the sound, mama? He's concentrating on all your edges now, honing sharp sharper-- quivering on a sill to somewhere, retiring to a glistening waver between turquoise and green, hanging on like dying gills.
He's a trumpet man, mama, more lives than a cat, more wind than a Texas twister.

It's all the magic horn, mama, that golden fetish, possessed and possessing, that haloed concubine caressed and polished, surrounded with plush.
And you-- bleached, smacked, sewing a dress out of mill ends, earning your master's degree in martyrdom with that eternal alloy suspended between you, even in bed-- that icon he hocked once to buy you an emergency doctor in Dayton.
And you sold your mother's ring to get it back.

new stanza

And the man, mama, with the hard harsh mouth,
dead weight in the bus seat, little slivers of life
telescoped into battered cases and collapsible stands.
Trumpet man. Pitched all shades and angles like shadows,
worse for women than drifters. Gone too high too often,
a pile of feathers dripping wax on the downers,
always patching to fly one more set too near the sun.

Was there a man at all?
Or just a flared gold phallus that seduced you
and crammed you in the gears of a music box on wheels,
hurled you across the bad-weather map
into broken-john motels with lint bedspreads
and the boozy corners of never-quite-level halls
full of lurching bodies and bad acoustics?
Trumpet man. Inseparable composite of flesh and reed--
cold spite for your touching,
hot pipe to all we know of paradise for his.

Tears emptied, he mounts the god syndrome
like mercury, surpasses sound, no longer protoplasm
and metal but some new alchemy entering
the last panging tunnel you sealed and secured.
Driving deeper, blowing down your barricades
like Joshua, playing what no mortal ever played.
Peeling off new notes like bright blisters,
exorcising the orchestra, resolving each chord
with light, nebulizing fire.
White consumes you, turns you immaculate,
unhurting anymore.
The trumpet fluoresces with his phosphorous eyes,
confetti light orbits his head
until his image blazes beyond seeing.

You open your eyes as the waiter pours champagne,
hear something shut like a latch, focus absently
on an alabaster herald you hand't noticed before.

LA JULIA RHEA'S CASTLE

She should have been a famous opera star,
she had the voice, she struggled through the training.
But she was born too soon.

Still, she attained one night of triumph:
a special Benefit Performance of Chicago's Civic Opera
with La Julia Rhea as "Aida"-- Verdi's masterpiece
about a captive Ethiopian princess (a master stroke
of irony.) The year was 1937, half a century ago.
For the first time, one of Rhea's race sang
on an American operatic stage. Adorned
in Rosa Raisa's gown and slippers, a gift from her,
Rhea offered her own rare gift
and won both audience and critics from the press.

It would be another score of years
before the Met admitted error
and a prima donna who was black.

Rhea's debut was more for others than for her.
Her full voice made tiny fissures
in an old invisible wall so Anderson and Price
could bring it fully down.

Rhea's haunting soprano toured in Broadway shows;
when tones began to dim she became a seamstress.
But she had 2 determined sons who wanted her to have
a shrine, a house fit for a princess.
They wanted her remembered while she lives.

Her oldest taught himself to build, taught himself
the skills he needed to stretch and shape
an old Blue Island house into his mother's castle.
Piece by piece he salvaged hand-carved stairs
and newel posts. Bit by patient bit the pair rescued
Chicago's Gold Coast treasures from the path
of the wrecking ball, and rummaged in its wake.

And now in her eighth decade, the grandam sits
at her grand piano, surrounded by mirrored walls,
prismatic chandeliers, mosaics of gilded reflections.
She will, if you ask, show clippings, photos,
Aida's costume, artifacts of things that were
and should have been much more. She'd rather
show you her home. La Julia Rhea is still beautiful,
her smile is warm. For how many divas have such sons?

For a male group and a soloist

THE LAST FOLK SONG

Group: A bearded performer comes on with his singing
To wail passé questions and chant a cliché.
Parochial verses in rhythm-rut ringing,
The singer is bad but he won't go away.

Solo: Is peace an unnatural, narcotic state?
A sick joke or social injection?
A dream diametric to national fate,
Or a myth to be aired at election?

Is peace an excuse for corruption and waste,
For a few to take most from the many
And give nothing back, not even a taste
Or the feel of a whole cent penny?

Is peace to accept that our future is nil,
Our years and our ways are in meaningless flight,
Abandoned by hope to some negative will
Which born out of darkness must live without light?

Group: That minstrel's still strumming his lonely lament,
Drop curtains, the oddball has had his big chance.
He's sung himself hoarse and his banjo is bent,
He's spooked all the thinkers, quick, bring on a dance.

Solo: Is peace for the young to grow prosperous and proud
While the old and the wise are forgotten?
How soon will their own acts be shoved by the crowd
To the wings while the stage grows more rotten?

An audience watches with tense dedication
For when all our tenuous trappings may fail.
Instead of the homespun that binds up a nation,
Our models wear gossamer draped from a nail.

Group: (change key half step)
Can't somebody shut that fool folk singer up?
He's adding new lyrics to those he rehearsed.
Let's grab him before he starts passing the cup
For all the performers who went unimbursed.

Solo: Fellow-thespians, join in my last chorus call,
The business of solos is no longer smart.
We can't leave the stage undirected to fall
To lobbies of jackals who wait for our part.

All: Repeat last verse

LEFTOVER BOY

Your syllables snarl and break off like hair.
You've forgotten the word; you tremble.
But I understand what you want,
and say "No, you can't have it. There isn't any."
I watch your thirty year old hands roll inward
and beat the sofa, a prelude
to the spate of moans, yelps, growls. Suddenly
you remember: "Coffee-coff-cup-coffee-fee-cup!"

Your brother and his wife kept you Tuesday
while I bought you a jacket and shoes. They
let you have coffee to keep you from doing this.
They don't see what happens later. They don't see
you walk the night. You hurl yourself
on your mattress, then up again, wall to wall,
back door to front, around your bed,
into my room, around my bed until daylight.
When I tell them the results, they grin
apologetically. They change the subject
and tell me how they taught you a new word.

Words are a problem. But you can sing
recognizably a verse of Silent Night.
You learned it Christmas, 1970. A proud milestone.
When you come to "mother and child", you point
to me and then to you. But you never call me that.
You never call me anything.
Still, your gamut of sounds is always aimed at me.
Your daily tears fall on me.

Yesterday you wanted the puppy you saw on TV.
You didn't remember the word or the one you had,
the one your long hands loved to death.

Twice a week you go to a school
that taught you to fold cardboard to make a box.
You used to earn fifty cents for your boxes.
Then one day-- someone taught you how to work
the coffee machine. And you never forgot.

Now I don't even keep the instant stuff
because you learned to pour it in water
and gulp it down. You spit out the de-caf
I thought would solve this one thing.
"Yes, dear, the dog you're drawing is beautiful."
Is that a smile? I'm never sure.

Oh God, how I'd love a cup of coffee.

GLENN HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
Naperville, IL 60565

4 lines

LINES FOR PETER NERO

Glenna Holloway

This Nero wouldn't dream of torching Rome.
This fire evolves from fuel nearer home
That tunes his piano pyrotechnically
With lasers in his hands to light each key.

LION ON A WHITE FIELD

Like the secret signs gypsies leave
on walls and doors, or sailors' symbols
carved in ivory,

I marked my lover:

(Others would see only radial intaglios
at his eyes, a curious curlicue
in his palm)—heraldry
from another time and place when I watched
the escutcheons woven, and the red dying,
and learned what bearings to trace
on my returning.

So in the summer of now
I left my posturing suitors
astride their growling bar-sinister cycles,
or encased half-couchant in horse powered steel.
And I rode a blazoned stallion,
ensign of my family's old strength,
through armorial heat and twisted shadows.
Then I saw the mountain. Halfway high
the stallion faltered and fell.
I crawled alone to the crest:
No stranger held it, no unknown arms.

His standards matched my shield;
he reached out his hand
and called my ancient name.

LISTENING TIME

I always say more than necessary,
hum an extra measure of a song,
breathe another sigh.
You can discard at leisure
what you don't want
along with dried up ballpoints
and crossword puzzles you solved.

I was born afraid of silence--
mine or yours or the earth's.
And if I hold back some of what
I feel, you'll never know how much
love you've generated.
It leaves no room for silence.

--Glenna Holloway

THE LISTENING TIME

I always say too much.
You can discard at leisure
what you don't want
along with the chipped cups
and the stringy philodendron
and the crossword puzzles you solved
without once cracking the dictionary.
(All things I'd keep.)
I was born afraid of silence--
mine and yours and the earth's.
And if I say too little,
how will you know what's missing?

LITTLE GIRL GONE

Glenna Holloway

It's such an old cliché--
but maybe this really is a trick mirror
from an old carnival
stretching her taller than I.
Looking right at her I didn't see it--
only when I stood behind and gazed unblink
into the hard shimmer of our reflections.

