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WHILE HE'S AWAY

This vase is designed to celebrate the delphiniums
he planted-- these dolphin-shaped sucklings nursed
on light, turning light to pigment, demanding of me
a competent complement for their perfected blue.

Imagining him battle-gearred somewhere on a sandscape
where nothing blooms blue, I write him about my urn--
how it began, a fat gray coil of earth, cold-slimy
to my touch, reluctant to accept my warmth or my will.
I insisted a deep reservoir to prolong blue,
a fluted collar to flatter the soft indigo spurs
soon to brush its curved flanks.

Free of my hands, its molecules shrank fossil-dry
on a shelf. A week later, successful graduate
of the first firing, country coarse
as big buck-toothed zinnias in baskets in my studio,
its brown rind avidly soaked up latent color
as I smoothed on manganese and copper unguents.

Today, in a final revelation, it vibrated
like a nascent nova, orange to white in a cosmic furnace.
Maybe suspecting its future, it ripened in the last lap
of hereditary heat on its way to azure-- then settled,
content in its glaze, replica of sky, sea and flower.

My letter avoids similes of fire and human clay
lodged deep in my mind's kiln. I describe
only the product of a potter's faith,
and the beauty of this love-shaped tangible fact
filled with delphiniums. Waiting here on our table.

WHILE HE'S AWAY

My kiln held magnified, multiplied desert suns
to fire the vase I designed
to celebrate the delphiniums he planted--
those dolphin-shaped sucklings nursing on light,
turning light to pigment, demanding of me
a competent complement for their perfected blue.

Writing him, imagining him battle-gearred
somewhere on a sandscape where nothing blooms blue,
I tell him about my urn-- how it began, a fat gray coil
of earth, cold-slimy to my touch, reluctant to accept
my warmth or my will. I insisted a deep reservoir
to prolong blue, a fluted collar to flatter
the soft spurs that would brush its arched flanks.

Free of my hands, it made no promises, rearranged
its molecules slowly, shrank fossil-dry on a shelf.
Later, graduate of the first firing, country coarse
as big buck-toothed zinnias in baskets in my studio,
its brown rind avidly soaked up latent color
as I smoothed on cool manganese and copper unguents.

Today, in a final revelation, it vibrated like a nova,
orange to white in a cosmic furnace. Maybe suspecting
its future, it ripened in the last lap of hereditary heat
on its way to azure-- then settled, content in its glaze,
replica of sky, sea and flower.

My letter avoids similes
of holocaust and human clay lodged deep in my mind--
it speaks only of the product of a potter's faith,
and the beauty of this love-shaped tangible fact
filled with delphiniums. Waiting here on our table.

POTATO SECRETS

A week they lay cribbed in the cool
of my pantry, secure in their symmetry
and size, their smooth pecan-colored skins,
their long Irish lineage. Now
they push their earth smell into my head,
an insistent musk reeking of history
and ethnos. Their heft in my hand insinuates
gravity, longevity, hints of hidden power.

Darkness activated their eyes; pale blips
poke out of their sockets. My mother says
these pointed knurls reaching for new life
must be dug out: they're poison raw,
they steal flavor if cooked.

No more lazing in warm hills beneath
urgent green, their future ends in a sack
hurried past my cat while their bulbous brown
origins hiss at me from the oven.

And my mother, humming, prepares to anoint
their sizzling finality with her own secrets,
part buttermilk, salsa and chives.

AMERICAN OUTBACK

After all the deadlines, f/stops, Bangkok
to Belem, film saturated with foreign colors,
he craves blue in his lungs,
his old migratory route
where Gaia's great bellows blow. Where he
is the only lens, and light readings fly up
like cactus wrens.

Tollways vanish in a chuckwalla's crevice,
a sidewinder's intaglios in sand.
A shedding spring coyote flings itself leanly
into the chase of shadows, silent as a star shooting.
Custom-made cacophony is lost under the humps
of hogans listening to Venus rising.

The ripe moon mounts an agate steeple,
hailing the appointed time for celebrants
of some ancient rite his cells seem to remember.

He inhales morning's turquoise horizons
unscaled by tall containers stacked
by corporate cliff dwellers. He moves through
granite halls posing for the centuries,
staging endless similes, enclosing nothing
but samples of light
and a lone hawk's two-note keening.
Old angers slough off like snakeskin.
He looks for the shine and sharp of obsidian,
touches pinyon and a sweating pinto.

Leaving, he turns to stare at pronghorns
as they wheel back to stare at him,
freezing in last year's pose on the same rise.