There where surface ripples rounded her
and bluey defined my eyes twice, my walk,
she spent all summer.
The newer image grew stronger,
passed into the parallax, and only mine
stared back from the tilting frame,
pale and unfamiliar. I turned my back.

Now ahead I see a woman in a glossy gown.
She holds a gilded looking glass
and calls for me to hurry.

ID
copy
only

LITTLE GIRL GONE

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stretching her tall, taller than I.
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Now ahead I see a woman in a glossy gown.
She holds a gilded looking glass
and calls for me to hurry.

LONG AFTER FATHER'S DAY

Today I went to the lakeshore--
so many bright boats rocked
on the ripples.
But there was one,
sparkling and sun-silvered,
farthest out of all,
and I thought of you.
No matter how much distance is
between us, or how many sails
gleam and beckon nearby,
it's your shining I look to,
your sure course I follow.

THE LONG EMPTY HALLS

In often dreams
when all the scenes have wound down
& streaming plots have knotted up & looped
& wandered away
there are the long empty halls.
Sometimes you get to them
in ascending/descending stages.
Sometimes you merely turn
& begin walking toward the vanishing point.
Light is always dim; you can't really see
your feet but they must be on thick carpet
since they make no noise & no effort
is needed to move them.
Soon you can make out dark-stained doors
lined up at attention on either side.
Pale chandeliers make decisions of light
on the high ceiling but offer nothing down,
no help with the numbers on the doors
which all look alike, all closed,
all someone else's. The digits blur
& you forget the one you're looking for
or even if you thought it belonged to you.
You calculate how far it is to the vanishing
point but each time you count off your steps
it's still the same distance ahead.
You can choose to turn right or left at intervals
into other corridors but they're all the same.
why do you come here so often? There's nothing new,
nothing here is yours, not even sound or shadow,
& now there are no more doors.

THE LONG FALL

The last of autumn came down wet and hard.
For nearly two weeks all we heard
was warring water, javelins of rain.
Soon subverted rivers overran
their trenches, aimed at everything white,
sludging the valley, sliming the wheat.
For miles the occupation gray-washed
homes with camouflage, patterned as wind wished,
making all our captive eyes reflect
our impotence. And now we watch foam-flocked
retreat: Faint sun grovels in refraction
of trickles, withdrawal etched by friction
between what stays and what must leave.
Then while we sort the salvage and live
with grit that rubs the wrinkled mind,
rebel clouds regroup under new command.

THE LONG ROAD TO MORNING

After the light, the memory
And meaning of light, something closes
Over me, a darkness I can see.

Its thickened bulk, not shadowy,
Moves on scent of aging roses,
After the light, the memory.

It seeps through faults, and guilt's debris,
Pours from jars and drawers; it poses
Over me, a darkness I can see.

Most basic archaeology—
One more hound of Heaven noses
After the light, the memory.

I stare at smeared black simile
Heavy as the laws of Moses
Over me, a darkness I can see.

Slowly sun delivers its decree:
Forgiven! Fear fades, vision glozes
After the light— the memory
Over me a darkness. I can see.

LONG WAY TO MORNING

Every night after the light,
after the meaning and memory of light,
it closes in slow thickens rises
making prison around my bed. Impenetrable
something nothing. I see it
by what I can't see because of it: no more
thin dark-on-dark blazonry like goblins rampant
posing for half-reared children,
no draped rectangles or bars sinister
on the ceiling. No more
wet marigold smell tire whisper,
small breeze banked off my headboard.
I am contained whole like once when I crawled
frown first into my father's sleeping bag.

This I don't touch. I know I can,
know it won't burn draw back as if.
Circles of pyrotechnics explode
behind my compressed lids. My bones soften,
sweat marrow melts short circuits
my overstrung guitar strings. A Rebanna drum
bombards my bed beat for this big exercise,
this long rehearsal. One night I'll reach out,
embrace it hard. Only sleep
is the final fear What I've never met eyes open
all senses pricked
like a wine connoisseur's tongue

What I've never met
properly armed.

LONG WAY TO MORNING

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know it won't burn, draw back as if.
Circles of pyrotechnics explode
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sweat, run. Marrow melts, short circuits
my overstrung guitar strings. A Rebanna drum
bombards my bed, beat for this big exercise,
this long rehearsal. One night I'll reach out,
embrace it hard. Only sleep
is the final fear: what I've never met eyes open,

cont.

all senses pricked

like a wine connoisseur's tongue—

what I've never met properly armed

LOOKING GLASS TIME

In her new dress she stands
five feet in her tenth year, waiting
for my smile, hers tentative.
Shiny hair fringes her shoulders
as I rummage for ribbon the color of her eyes.
Halfway to maturity she studies the surface
of what she is and tries to coax the mirror
to show what she will become. It's easy for me
to add a decade to her armature--
I lived my own blossoming not so long ago.

She strokes the nubby texture of her sleeve.
"Winter white," she murmurs. "It matches
snow the mountains wear like ponchos. Remember
how they looked when we went to see Uncle Norton?
He'd like my dress. Don't you have some ribbon
like the blue-green of the gum trees?"

She notices every nuance of color;
she counts the gold stamens in lilies
and iridescent whiskers of kittens.
Already she longs to see her share of shades
from Old World skies to New World oceans.
She stands humming, a microcosm of humankind
on the lip of an unknown narrative.

She has never heard of winter black
or megaton overkill-- the aftertime
no one understands or talks about. In parts
of our brains we comprehend ruin, rubble, death.
We've seen it before, if only from screens
and mirrors of other eyes. But no one has seen
dayless earth and unstopped winter. No one
has gone to bed by nuclear night that shuts out
the sun with widow's weeds and funereal ash
while the spectrum bleeds into the ground
and all green fades from acacias and minds
and the last limp stems of crops.
Pilotless seas will lose their way,
aimlessly searching whatever is left, rattling
cold shells and building layers of rime
on land that was never shore.

And this child, if she can speak, will ask,
if I can hear, what has happened to her world.

When I was eight or maybe only seven
I imagined storms were dirty piles
of evil-- dark bags of it for miles
the devil hung between us all and heaven.

And suddenly the bags would break
with their enormous weight. And when
the terrible stuff began to spill again
it clawed like a cat falling in a lake

ripping open the sky, letting heaven
show for a split instant, so bright,
brighter than sun and electric light. *blab*
(I pondered this till I was near eleven.)

With an angry tug at yonder's raveled lining,
earth jarred and boomed as God ran to snap
together each disrhythmic jagged gap--
knowing we weren't ready for such shining. *needs impact*

When I was a child I imagined
storms were great dark piles of evil--
black bags of it the devil hung
over us to break suddenly
with writhing weight. And when
all that wickedness came down,
it clawed like a falling cat
ripping open the sky, letting heaven
show for a split instant, brighter
than a dozen suns compounded. *overwrought*

And then the earth shuddered and jarred
as God snapped shut the zigzag tear
with an angry boom,
knowing we weren't yet ready
for such terrible shining.

GLIMPSES

When I was seven or eight
I imagined
storms were swept-up piles
of evil-- dark bags of it
the devil hung over us
to break suddenly
with the awful weight.
And when such corruption
began to spill,
it clawed like a falling cat
ripping open the sky, letting
heaven show for a split instant,
brighter than all other light.

And then the earth jarred
as God snapped shut
the jagged tear
with an irate boom,
knowing we weren't yet ready
for such unshielded shining.

--Glenna Holloway
October, 1993, CHRISTIAN CENTURY

THE WAITING SPOT

The dog misses you.
Nose validating the glass panes
like an auditor, eyes searching
for rooster tails of dust billowing
above the road between russet fields,
he watches. Soft high-pitched sounds,
half whistle, half moan, escape him
now and then as he makes his rounds
to the back door to survey
the stone wall where you often sit
overlooking the dimming hillscape.
Sometimes his dedicated ears suspect
your step in the upstairs hall.
Knowing it's only the late day creak
of cooling boards, I don't succumb
to dashing up and down. But more
and more often my hand reaches toward
his anxious head as we share windows
framing the approach of darkness.

--Glenna Holloway

VIGIL

The dog hasn't mastered waiting.
Eyes beaded on the driveway,
Muzzle testing every glass pane
Separating him from where
He saw you last, he compounds
Nose prints. Now and then
His dedicated ears suspect
Your step in the bedroom upstairs.
Knowing it's only the creak
Of evening in the boards,
I don't succumb to flinging
Myself between floors.
But more and more often
My hand reaches for the warmth
Of his anxious head
As we share an empty window.

DIVA, FACE TO FACE

Hers was the perfect instrument, so said
Reviewers. Lavish public praise and love
Were fuel for the music life she led
Where splendid voice and skill go hand in glove
With travel, wealth, an elevated scale.
And beauty--such as men could not resist
On stage or off. Sometimes she would regale
Them all with riddles, leave them sad, unkissed #2
Like Turandot. What's seen with eyes, the heart
May not record in depth, nor does it last.
This prima donnas's throat held endless art
Beneath all surface visage, prime then past.
Vibrato of the spirit's secret places,
The lightning of her sound still lit our faces.

DIVA, FACE TO FACE

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were fuel for the music life she led
where splendid voice and skill go hand in glove

with travel, wealth, an elevated scale.
And beauty--such as men could not resist
on stage or off. They said she would regale
them all with riddles, leave them sad, unkissed

like Turandot, the role that made her name.
And Butterfly and Tosca, Manon, too.
Puccini--bane of some sopranos' fame--
was hers, his ghost, his soaring scores her due.

The charm men see with eyes alone, the heart
may not record in depth, nor does it last.
But human melody holds endless art
beyond all surface visage, prime now past.

This prima donna's voice still fills the halls:
Vibrato of the spirit's secret places,
the reigning princess, Turandot enralls--
the beauty of her sound now on our faces.

#1
more specific

WINE, OH!

Reserved and somewhat shy, still I refuse
To be intimidated when I dine
In fancy bistros where the waiters use
A French lip curl each time I order wine.

They sigh, they sniff, as if I'd ordered brine.
They start suggesting Zinfandel-- Chablis--
No thanks, I interrupt, just bring my Rhine.
No Chardonnay or Burgundy for me.

The sommelier will lightly swing his key
And mention choices from a rarer vine
Would surely compliment my bleeding Brie
Much better. Thank you, but my choice is fine.

He talks varietals from quaint chateaus
As if describing paintings by Monet,
Insists taste buds will bloom and thrill my nose
If I'll experience the Beaujolais.

What must I say to satisfy my wish?
Would frowning or a cultivated whine
Get me a frosty goblet with my fish
Without discourse I feel is asinine?

My simple untrained palate makes a plea:
Indulge me, bring my order with a smile
And save your expertise. I'm not, you see,
Elitist, neither French, nor oenophile.

Please take away your leather-proffered list;
Don't offer Pinot Noir, just bring my meat.
I love your well-sauced food and here's the gist:
I'd rather savor flavors that I eat.

DISCONTENT DECANTED

HOPING FOR A BETTER YEAR

METAMORPHOSIS

This creature was so creeping ugly--
all mouth, stomach and grasp,
I naturally called it "he"--
a green and yellow appetite,
an elongated eating machine, insensitive
to anything but juicy gratification
and a sudden urge to sleep.

But after he surrendered to seasonal sleight
and I began envisioning royal change,
I let him steal the smoothness of my days,
demand nightly risings from bed,
flashlight in hand.

Convinced he was becoming pure essence
for recasting, I even bought a magnifier.
One evening there were signs of struggle
in his laboratory of dead leaves.
Wide-eyed, I waited for his princely appearance,
certain I'd adore him remade. The emergence
was exquisite-- a ballet of wings
unfolding like damp peau de soie--
seafoam and lavender grace set with amethysts.
He--
But wait! Such exotica is thoroughly feminine.
The magic has gone too far. I never wanted
to add an "s" before the pronoun
or after the prince.

Mod Lit 101

Your choice, I said, a poem, essay, play--
Use any form you wish, just keep it fresh.
The subject's been abused enough, so say
Your feelings in a thought-provoking way.

Distaste and boredom surfaced in their eyes.
"Ms. Moss, that's hackish unexciting stuff."
"Too blah." "No meat," were some of the replies.
Consider it a challenge in disguise:

You'll have to dig and search with inside light,
Recycle slag, repolish dulling ore
With diamond grit until it's blinking bright.
I longed to see one pair of eyes ignite.

They sighed. The subject I assigned was peace--
Man's old recurring dream, his anguished cry,
His noblest aim. My students grumped like geese.
Perhaps their finer senses would increase.

This theme might be the turning point, I thought.
They have the raw material to build
Beyond sci-fi and gothic romance caught
Between truth pangs and all those myths they bought.

And yet they chose antithesis: They wrote
Of war-- as though the obverse scene would burn
A better image of the goal. I quote:
"The script for peace is lost," said one footnote.

rhymed, 24 lines
peace

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1986
1. Golden Eagle, Nov. 8 - Contest canceled

MORE THAN MERE MAGIC

No one, I said, writes music like this anymore
using colors instead of notes
on a wire-drawn breeze for a staff,
recording it on spools of the spectrum.

Then you came to me, a willow wind
brushing the small scar on my cheek,
opening pores in the blue
of my rock-rinded inlands.

You are the only one I ever met
who could discuss Debussy's Afternoon of a Faun
except it wasn't words you used
but woodland legerdemain,
articulated phosphorescence
at once cerebral and visceral. My guarded shade
flowed cerulean and painted us an island.
Your flute hollowed us a hurricane eye in August.

You transposed me to an ocean key,
tuned me a viridian obbligato quick to follow
the discovered imprint of your human sandals,
feeling the flight feathers on mine.

NIGHT OF THE SURGEON

Wilderness witch-man,
always somewhere beneath my lids,
lingering under an ancient moon
waiting
in the shallows of snatched sleep,
waiting
in the secret afterbeat of systole, diastole,
whispering
forgotten incantations my blood remembers.

We are not strangers, shaman,
minus our masks in this breeding dark.
I understand the language
of your hands rehearsed in sleight,
the constant drum,
the fetish bone and feather
in your bag made of skins.

We are not so different, devil-doctor,
moving to wild harsh cadence that quickens
with the questions,
the unknowns in the shadows. My hands
have held the same thin chances
up to light. Sorcerer, healer, leech,
how far through the gauntlet am I?

Somewhere in the jungle
you defied endemic demons,
sowed the covenant seed, swore
with your own blood to reach above
the smoke, to raise the order.
Sharp stone incision, humble herbs
and purifying fire begot a sterile lineage
of wizard steel, bottled nostrums,
licensed magic.

A siren punches through my dream.
Skulls and scarabs recede on walls of waking;
you pass beyond the parallax. But never far
from now. Or from arriving pain,
the always asking eyes,
the imperfect tools of the fleshsmith.

Sure shadowless light
supports the fragile promise of my hands,
anointing my sacred scalpel.
And morning is a little nearer.

ANY NIGHT OF THE RESIDENT SURGEON

Wilderness witch-man,
always somewhere beneath my lids,
lingering under an ancient moon
waiting in the shallows of snatched sleep, waiting
in the secret afterbeat of systole, diastole,
whispering
forgotten incantations my blood remembers.

We are not strangers, shaman,
minus our masks in this breeding dark..
I understand the language of your hands
rehearsed in sleight, the constant drum,
the fetish bone and feather in your bag made of skins.
We are not so different, devil-doctor,
moving to wild harsh cadence that quickens
with the questions, the unknowns in the shadows.
My hands have held the same thin chances up to light.
My fingers probed the same twisted gauntlet;
on cerebral knees I've crawled the somehow corners.
Sorcerer, healer, leech,
how far through the tangle am I?

Somewhere in the forest sowing the covenant seed
you defied endemic demons, listened
to the needy pulse. You swore in your own blood
to raise the holy heathen order,
cut away the harm and lift the legacy toward the sun.
Sharp stone incision, humble herbs and purifying fire
begot a sterile lineage of wizard steel,
bottled nostrums, licensed magic.

A siren punches through my dream. Skulls and scarabs
recede on walls of waking; you pass beyond
the parallax of now. But never far from me
or from arriving pain, the prone and asking eyes,
the fleshsmith's tools.
Sure shadowless light
supports the fragile promise of my hands,
anointing my sacred scalpel.

NIGHT DUTY, COUNTY HOSPITAL

Wilderness witch-man my far-off forebear,
Mystic motions against ancient moons beneath my lids,
Jade-leaf jungle tuned to cabal chants
While brother devil-doctors dance with fetish fang and feather:
My pulse takes up the secret rhythm, distant harmony,
Systole—diastole, an alternating tom-tom,
Forgotten incantations, major key to minor.

We are not strangers, shaman,
Minus our masks in this breeding dark;
Atavistic heart, disrhythmia unchecked,
Wild harsh cadence, current beyond blood
Quickens with the questions, with unknowns in the shadows,
Alien kindred tom-tom, minor—major.

How great the gamut, Aesculapius?
Sorcerer, healer, leech, how far through the gauntlet am I?
Sharp stone incision, humble herbs and purifying fire
Begot a sterile lineage
Of wizard steel, bottled nostrums, licensed magic!

Past shade-brooding forest, far down in the covenant breed,
Some conjurer's conscience defied endemic demons,
Some holy heathen swore by aboriginal Apollo,
Sowed it deeply in the seeds of evolution.
The beat has wandered, broken—the tangled cord remains.
Skulls and scarabs dissolve on the walls of waking.
Sure shadowless light supports my hands,
Anointing my sacred scalpel.

NO PLACE FOR DEJA VU

It's such an old village,
not somewhere I would have lived.
The houses look diseased,
the streets abscessed and humpbacked.
I know it all as surely
as the sound of your voice
calling my name
but I've never been here.

I've heard about this spot
in rattling prologues to winter,
and from spider tracks behind the furnace.