Undiluted azure anoints him now,
his mouth tastes of last night's royal.
And the crimped mass of wires within him
loosens like the brittle clench
of a resurrection plant greening open in rain.

FOLLOWING OCTAVIO PAZ

From a safe distance
I wanted to have a serious talk with Death
but it's always too busy.
Creeping beneath the floorboards,
dropping out of the sun on a single filament
like a spider. Right in someone's face.
Always practicing its craft, its stealth.

Lacking humanity, I suspect Death lacks gender
as well. But perhaps "it" offends it. Perhaps
it is indeed male--as usually designated by poets.
Or perhaps a Yang-Yin combination. Maybe
it has a given name we don't yet know,
and its own personal pronoun. Another enigma.

I wanted to ask the lichenized questions,
the ones with wet black smell clinging
to the undersides, arcane queries
knotted in coils beneath slimy earth
where worms tunnel as they please. Questions
wrapped in hand-me-down vanities and fire's greed
and the hauteur of stone.

Why couldn't Death just reply sidewise
while following its agenda? It needn't disrupt
routine. Sotto voce, it could converse with me
as it continued its regular rounds.
There are things I demand to know as I stand
in morning's disappointing light, still able
to reason, still able to watch the city
mimic itself in academic incandescence and dust.

Nameless, sexless, or not-- Death has no call
to be snobbish. Maybe if I join
the roistering revelers-- an ethnic melange--
hire an eloquent spokesperson-- surely
it can't snub us all. All we want is a few answers.
See? I'm in the company of like-minded companions,
just one of the crowd. Each of us wants to know
the same things. Maybe Death could toss us
a few quick words of explanation in passing.

I don't want to wait
until I have its undivided attention.

BEFORE A POET KNOWS WHAT SHE IS

Eyes wild with light as a puma's,
blossoming breasts up-tilted to summer,
topaz and nectarine heraldry of Erato in jeans.

Marriage pleas began in high school,
arms and lips she liked, bottled forest scents,
denim and leather always near.
New sums to sift at the deep waking.

Suitors spoke hoarsely of apartments,
TVs, beds, money, children.
Two promised a car of her own.
She ran alone to wrap night around her.

Without secret pages,
too shy to say how warlock winds
hurried her blood, how river tongues rhymed
with hers, promised more. Too new

to tell how strings and reeds in minor keys
leaned her on shoulders of granite,
closed her eyes with breath of living green
while wilderness sinew held her closer.

Too unsure to speak of her unnamed babies
sleeping in an outgrown cardboard box
pressing blue gentians from ditches.

DRIVING THE MIDNIGHT LOOP

As Sunday ends the city is as vacant as I am.
Blisters of light sting bare streets and sidewalks.
Michigan Avenue voltage shivers through me.

My wires cross and short out. The Chevy's worn tires
make a heatless sizzle. The engine tenors its monotone
to the sibilance of sudden lakefront rain. I turn off

radio arias of alienation and hum my usual obbligate--
no flattened fifths, just aniline-dyed sharps. Same tune
as last year when you left me in the dark.

Night is a long leech. I feel it fattening on me.
Millions of rounds of electric ammo fire at it,
bounce off. Brilliant white shrapnel pelts me.

I try to stuff some in my jacket but it goes black.
And I'm riddled with shallow concavities
bleeding faint shades of light I've been hoarding.

Way back I passed something I need, maybe
on the verge of the Magnificent Mile or in the gorge
between highrises. Nothing I ever bought was it,

pricey or cheap. In reflections, sometimes I think
you're still out there on an angle of shine,
on the bright bias of the possible.

Light drifts away. Warmth escapes me. Maybe
I'll recharge in the a.m. like a lizard on a log.
Somewhere are people I forgot, people I promised,

people I owe. They roll up in winter potholes
and old shadows with broken names. The moon comes out,
sheds a pale legend all over the roof-scraped sky;

it rides the leech's back, irisless eyeball sporting
a cold wet halo. The road ahead's closed for repairs.
No right turn. I shake my head at two leftover tourists

who hope my roaming headlights are a cab's. I scoop up
each shard of loose illumination, rub it in my wounds.
And the leech is still hungry.

CRUCIBLE

He used to stop late at night and stand
on a certain lip of Shades Mountain, staring
down in the red-rimmed bowl of Birmingham.
Now, when his thumb and finger press his eyes,

he can still see harsh crimson flare up
like an old Bessemer converter spewing
across Alabama dark. He can smell the hot rush,
feel the burn smack his face.