You've ruckled these alleys
with your flickering eyes,
skewed these rooftops with your fever.

How can I stay?

But if I don't
you might lose your way
and no one else knows the road home.

NOTHING LEFT TO SAY

You said it all
in one lean-as-a-scalpel pronouncement
incisive— divisive—
leaving me unwhole and unhealed
on the cutting edge
of a period.
Your own clipped words
were over quickly.
My sentence
goes on and on.

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NOT NECESSARILY NOTED FOR FRAGRANCE

Glenna Holloway

Eliza is a zinnia, needing polish and props,
coarse as canvas, unsubtle as orange.
Still working when everyone else is lacking
and looking decidedly finer.

Christy is the purple thistle, always the same,
sharp of tongue and head, prickly to some,
yielding to many, depending how they touch.
Standing by but never out.

Eudora is an orchid, porcelain poise, firm pastel.
Extravagant form at ease with butlers or lovers,
living everything special, leaving auras of elegance.

Roberta is the tuberose, overtly sweet, whitely precise,
offended by sweat, demanding attention and precious
tending. Never around in ruin or rain.

Delilah was a day lily, expending all her possibilities
on one vivid pageant against the wall in the sun.
If she had regrets they were well covered by strong
country origins greening-over the scene, preparing
for more spectacles from their long-grinning lineage.

Florence is the four o'clock, overlookable,
ever likable, late to unbank her small fire.
Mild warmth sincere as Burgundy
for those who pause to pass the fading day.

Women, all their nubile, mobile kind,
come and go like blossoms,
open to be coped with, but even
by their closest kin, never truly copied.

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by their closest kin, never truly copied.

INSIDE PASSAGE, GLACIER BAY

The ship's orchestra, the midnight buffet, strolling couples are abstractions of sounds and colors. Down here, the engine massages my soles, my pain through the carpet. The screw munches fragments of glaciers, spitting them against the hull like pieces of my life, a hollow random tattoo.

The guests are primed with promises of spectacular scenery with breakfast. I hear trailing sentences, last goodnights. I wait for the final door to close.

At this hour the empty elevator rises lightly, hurrying me to the top deck, to the lonely chill of one I've never met. The sea is Irish whiskey smooth on the rocks. The air is polished, wiping my lungs like silk pulled through a gun barrel.

The moon trails a wide ramp over the bowscape I could climb if I wanted to be higher. At land's end, an old worn glacier kneels to lap reflections. The tall young one catches every dangling shine, volleys the bright bias from peak and pylon to walls of bas-relief, Picasso sketches, deep friezes. Its hoard of blue is scalded with silver. Its face can no longer resist the duress of captive fire. Facades craze and fall. The ocean roars in shock. Slow-motion geysers reach up to muffle plunging entablature. Liquid silver heals over the wreckage wallowing to the surface, blue-fluxed, light-brazed.

Monumental violence. Yet the scene is unchanged. The ship sways, dips, moves on in afterquiet.

Thundered awake, my inside eyes are silenced open. They adjust to light slowly as icy blinds melt. I feel a small warmth stirring my dark. And peace as real as rows of instruments gliding sleeping passengers through the fiord, or bakers far below making bread. Suddenly a great bald eagle crosses the moon-flood, sounding like wet sheets on a windy clothesline. He circles to look again at what is floating on his jurisdiction. For him, for me, there is nothing but silvered now.

NOT SLEEPING ON GLACIER BAY

July 86 revised
38 lines
Kronlosky

The ship's orchestra, the midnight buffet, strolling
couples are memories of sounds and colors.
The captain has announced the most spectacular scenery
comes with breakfast. Down here, the engine massages
my soles through the carpet, the screw munches
fragments of glaciers, spitting them against the hull,
a hollow random tattoo. Roundly framed for a moment,
a mooning seal lolls on a custom-fitted ice cube.

At this hour the empty elevator rises lightly,
hurrying me to the top deck.

The sea is Irish whiskey-smooth on the rocks.
The air is polished. It wipes my lungs
like silk pulled through a gun barrel.

The moon trails a wide ramp over the bowscape
I could climb if I wanted to be higher.
At land's end, an old worn glacier
kneels to lap reflections. The tall young one catches
every dangling shine, volleys the bright bias
from peak and pylon to walls of abstract relief,
Picasso sketches, deep friezes. Its hoard of blue

(cont.)

is scalded with silver. Its face can no longer
resist the duress of captive fire. Its facade crazes
and falls. The ocean roars in shock. Slow-motion
geysers reach up to muffle the plunging entablature.
Liquid silver heals over the wreckage wallowing
to the surface, blue-fluxed, light-brazed.
The ship sways, dips, moves on in afterquiet.

I do not believe there is a watchful crew
or a dozen bakers far below making bread
or rows of instruments slipping us through
the fiord. No sleeping passengers. No ship.
Only a paving of moonwash and suddenly
a great bald eagle flying across the silver
sounding like wet sheets on a windy clothesline.
He circles to look again at what is floating
on his jurisdiction. He swoops low, a snatch
of moon in his beak, northern stars for talons.
For him, for me, there is nothing but silvered now.

NOT SLEEPING ON GLACIER BAY
Glenna Holloway

The ship's orchestra has put away its sound.
All that remains of the midnight buffet
is a small stain on my sleeve.
The captain has announced the most spectacular
scenery comes with breakfast. Content to wait,
the Chicago dentist says a last goodnight.
The couple from Kentucky in the honeymoon suite
dreams tiredly, locked in positions
they won't find tenable a week from now.
Down here, the engine massages my soles
through the carpet. The screw munches fragments
of glaciers, spits them against the hull,
a hollow random tattoo. Roundly framed for a moment,
a mooning seal lolls on a custom-fitted ice cube.

At this hour the empty elevator rises lightly
sharing my haste to reach the top deck.
The sea is Irish whiskey smooth, an aperitif
on the rocks in a slender frosted tumbler.
The air is polished. It wipes my L. A. lungs
like clean cloth pulled through a gun barrel.

cont.

The moon trails a wide sash over the bowscape
strong enough to climb if I wanted
a more aloof view. At land's end an old worn glacier
that grabbed every dangling shine in its youth
kneels to lap reflections. The tall young one
catches the bright bias, volleys it from peak
to pylon to hoarded Picasso sketches in 3D.
The deep of its blue is scalded with silver.
Its face can no longer resist the dint
of millions of silver sparks. Its facade crazes
and falls. The sea roars in shock. Slow-motion
geysers reach up to muffle the plunging wall.
Liquid silver heals over the shards
wallowing to the surface. The ship sways
and dips and moves on surely in afterquiet.

I do not believe there is a watchful crew
or a dozen bakers far below making bread
or rows of instruments slipping us through
the fiord. No sleeping passengers, no ship.
Only a strand of moonlight and suddenly
a great bald eagle flying across the silver
sounding like wet sheets on a windy clothesline.
He circles to look again at what is floating
on his jurisdiction. He swoops low, a snatch
of moon in his beak, northern stars for talons.
For him, for me, there is nothing but silvered now.

NUCLEAR WINTER

After the targets burn, feeding on their own rage
After the firestorms in the big cities
after smoke and soot defame the sun
day on earth will end.

When the last leaves of potatoes and soybeans
shriveled whitely on distended stems
and there is no more green
to love the light even if it returns
the pilotless seas
will make no orderly rounds.

Land that was never shore
glazes with rime
as random waves surge from old depths
raking the emptiness
rattling frigid shells
too cold to smell of deadness
hunting like the ravenous fishermen
for any life left
in deep crevices darker
than chambers of nautilus or conch.

NUCLEAR WINTER

Glenna Holloway

They don't tell us the worst,
the final cost they haven't counted.

After the firestorms in big cities,
after smoke and soot defame the sun
and there is no more day on earth
and the last leaf in the fields
sags whitely on a distended stem
and there is no more green to love
the light even if it returns,
the pilotless sea
will make no orderly rounds
to shores beginning to glaze in ice.
Random waves surge from the bottom
raking the emptiness
rattling frigid shells
too cold to smell of deadness,
hunting like ravenous fishermen
for any life left
in deep crevices darker
than chambers of nautilus or conch.

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
Naperville, IL 60565

12 lines

AN OCEAN-COLORED MEMORY

Glenna Holloway

You gazed: The sea sent miles of green
to fill your scene,
to match your eyes,
repeat your sighs.
My jealousy was greener than
the tide that ran
to higher ground.
You turned around
so not to miss its ardent chase.
I watched your face.
You loved the sea
but never me.

THE LISTENING

Wrapped in its deepness,
the moving sea astounds me. I hear sounds of being,
dark within myself, and darting low and light
around me. Water amplifies this allness;
it resonates through life in shells, in shoals,
in floral-feathered animals abounding,
whispering arcanums of their kind. And their alien kin.

Treble-humming kelp beds are crowned
with beads of sun and corrugated glare. Undulating
straps and strands are wound with blistered silver
grace notes; some play in nets of algae, some escape
the tune to join an endless monotone of green.
I descend to places where my lamp has found
warm colors in blue cold.