He thinks about the ways work molds a man, pours
him out of a boiling river of iron, an offering
to old Vulcan's 55 feet of rusty arrogance
pedestaled on Red Mountain, guarding the ore seam.

Matching mettle deep in his Welsh breed rises
above slag, turns him, magnetized, toward
the final furnace, believing he can ignite the sky,
no longer envious of the statue's raised flambeau.

He hits the mid-channel popping, sparking,
blinding heaven-white, spraying fire
hell could be proud of, knowing his worth
better than when he was young and molten.

And after 40 years, he can look up at the old god
he refused the sacrifice of his sons; he can watch
as welders repair the sagging torch and arm, and he
can laugh as he flexes the ingots of his biceps.

DESERT ODYSSEY, 1991... AND NOW...

This dreaded sea is dry: its wavy crests
Designed of sand, its granulated tides
Eternally unscheduled, owned by wind
Or gravity when overburdened heights
Slide down a concave swell. Or when disturbed
By men in motion and their weaponry.
A mortar shell will spew a mighty splash.
The hole fills up like leakage in a bilge.

Could be the desert has its own Poseidon.
And if he chose this realm for peaceful rest,
His hideaway for secret meditation,
He's still incensed from those first noisy lights
That ripped the dark and crazed the blistered sky.
No doubt the god remains enraged enough
To heap more bile on mortals who set fires
That char the clouds, and blasts that crater hell.

This ocean's wretched wrack clings to our wake
As silica Poseidon watches, waits
Astride an Arab horse or camel hump--
Avenger riding on the tidal dunes
And hard-caked flats nailed down with cruel sun.
Without a trident, does he wield a spade,
This unknown deity whose spleen we rasp?
What sacrifice will he require of us?

My tough seaworthy ship: a tank with eyes
To leap horizons, pierce the dark and relay
Images Athena couldn't conjure.
My crew: well-trained but none so battle-wise
As those who followed brave Odysseus.
I make myself no such comparison,
No hero. No enchanted sojourns, nymphs
Or ogres-- ah well, maybe counting colonels.

Eng-Lit Professor, weekend warrior
For years-- small incongruity in that.
My Army unit called me up and shipped
Me out, late of a college classroom where
I taught the classics: Homer, Virgil, Dante,
Themselves no strangers to the Fates and strife.
And like most men who fight on foreign ground,
The mind survives on memories of home.

(cont.)

MEGA CITY MARVEL

Safe from weather and vehicular distraction,
you enter a pedestrian paradise called The Skyway.
Exemplar of the good life: umbrella and coat unnecessary.
The yonder concept: neo-magic non-yellow brickless roads
leading you on. Warning: Wear shoes built for mileage.
Fine tune your sense of direction. Check your levels
of credibility, your synapse spark plugs. Know where
you came from. Carry plenty of thread.

Seven square miles of urban core lie far, far below.
Polished glass on all sides affords sweeping views,
mysterious, speculative, unimagined panoramas, billed
as "Unmatched Elsewhere." And there's a story about
soul mates who met up here, married in Shoppers Chapel,
stayed, opened a poetry slam venue, made a deal
to be demos while sleeping in a mattress store.

A space walk without a tether. The city is down there;
it's crucial to believe that. Winter fog engenders
speculation akin to insider-trading from natives,
and risky bravado from out-of-towners. You soon learn
some of the locals are lost. Exit directions on elevators
and winding stairs are written in Martian idiom. Entries
to eye level fast food, fashion, fine art, footwear,
a French salon, photo studios and five star restaurants
are flawlessly pinpointed and explicit.

It's necessary to always be somewhere definable,
needful to know where somewhere is. You scan
the high outside ether for UFOs, maybe lunar landers.
You expect a straw man and a silver someone in a funnel hat
to cross your path. Now and then you allow your theories
on position to be scrutinized by fellow travelers who seem
knowing. Your nose moistens a tinted window as you point
down to stationary shapes you suspect are landmarks,
identifiable terrestrial structures. Again, you share
your fondest beliefs with a man who shakes his head.

Your afternoon rambles, lacking closure. A girl's voice
rises. She and a small dog pass you from behind. How long
have you been sealed in climate-controlled ambiguity,
post-modern steel and glass running all over town,
bridging every possibility but yours?

BEST OF SHOW

Their names are Jan and April, Mae and June,
four artist friends of mine who paint the scenes
around them to their own, their female tune.
They see with poets' eyes; the blues and greens
they ply in unique ways are new-coined words
to say each hue in tones unheard before.