New rhythm pounds with my own, sibilance
changes to a minor key. The sounds are older here,
and louder. They rumble in mounds of wrinkled polyps,
millenia of designs once bent on feeding, reproducing--
blackly echoing the plips and shumps of now.

A frowning moray eel, maligned by solitude,
snaps his hunger on finny iridescence.
A carapace browned with parasite plush
skitters through the medley. Bright mills have ground
dead coral into miles of sand-- generations
of parrot fish gnawing the reef, layering the floor.
Three flounders hollow out the bottom range,
the whole filled with unseen appetites.
Downed by day, they lie in wait to hound the night.
And as it nears, the noise grows fuller, rounder
like the coursing salt inside me.
I must go, respond to movements and tempos
of my pale obbligato drowned in rising volume.
Tomorrow my small swash
will practice close harmony once more
with earth's most ancient sound.

GLENN HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
Naperville, IL 60565

OVER THE HILL BULL

The bull is getting senile, there's no doubt:
has spells of falling, slower to recoup
the ground he lost, inclined to lag and dote
on former glories, careless to recap
the climax he allowed to drift away.
Old Nemesis Inflation needn't lift
a fraction of a threat to steal the day.
Just let the Fed suggest the prime will shift
an upward mite, the bovine's charge goes flat,
the bear not far behind his dragging tail.
El toro snorts, erratic in his flight;
the china shop sustains another toll.
He may survive the times, say Wall Street vets.
But most of them are hedging all their bets.

--Glenna Holloway

THE PENULTIMATE STATE

The natives call it "Great White Land":
Their single soft-sound word can stand
The weight of glaciers, rocks, bore-tides,
Migrating caribou besides—
One word embracing snow and sand.

There's magic and a quiet command
In Athabascan tongues that grand
Uncluttered imagery provides
The natives' call.

The foot responds, the step unplanned;
The pull is pure and wild, not bland.
Their shores are where the lost trail hides
Near permafrost and beaver slides.
Oh, Alyeska, take my hand:
The natives call.

PILGRIMAGE TO BLUE

A ripe moon mounts agate steeples
like an ageless mystic hailing the appointed time
for celebrants of some ancient rite
my cells seem to remember
here in the high blue watching places.

A sudden bobcat flings herself leanly
into the chase of shadows, silent as a star shooting.
Rampant tollways vanish into the ash patterns
of a potter's cold fire. Custom-made cacophony
is buried under the humps of hogans
listening to Venus rising. How many winters
I've survived on dreams of here.

In the morning I will inhale turquoise horizons
unscaled by stacked containers shoved together
by corporate cliff dwellers. I will move slowly
through incised granite halls enclosing nothing
but samples of light, posing for the centuries,
staging endless similes under the direction
of wind and water. I will search for the shine
and the sharp of obsidian and ocotillo, touch
the texture of sand, twisted pine, and a pinto.
Then I'll turn and stare back at pronghorns as I leave.

Undiluted azure anoints me now, my mouth tastes of royal.
And the crimped mass of springs and wires within me
loosens like a resurrection plant in rain.

Glenna Holloway
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville, IL 60565

PILGRIMAGE TO BLUE

Glen Holloway

Sometimes I come long before hunting season,
no baggage, no camera, no partner,
hungry for something beyond meat.

A ripe moon mounts agate steeples
like an ageless mystic hailing the appointed time
for celebrants of some ancient rite
my cells seem to remember
here in the high blue watching places.

A sudden bobcat plunges
into the chase of shadows
silent as a star shooting. Rampant tollways
vanish in the patterns of a sidewinder.
Custom-made cacophony is buried
under the bulges of barrel cactus
and creosote bushes listening to Venus rising.

In the morning I will inhale turquoise horizons
unscaled by stacked containers
shoved together by corporate cliff-dwellers;
I will move slowly through wood and granite halls
enclosing nothing but swatches of light,
posing for the centuries, staging endless similes
under the direction of wind and water. I will search
for the shine of obsidian, the sharp of ocotillo,
feel long unused saddle muscles and the hide
of a pinto beneath me. Atop the spine
of an opposite ridge, I will turn just as they do
and stare back at pronghorns as I leave.

(cont.)

Holloway
913 Bailey Rd.
Naperville IL 60565

Pilgrimage to Blue 2.

Stanza break

Undiluted azure anoints me for now,
my mouth tastes of royal. And under my smile,
behind my eyes, the crimped mass of springs and wires
loosens like a resurrection plant in rain.

PLEASE DON'T PASS AROUND THE BON MOTS, DEAR

What fun they are to deliver with verve
intoned at perfect times and places,
served with social chatter and graces.
A stunning remark and a spiced hors d'oeuvre
can make an evening tres complete.
I store the best for the next big fete.
But someone always steals my meat
and butchers it first. What nerve!

THE POTTER OF THE RED HILLS

My hands are ancient:
Older than the painter's, that stick-man
who lost his best dimension in a cave.
Older than the lightning god's gift,
far older than the hands of the wood carver
and the stone worker who made man a hunter.
Man was born a gatherer. He was born thirsty.
Mud leaks slower than woven leaves and grass.
My hands molded wet dirt. Sun dried it.
Unlasting as a meal.

It wasn't an accident: Don't believe
tales about forgetful old women
leaving clay cups in newly mastered embers
and finding precious substance in cold ashes.

Too thick or thin, too wet, too coarse--
exploded, fractured-- my work miscarried often
but had no careless birth.

My hands made man a storer, trader, preserver--
foundations for peace. My fingers fashioned
beads strung on willow to mark a woman mine.
My palms made the first wheel,
then a pair with center holes for a stick--
a plaything, a lost exclamation point
in time defined by rock.

You new ones blessed with knowing hands
have forgotten the source: Clay wants to be
searched for, seasoned with digger's sweat,
praise-words and promise-words exchanged
for the gift and covered inside Earth's wound.
Creation breathes in her marrow,
the raw dough of eternity
waiting to be baked like bread.

Entrusted with mounds of her living self
willing to your touch, remember your beginning,
remember all the hands that formed before--
each time you make another miracle
and yield it to the fire.

PRELUDE FOR WOODWINDS AND VIOLA

My mother's violets have kept her young.
She bears their name and wears their hues,
Keeps planting clumps of them to stroll among.

She told me once that when she was a child,
She crossed this stream and lost her way,
Then fell-- in tufts of purple growing wild.

She sprained her ankle badly, couldn't walk.
She called for help then bawled herself
To sleep. Pain woke her; she began to talk

To tiny flower faces near her own.
She wondered if they understood;
Somehow they helped her feel not so alone.

She pressed their coolness all around the heat
That swelled her leg and held her there;
Green quilted hearts bent down, caressed her feet.

Each time she watered blossoms with her tears,
Their scent poured out, a vent of spring
Demanding notice, lessening her fears.

She doesn't know how many hours went by,
But floral tang met hunger pang.
She still insists the blue ones taste like sky.

Her father found her later in the day.
He scooped her up and stooped to get
Spilled violets; she wanted her bouquet.

And when she met the man I know so well,
Sweet violets and triolets
Were what he claims he used to cast his spell.

Gramps placed a special order so she carried
White bird's foot on her night of nights
Although it was December when she married.

Sometimes she'd bring me to this April place--
Pale-plushed with moss and hushed with trees
Where we picked treasures for her crystal vase.

A second generation devotee,
I've blue and purple running through
My veins, five-petaled genes and potpourri.

I've never told you all of this before.
How did you know my hidden heart
Would bloom when you brought nosegays to my door?

I've wept to find a single violet
Aglow beneath old snow and leaves,
So it's no wonder now my eyes are wet.

Your gift is fragrant friendship, love's envoy.
Let's walk this trail and talk of us,
And sample woodsy shades of simple joy.

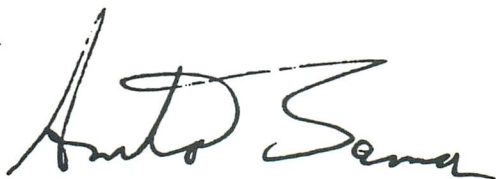
Pennywhistle Press

Thank you for allowing Pennywhistle Press to review your manuscript.
I'm sorry to say it does not meet our needs at this time.

Pennywhistle Press accepts approximately 20 manuscripts each year, although we receive over 1,000 to review. While we would like to respond personally to each author, the business of putting out a weekly newspaper with a small staff prevents us from doing so.

Thanks again for thinking of Pennywhistle Press.

Anita Sama
Editor



P.O. Box 500-P, Washington, D.C. 20044

Puzzle Clues: A CRANE IS NOT

A crane is not a stork.

A stork will perch and nest in trees;
it has a long hind toe
besides a shorter neck and knees.

A crane is not a heron.

A heron has that long back toe;
its neck is angled sharply,
its voice is raucous like a crow.

A crane is no flamingo.

Flamingos nest in noisy groups;
they're pink, their feet are webbed,
their bills are black and shaped like scoops.

A crane is not an ibis.

An ibis sports a curving bill
and never grows as tall,
nor ventures far in northern chill.

Discover what cranes are

by learning all the things they're not.
Compare the feet and necks and bills
to figure what you've got.

After studying the poem, pick out the crane then name
the other four birds pictured.

- E. Heron
- D. Wood Stork
- C. Crane
- B. Ibis
- A. Flamingo

ANSWERS TO PUZZLE

May 20, 1986

Anita Sama, Editor
Pennywhistle Press
Box 500-P
Washington DC 20044

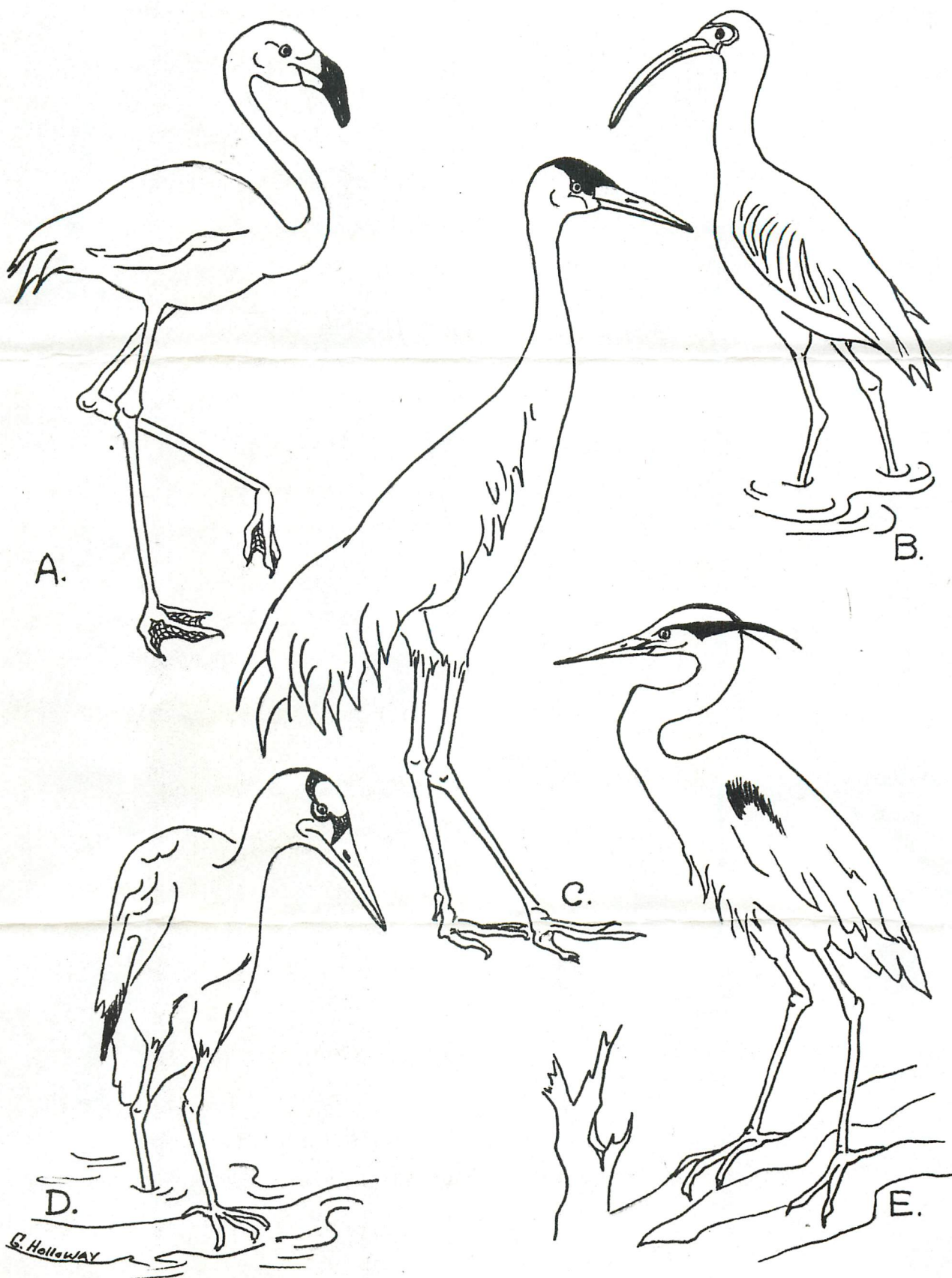
Dear Ms. Sama:

My articles and poetry have appeared in many magazines and literary journals. I'm also a painter and sculptor. I designed this puzzle for my nieces who are interested in large birds. They liked it so much, perhaps you can use it to teach and entertain other children.

Yours truly,
GLENN HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
Naperville, IL 60565

Glenna Holloway

9" 7"



CALENDAR FOR THE WETLANDS

The morning's colors
show seasons' changing places.
Birds watch quietly.

Stilled pond now loosens
the young doe's dark reflection
from patches of glaze.

Faint green grows stronger
in midday warmth and lengthens
its reach for the sun.

Creeks flow loud and fast,
make silver curves as they grind
the valley deeper.

Two gold aspen leaves
float in silence on the lake.
The wind has moved east.

CHALLENGE FOR AN ENLIGHTENED AGE

In a time men call the beginning
there was unbridled light,
too pure, too intense for any but God's eyes.
A time of mass and matter,
awkward elements warring and waiting—
His playthings—
molded and willed and flung from dawn to forever.
Science calls it the Big Bang. All things
hold the message. Let science equip us to receive
the signals of truth, train our tongues
to transmit the whole. Break Creation's code;
tell us what life is and how it happened,
then let us learn together the WHY.
Locate the lost language of holiness;
discover the essence of praise. Give us new words
wrested from granite, born burning, tempered
on glaciers, cut and polished with diamond.
To be spoken by men in whispers.

CHALLENGE

In a time men call the beginning
there was unbridled light,
too pure, too intense for any but God's eyes.
A time of mass and matter,
awkward elements warring and waiting--
His playthings--
molded and willed and flung from dawn to forever.
Let science break creation's code,
tell us what life is and how it happened.
And when those wise ones stumble, let them discover
the Why. Let them locate the lost language
of holiness, the origins of praise. Find us new words
wrested from granite, born burning, tempered
on glaciers, cut and polished with diamonds.
To be spoken by men in whispers.

CHICAGO

Yeah, you've heard of it--
3 million strong, the Loop, the Cubs,
boating on the lake, Sears Tower, the Chagall Wall.
"Something there is that doesn't love a wall,"
the poet said. I know what he meant--
even if it's invisible. Here on the southwest side
most of them are too visible--
warped with the weight of graffiti,
bullying up to the next one to rub off dirt
and slough off a few more bricks or concrete chunks.
That's the one thing that never stays where it falls--
bricks and pieces of masonry are good for breaking
windows and heads. It's a simple equation--
deprivation makes some people mean.
Whatever gets smashed is a stand-in
for the wall they can't beat to rubble.
City fathers keep talking about how new jobs
and renewed pride are gonna tear down the stockade
of poverty, crime and neglect,
just like they got rid of the old stockyards.
But poorness is more than lack
of tollgate fees to get through the barriers.
It begins with the ancient walls of the womb
and discovers the greatest heights
in partitions of the heart.

CHICAGO: FIRST LADY OF THE LAKE

She moved leanly through Indian twilight,
shabby and unmet, slogging through swamps,
trailing her long skirts over skunk cabbage and mud.
She stumbled on shores that bullied her
with dares and promises others never heard.

She lay on the flats in bosomy youth, gazing
blueward-- high hollow blue, pale-seamed
with wet blue, cerulean and indigo--
priming the canvas waiting for a subject,

waiting for her to quiet her urgent hunger, waiting
for her to find a wintersmith husband and breed
a breed taller and stubbornner than the emptiness.
She, without first-glance beauty,
without dowry or lineage-- a razorish termagant
on Tuesday, demure as dimitry on Wednesday,
racy as red sequins on Saturday,
then Sunday-caring through the long rains
gone white and heavy on her head, an enigma--
fine figure, unfathomable sum.

She took her time with the art of ladyhood,
roughing in charcoal,
handling mixture and brushes her way, using
the flattering, fuming, prodding blues
waiting for their match, icing and steaming,
waiting for her to model her rising brood
with the back of her hand,
to teach them to pose substance on air and water,
add the warm colors to the palette,
and at last to put in perspective millions of highlights
framing the time-stretched palimpsest of azure.

CHICAGO: FIRST LADY OF THE LAKE

She moved leanly through Indian twilight,
shabby and unmet, slogging through swamps,
trailing her long skirts over skunk cabbage and mud.
She stumbled on shores that bullied her
with dares and promises others never heard.