And yet, the viewer/reader recognizes birds,
and rivers, gardens, though a different door
has opened on their forms-- apprised
on levels offering a deeper look.
They've captured insight into light-- surprised
and pleased that sketches in their newest book
of unrehearsed and random angles caught
the painters' focus and will be preserved
for other devotees-- who may have thought
impressionists had claimed the oeuvre and curved
the ultimate in bright refraction's play
to ends unparalleled by womans' strokes.

With former preconceptions brushed away,
my friends blend pigments, textures as they coax
my eye. Then Jan invokes her nuanced theme:
Three herons fly in haiku silhouette,
a spread-winged arc as lightning rips the seam
in hoarded blue to pay off March's debt.

As April paints in shades of lullabies
and shadbush-stippled air, her spectrum blends
with Mae's and June's like summer fireflies
aflash with hints of late-evolving trends.
A dash of Dada, feminine designed,
appears in images of bold rebirth
(retitled "Mama" in my biased mind),
enhancing old perspectives of this Earth--

romancing all the qualities of worth.

"--she thinks I'm a bit of class, [and] I know the way to get around her, man. She's a bit gone on me."
TWO GALIANTS-- James Joyce's DUBLINERS

DUO UPDATE

The pair of sports from Dublin days of yore
stepped on a time machine. Their vessel's yare,
its secret route, has brought them to our year.

Deposited downtown when they arrive,
they see enticing places they may rove.
A woman with a mike begins to rave.

A mob of feminists is on the street.
The men start past, one with his studied strut.
The women cut them off and back them straight

against a wall. "It's you we're here for, chaps,
two specimens from former days, two cheaps
who need someone to tenderize your chops.

"You two can stand before us with your tale;
we'll listen, sympathetic, as you tell
of making that poor servant girl your tool."

These women don't resemble those they've known.
They snatch the fellows' clothes until they've none
between them and the winter's sunless noon.

Each stands unclad, self-conscious as a clone.
Each wonders if his underwear was clean,
and neither understands the role of clown.

As one, the women laugh a chilblain laugh.
The men, amid jeers, try to be aloof.
This isn't worth their coming back to life!

Attempts to flee, to protest, come to nil.
A distant tower clock begins to knell.
A blue-jeaned mama points a fuchsia nail:

(cont.)

"You, Corley, made a simple maid believe
that you were more than greedy hands and love
of gin. And that you'd earned your right to live.

"You try to hide one party to the crime,
you sorry sleaze, not worth a cracker crumb.
Your kind would steal a little kid's ice cream.

"And Lenehan-- abetting is a sign
of sloth. Impatient for the final scene,
you profited from someone else's sin.

"Now entertain us with your charm and wit.
Oh, gee, it's started raining-- you'll get wet.
Just have yourselves a shower while we wait

"for you to taste the errors of your ways,
the gall of all your perpetrated woes--
before we send you back-- we hope, more wise.

"As drivers curse, you'll snarl the traffic lane;
you'll dance its length, each like a crazy loon,
as you repeat in unison this line:

"It's dangerous to victimize a female.
We think you'll see the light within a mile--
and things you'll have eternity to mull."

HOW COME HE DOESN'T LOSE WEIGHT?

He gets plenty of exercise:
Walking on peoples' toes,
Running others down,
Climbing the social ladder,
Seesawing on issues,
Jumping to conclusions,
Juggling the facts,
Dodging responsibility,
Throwing everyone a curve,
Pulling fast ones and
Pushing his luck.

--Glenna Holloway

A MOON FOR OSCEOLA

All things Floridian belonged to Spain
Whose local regents had enough complaints
From neighbors to the north to fill their casks
(Still empty of expected gold not found).

South Georgia settlers said their meat and corn,
Their tools and guns were crossing borderlines
To disappear in Seminole encampments.
The Indians hid fleeing slaves to boot.

When both sides fevered up like flesh with deep
Infected sawgrass cuts, the fire began
To flare in thatched-roof huts, and swiftly spread.
Americans torched Osceola's land,

Destroyed an Apalachicola fort.
He pushed them back each bloody time until
Invasion came from Andrew Jackson, staggered
Osceola, captured Pensacola.