She lay on the flats in bosomy youth, gazing
blueward-- high hollow blue, pale-seamed
with wet blue, cerulean and indigo
priming the canvas waiting for a subject,

waiting for her to quiet her urgent hunger, waiting
for her to find a wintersmith husband and breed
a breed taller and stubbornner than the emptiness.
She, without first-glance beauty,
without dowry or lineage-- a razorish termagant
on Tuesday, demure as dimity on Wednesday,
racy as red sequins on Saturday
then Sunday-earing through the long rains
gone white and heavy on her head-- an enigma--
fine figure, unfathomable sum.

She took her time with the art of ladyhood,
more earned than learned, roughing in charcoal,
handling mixture and brushes her way, using
the flattering, fuming, prodding blues
waiting for their match, icing and steaming,
waiting for her to model her rising brood
with the back of her hand,
to teach them to pose substance on air and water,
add the warm colors to the palette,
and at last to put in perspective millions of highlights
framing the time-stretched palimpsest of azure.

CHICAGO: FIRST LADY OF THE LAKE

She moved leanly through Indian twilight,
shabby and unmet, slogging through swamps,
trailing her long skirts over skunk cabbage
and mud. She stumbled on shores that bullied her
with dares and promises none of the others heard.

She lay on the flats in bosomy youth, gazing
blueward— high hollow blue pale-seamed
with wet blue, cerulean and grayed indigo—
seasoned shades priming the canvas
waiting for a subject, waiting

for her to quiet her urgent hunger, waiting
for her to find a wintersmith husband and breed
a breed taller and stubbornner than the emptiness.
She drew a line in the black dirt,
she, without first-glance beauty,
without dowry or lineage—a razorish termagant
on Tuesday, demure as dimity on Wednesday,
racy as red sequins on Saturday,
Sunday-caring through the long rains
gone white and heavy on her head, an enigma—
fine figure, unfathomable sum.

After her wedding for better and worse,
feast and fire, splinter and guilt,
she took her time with the art of ladyhood,
more earned than learned,
roughing-in with charcoal,
handling mixture and brushes her way,
using the flattering, fuming, prodding blues
waiting for their match, icing and steaming,
waiting for her to model her rising brood
with the back of her hand,
to teach them to pose substance on air and water,
add the warm colors to the palette, and at last
to put in perspective millions of highlights
framing the time-stretched palimpsest of azure.

COMMUTER TRAIN RIDERS

Let all the habitual passengers know
in the dark of their heads that the 8:15 will pile
jackknifed and jagged in a ditch tomorrow; leave
Gabriel feathers on their doorsills so they're sure.
Some will ride it anyway, unable to crack
their molds, ratcheted to their private reels,
racked on indelible rails in sweat-fitted hides.

Knowing now, knowing nothing else,
they rattle their loose change, dash
from center to corner, mouths working.
They make long fingernail tracks
on the sides of their pits, finally
fall back to eat and drink. One reads
a certain book, one cleans the attic,
fondling trophies. One prowls sleep with pills.

They do what they can with their morning faces,
staring at the huge WHY that palls their reflections.
Slowly, though not enough to be late,
they go out and board the 8:15.

Personnel complain about equipment, one quits.
FAA says system is adequate. --Chicago Tribune

CONTROLLER

Today is his final day. Today he tells himself
the screen will not go home with him tonight,
will not shunt images through his head,
awake, asleep, mainlining blue channels
all the way to his soles.
Today he will clamp his belly on his breath,
smooth its intake for the last time
then walk far and forever from the scope.

He remembers a winter day, how cursing close
the dots came to collision when he went blind
and mute. He recalls the sudden icy sweat
before the backup patched sight and sound,
and his voice acquired an edge
as if to pierce the phones the pilots wore.

In June, calculating links let go
and the fortuneteller's ball went blank
as cloud cover. The seer and the seen
proceeded in the other's silence, one confined
to a few feet of floor while one went
60 miles before he got the word. Last week,
blurred frequencies sent three private jets
past their destinations. Fragments of his own
blown whistles, static of official replies
replay in his skull and go knifing zigzag
down his middle. He frowns at the clock.

Now, two airliners and a wayward Piper
fill his glasses, each a synapse away from trouble,
each speeding through his space parenthesized
by left and right brain, a well of judgement
deep between. His whole reason for leaving
is these bright blips, their living becoming part
of his own pulse as he vectors them through a maze
drawn on a factor of time, hung
on invisible threads, fallible junctures,
boxes of tangibles too old for the overload.

Three million flights this year, winging
past prudence. He prays again for freedom
from failure-- electronic, mortal, metaphysical.
He directs courses, altitudes, approaches; he covers
possibilities with all the gray matter he's got.
The Piper has not acknowledged.

If computers go down now, so will planes.

THE CRAFTSMAN

His hands were wise
in the ways of wood.
They understood the grain and strength
of maple, cherry, oak.
The soft gleam of his work
still warms the finest southern homes.

His hands could handle a gangling board
and know its heart,
foresee the gain from a saw's hot bite.
He pursued the beauty of natural curves
or bent with clamps when needed.
And when his sure pressure was loosed,
no part of his chosen trees
ever returned to a former intent.

His hands are nearing eighty now,
twin burls, mahogany stained,
retired and dovetailed across his jeans.
They've heaped their talent
on nimbler heirs-- a dozen boys,
now men, who once heard and felt
the state's cold cell doors close.

He aligned them with a spirit level,
turned them on a lathe of love and joined
with each, mortise and steadfast tenon.

Most are master cabinetmakers.
When he runs his knurled fingers
over their yield he smiles and nods.
But one's a warden-- with methods
of remolding and designing,
one's a prison doctor, one's a teacher
and two are preachers. And oh,
how they all make the old man smile--
putting things together to furnish tomorrow,
building things together that will last.

CROW WATCH
Glenna Holloway

Each year third week in August
they come to savage my cornfield
and twang my nerves with Halloween laughter
thousands of greasy black rags
from the refuse bins of hell
flapping all over my sight
dirtying my days
violating my airspace.

Then when the corn is gone
one of the loitering bastards
will spite my well with its death
from overeating
while another spikes the placenta of my dreams
and impales the dark navel of my mind
on its crucible eye.

*Latest
Oct. 86*

THE CUCKOLD AND THE KING

Uriah swore his valiant sword to Israel:
A Hittite, he strove to prove allegiance
To Zion's holy cause. And many heathens fell
Before his might, who seldom lived to tell
The prowess of Uriah.

As Joab's hand-picked, battle-wisest veteran,
Uriah thought himself a lucky man.
Born poor, his soldiering provided much
Of comfort's touch— soft linen, wine and meat, a house
Well-shaded by the king's for his new spouse,
That strange shy girl he wed.

His mind was peaceful knowing Bathsheba was sheltered
With more than a tent protecting her bed.
But the campaign for Rabbah was going less well.
The king was needed at the front to lead his troops,
To sing and play his songs of inspiration to them.
Yet David idled in Jerusalem.

Israel was stymied outside Rabbah's wall,
And David sent a summons to Uriah
Who hastened to his ruler, always ready for his call.
After his report, David gave him leave,
Aimed him toward pleasure, primed him with meat.
But the perfect plot was wasted on the Hittite
Who joined the kitchen servants for the night
Beside the king's back door.

When David heard, he tried again to plant
The vineyard with the owner's seed. Once more
Uriah failed to cover up the deed. "I can't indulge
My flesh while comrades suffer in the field," he cried.
Then with the wintry will of kings, David called for seal
And quill. Exquisite feel for punishment and irony
Composed the message to Joab.

Herder's hands/warrior's hands with newly learned regality
Placed plans for execution in the executed's hands.
And David watched him go. Uriah had his chance.
Now came the ritual of rationale. The army must advance
Advance. All obstacles to Israel must fall.
Uriah knew the risks of his profession.
So David sighed how, lately, he wearied of war.
Soon— a wedding to prepare for.

DAY LILIES
Glenna Holloway

Fiery
exclamations
against the garden wall--
willing to shout it all at once
for love.

DEATH: A STARRING ROLE IN THE CELESTIAL SCENARIO

Death never was the enemy we thought,
nor is it sinister or strange. Our acts
could not go on without this pivot tip
that makes the drama work. Our close is brought
about by saturation, emptied facts,
not death. It gives us earthly drive and grip,
this old unbroken contract to equip
us with an exit that repels/attracts,
spares us the rote lines, dull plots, staled breath.
Foreverness of now and here impacts.
The wise Director leaves no trouper caught
on stage so long he mouths a shibboleth
instead of song. The scene is saved by death,
resumed by understudies we have taught.

But death is just a word we mortals use,
all entities may not regard the same.
Some players know (man, beast or other things)
time curves away, form alters to diffuse
its atoms, rebuilds, takes another name.
Matter returns to elemental springs;
we must do the same, completing the rings.
Energy evolves, fuels cosmic flame
as basic thread for stars being basted.
Recycling stages give us different views.
Nothing we have learned is lost or wasted,
but fits in vast collages being pasted.
Endings are openings where each one renews.

Transition is a better term. Our scenes
will change dimensions, turn with different keys
and combinations, be perceived by other
sensors. Dimensions number more than genes!
The ones we know will be passé; of these
who understands the fourth? Time is mother
of birth, and death the sire, space the brother.
Death deserves far better press; spinal freeze
and prickling sweat are not reacts of truth.
The revulsion we feel is for disease
and wounds and all ignoble painful means
by which we meet, unready and uncouth,
in evil scheme, old age or careless youth.
But have no fear— perfection supervenes.

DEAR SENECA:

MARCH, 1987

Our old asthmatic mentor, you discuss
So many things we're guilty of today.
With elegant simplicity you jab
Our faults, incise them, hold them to the light
Before we know we're cut. Without a pause,
Without a blink to minimize your stare
You zap your logic automatically
To circuits in our brains that trigger nods.
Bizarre beliefs, affected speech, eccentric foods,
Cosmetic fads-- "It stems from serious
Affliction of the spirit," you forewarned.
Declaring "passion for the defect for
Its own sake" as the ultimate conceit,
The height of ostentation, you describe
The skewed esthetics/ethics of our times:
Contorted fashions, gross musicians, toys
That turn the stomach, drugs, abortion, porn--

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But modern egos snort at ancient truth.
We puff and posture in our own defense.
Equivocation fades to vanity
Each time you hose it down with lucid force.
My counter-commentaries seem pale crumbs
Of what you noted nineteen hundred years
Ago. The thing is, what you say, once said,
Is obvious and so damned ordinary
It's easy to forget nobody speared
Its nucleus before, and few have since.

A DIFFERENT ROAD TO SUN-UP

My mother would have muttered a certain chant all day.
All the omens were there: Sickly sun
plunged wide shafts into the ground, sucking it dry,
giving no warmth, only taking, leaving a swath
of cold-parched earthworms and rock/clay crumbs.
The first wind pried shutters, crashed my lamps,
spilling all the oil far from my green firewood.
Alto afterwind was discordant whispers,
slaps of chill, wavy scent of damp animals.
Half of me gathered wolfsbane, racing decaying light;
the other half swallowed a drugstore ball of sleep
then centered together under the blanket
woven and dyed with my mother's mystic patterns.

Awakened by blackness darker than sleep, heavier
than night, I tried to surface, swim up through it
like a cave fish looking inside its head
for its lost eyes. Night pushed up
from all the world's old graves, smelling
of all the world's old sins. A wolf night,
diseased and howling. A night to grow everything old.
I lit a trembling candle. Morpheus had fled,
leaving me an empty bottle, floating me in vertigo.
But Pluto was there to breathe out my frail flame.

cont.

The charred moon still smoked, reversed itself
revealing a death's head just as she always said,
withholding its downshine, dripping
ice sweat— wolf sweat— grave sweat—
Black was nebulized violence and violation. Black
stained walls and air, seeped into books to lie
in wait forever. Trackless black where the wolf walked,
bearded reeking black, silhouette of hills not there,
of beasts clanning moonward, necks fletched like arrows.

I said my mother's name, her part of me
clutched the stems of aconite, flung them on the bed;
she rose in me like ether. I groped beneath fear
for the incantations drummed into my childhood,
stumbled and skidded over roots my father planted;
some trailing tendril snagged and held.

Weed essence opened the flue; friction made a spark.
Still sneezing, I relit the candle,
snatched up the wolfsbane for a funeral pyre
crowned with her hand-hewn table. Leftover night
was stilt-legged shadows on a hearthlit stage,
the usual cast with known names.

I am no part of her or here. Tomorrow,
I announced to the snickering flames,
is the time to move back among my kind.

multi-rhythm ballad to be read in the natural cadence the lines suggest

MUSICALE IMPROMPTU

A tall man with a banjo leaned against the Ozarks,
propped his boot on granite, began to make a song.
He borrowed chords from falling rivers
down the longest canyon wall, from the blowing cottonwood
and bluestem miles of prairie
tomorrowed with the off-key bawl of calving.

He saved insistent rhythm from an appaloosa hoof,
a pumping well and tin-roof rain,
the ragged rugged meter of the languages that met,
a Hopi shuttling sunset through a rug loom.

A cowboy started strumming his guitar to make a medley,
hummed his loneliness and thumbed some badlands bass.
A Red man added drumming, like the coming of a twister,
like the warning of a rattler and the fear-beat of a doe.

Play the ranging polyrhythm changing green to gray or tan;
heathen heat that stills the windmill, spirals deep
inside the core drill, thrums the alto obbligato
for the dreamer and the drum.

Other voices join. The ballad changes key—
minor to major and back—
dust-scape, wind-scope, miles of mood as black as crude,
magpie notes on rusty wire staff,
salt-flat hopes pitched higher-toned and sharp.
Tighten old guitar strings, patch and stitch the tune,
lighten with the lupine, reach a wing.

Listen to the underlilt, the afterbeat of thunder,
whistle up the wonder of thistledown and otter,
modulate the sound of silversmith and potter.
Everything is scaled to harmony's quest—
Sing another chorus of the west.

random rhyme,
multi-rhythm dithyramb

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DRAWING FROM THE INSIDE OF MY BRAIN

I'm not sure there is a right side
to my grey matter. I only know
the sounds of mourning doves
keep opening crevices behind my eyes,
splitting some layered structure
with creeping fissures in the after-zone.
Soft notes of their morning keening
probe the inner kiosks of my skull.
Delicate crazing spreads on the bias,
deeply igniting an under circuit
that radiates to the surface.
There is a subtle easing
in my contained dark.
Something under pressure has escaped.

RADIX

Leaning over them, nose touching blue,
inhaling deep,
there isn't much to smell. But the air
pulls out wispy perfume, hanging it
like ruckled ribbons over the iris
you planted years ago. And the drapery
of scent is more iris, more blue than petals.

I don't know how they survive in their beds
raided by teasels and cockleburs. Desperately
unfurling pale silk in May, they wait for you
as I do to rescue their lives from weeds.

Each day I promise to free them; each night
knots their mating colors wetly
while wind tugs at the tangled secrets
of their shallow roots. Now the wind plays
what is written on loose staves of old fences.
I lose the trail of your fragrance
at the fallen corners.

Strange rhizomes spring from stone bruises
on my soles. I taste the latest breeze
fondling the bitter-veined leaf
but cannot leave the only source.

RADIX

Corkscrews of air pull wispy fragrance
from blue iris you planted years ago.
I don't know how they survive
in their ruckled beds with tough grasses,
teasels, cockleburrs. Struggling to unfurl
pale silk in May, they wait for you as I do
to rescue their lives from bindweed.
Each day I promise to free them; each night
knots their mating colors wetly
while wind tugs at tangled secrets
of their roots. Now the wind plays
what is written on fallen staves
of old garden fences, and makes a rhythm
of your name. Strange rhizomes spring
from stone bruises on my soles.
I taste the latest breeze
fondling the bitter-veined leaf
but cannot leave.

REMEMBERING SYLVIA PLATH, 1932-1963

HER glittering mind, swarming bee-box temporary: such
ABLENESS to support vast barbaric confusions & illuminations
BETWEEN God/ good/ bad.
NOT ABLE to bear its own harsh winged weight.
AND NOT willing to bear.
LISTENING too hard to the insatiable muse
demanding human sacrifice.
UNWINDING a wake of sparks
from horse's hoofs or maybe unicorn's,
TRIMMING her wick always Charon-close
to joyous fuel's drench, still
KNOWING flame-laps, free-as-fire stretches upward,
branching, rocket-showering
FIRE enough to fry the pit demon, the sheet-
COVERED trees, the scalpel-carved moon. Almost
FIRE enough to harden living into
GIVING up only enough blood to write it on
A WELL and wisely worn scroll of flesh.

RUWENZORI!

Bright Africa

Some still say "Dark Continent"—unenlightened strangers
who look at old sepias and read one page—strangers
who land then leave and never need to shield their eyes.

You see the dripping corridors of berserk green weaving
always dayless, faces and feet in samples of night,
pits and cages of customs, storm bags like herds
of hump-necked wildebeest hanging on the horizon.

You see black dust driven across the sun by hoofed pistons,
places where ignorance is pure and evil is innocent.
And if you looked no more you would call it a dark land.

But after savage sudden daybreak on the veldt
exorcises each shade lingering behind your eyes
you begin to **know** bright Africa.

For the last learning, you must climb. Far above
the thorn trees, through the temple veiling—they are there—
the Mountains of the Moon!

Continental beacons of ice and silica and lakes of opal
catching fire—Ruwenzori—the Mountains of the Moon!

Great glistening Titans headdressed in Ptolemaic pylons,
Cold-faceted obelisks that fell from a lunar pedestal.

Hot-cut crystal domes that **heaved** up whole
from Hades, ignoring Vulcan's spewing funnels.

Ruwenzori!

Frosted deserts and frozen dunes,
altars of alabaster, secured, sacred, beyond
terraced moats arc-lit with scimitars of sun.
Wet-shiny skin of the guides reflects
the unblinding blow.
No one can remember dark.