Unauthorized, the clash embarrassed Congress.
But Jackson was admired; his government
Did not reprove his actions or his gall.
With artful diplomatic moves, outrage

Was soothed by buying the peninsula
From Spain. The Indians agreed to leave
Their almost-island home for lavish lands
Described to them in hundred-dollar words:

Their own abundant boon called Oklahoma.
But Osceola knew it was a trick.
When agents came to take his slave-born wife,
He killed one white man, killed a Creek chief, fought.

A new war, longest war of all, began.
By treachery foes captured Osceola.
They chained him in a Georgia jail. Three months
He cursed his white blood, died not knowing what

Became of family or Florida.
His own adopted people called him "hero."
Even whites who knew him paid him tribute.
On winter nights, full moon's called "old Creek moon"

By some, or "Seminole tiara" when
It's new, designed to fit the fairest bride.
But many call it: "Osceola's moon,"
The pagan light an army could not douse.

WHERE DID YOU HIDE MY CROWN?

It can't be lost. I had it on
just yesterday. I know it was there
reaching up to hold light and warmth,
lending me height, splashing confetti sparks
on everything. The fit was so perfect,
the feel— I even slept in it.

People always envied the blazonry
in the center, the ivory unicorn
with his ruby gaze. My fingertips store
memories of pearls and emeralds. Your eyes
relayed every mythic glint back into mine.

Such obvious cachet opened paths in the crowd,
manipulated the dark, kept the years kneeling.
You must have playfully slipped it off
while I was forgetting something.

You shouldn't tease me like this.
Suddenly, time is rampant.
Smiles don't approach me.
No dancing facets shine through my shadow.
My head feels weightless
and cold.

COUNTERPOINT: THE LOST CORDS

The therapists all gave her up: "No hope,
why waste your time? She'll never speak a word,
she's closed her mind. The case will break your heart."
Like high-pitched bees trapped in an envelope,
an idea whined inside my head. I heard
concertos in my sleep; they could impart
a healing strength, if not to her, to me
if this approach should fail. My reasoning
was simple: Savagery had caused her state--
let human heights expressed harmonically--
the smoothing, prodding shades and seasoning
of music throb down walls and activate
her frozen cords and self-imprisoned tongue.
Re-tune her soul to beauty, played and sung.

The reels unrolled their offerings in her room.
Soft-spun sonatas, choirs and symphonies
recorded on her brain as sure as wax.
Rachmaninoff-- her eyes began to bloom--
Dvorak, Brahms, Tschaikowsky's melodies
seeped in and out the conscious parallax
of time and tone, entwined inseparables.
Romanced, wing-shod, string-plucked-- who could resist?
One day I stopped the sound-feast. She must ask
for more. She must end the silence. Miracles
began. She'd felt some chord resolved with Liszt--
Les Preludes-- wanted it again. Her task
was plain. She had to name or hum the thing.
And music won. She found the notes to sing.

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appears in images of bold rebirth
(retitled "Mama" in my biased mind),
enhancing old perspectives of this Earth--

romancing all the qualities of worth.

POTATO SECRETS

Smooth as Moroccan leather, they rolled
each time the grocer tried to make pyramids
of them. I selected them one by one,
each perfect individual,
paying more than the 5-pound bag price.

Matching in size and symmetry, the shade
of pecan shells and almost as firm,
they lay basketed in my pantry
a week, dreaming their long lineage.
Now when I open the door,
they insinuate earth smell
into my head, an old insistent musk
reeking of history and ethnos.
Darkness has activated their eyes;
pale blips poke out of their sockets.
My mother, honing my kitchen skills,
says these pointed knurls reaching
for new life must be dug out;
they're poison raw, and they steal
flavor if cooked.
Their future ends in a trash bag
hurried past my suspicious cat
while their bulbous brown origins
hiss at me from the oven.
And my mothert hums in alto monotones,
lacing sour cream with salsa and chives.

JOURNEY FROM JAUVE

The travelers watched their home sun fade.
Engines thrusting blind,
they sped past stars, through shine and shade,
their mission a desperate kind.

Their craft turned Earthward as they planned.
The crewmen knew each risk
to save their desiccated land
rode on their aerodisc.

New water sources they must find
through intercosmic aid.
With hope, they sought a mastermind.
They carried gold to trade.

Jauve's metaphoric basilisk
turned lakes to smoking sand
and crumbled hills with one tail whisk.
Would Earthmen lend a hand?

Jauve's early natives once had flown
to many far off spaces.
Their ancient books said some were known
as incubative places

for enterprising anthropoids
and healthy atmospheres.
Intelligence was well-employed,
no signs of war or fears.

This time, would welcome shape their faces?
Maybe they've now grown
ill willed, with battle-ready bases
framing all they own.

The strangers were all volunteers;
their blistered asteroid
had bred a race of engineers,
life's outpost in the void.

They prayed to any god below
who guided Earthly turns
to pour his mercy on their woe,
and help with their concerns.

They slipped through threats of surface burns,
their ship's odd shape aglow.
The universe both lives and learns
where daring travelers go.

TABLE SETTING

Last night your only daughter prepared
all your favorites-- wild rice and roast duck,
pink champagne, centerpiece of mauve asters
for our gourmet silences to orbit.

Exuberant bubbles flung themselves on linen,
condensation crept down cut glass. I tested
my words for doneness, thoughtfully tasted
each seasoning before my tongue released it.

I hoped you'd be pleased with the good things
I served. I sheathed my knife edges, quietly
swallowed your rummaging fork remarks.
My voice stayed in the alto range all evening.

How long do mother/daughter banquets last?
I left your premises years ago, a lone moth
escaping the cakes in your closet.
Still we feed at these movabvle feasts.

You sat staring off, oily opalescence gaining
on the entree, the trail of our sentences.
I smiled and touched the flowers: "You once
made me a velveteen dress the same color."

You said you didn't remember that at all,
and shades of purple just reminded you of pain.
You ignored a second helping
of my dated appetizers, then sniffed

at the current kettle and declined the ladle
designed for your grip. Why
must you keep saving the old torn giftwrap?
Slipping it under my pillow at bedtime, fanning

the mustiness of it as I shower, fluttering it
against my windshield on the tollway.
Then after last night's table was cleared,
leftovers saved for another venue,

you unsnapped your purse, picked
at the foil-wrapped roll under your tissues,
and offered me a broken lozenge
coated with the lint of love.

CONTINUUM

Today
Is always less
Than hope would have it be.
Tomorrow is what could not be
Today.

THE TRUTH ABOUT POEMS

Do poets create them?
More likely they infect us,
incubate in us,
their dividing cells expanding
to claim space. And we try to be
available as volunteer hosts.

Some stanzas form like stars,
engines of generation
followed by a trail of sparks.
Others smoke with modernism.
Some are fueled by ancient stock
simmered for centuries.
And if they survive and fly,
the sum of each orbit
will ember in places
where nothing else can lodge.

The rarest, most elusive kind
scuttle off like scorpions,
stingers raised, spring-loaded,
patient in dim corners.
Watching. Waiting for the moment.

I go after them with a torch
and a bare hand, no creator,
not even a capturer,
just a willingness to suffer
their strikes for the chemistry
they transmit:

Potent instruments of thrust,
animate with substance and heat
and power to disturb
idleness and apathy. Not meant
to finalize breath or beat--
but maybe to make each tremble--
if only for a moment.

LEARNING YOUR OWN

After ages of staring blind into empty glare,
searching for wisdom, hoping,
squinting into the white whelm of clouds,
suspecting music just under the surface
if only you could get close enough to hear it--
you suddenly see the birds:
Grace notes from the highest scale,
perched on the treble staff.
Maybe they were there in the beginning,
dreaming their wings; maybe they arrived
this moment on the first faint edge of harmony.

They free fall, arc and gyre,
then pose as finials on spires of light.
They soar again on vowels of exultation, vibrato
of tenors and sopranos holding at the top
of their range, mindless of time or breath.

They orbit the sun and return, dipped in azure
and indigo, trailing fire from tertials and tails,
circling at eye-level until you recognize them,
sing them-- your own human joy:
Saved in small increments, amassed over years.
Anthems flown from their long-dim cage.

TEXTURE TRIP

After the storm, a found art collage:
Opal-studded flora nodding yes,
inlaid pocks and crevices,
dimpled topsoil, stippled velvet
and silvered fissures. Microcosmic
oceans in lily chalices, random droplets
sending tides around their coral walls,
stamens bowing with second-hand drips,
dollops rolling off long leaf veins.
Wind-roughed green waled with straw,
stems mud-beaded like frog hide.

Light making glazes,
bubbled paint on a wrought iron bench
sloughing oxide flecks, free-form sequins
falling on the dusty miller fuzz.
Blossoms like hand-wrung wash
littering the grass with their memories
of the rainbow.

My trowel, stakes and shears
are reluctant to restore my will.

SUMMER STOCK

Ten-year-old boy: tan face, grass-stained bottom,
trading heavily in risky ventures and strong sun
while girls retreat to shelters. He speculates
on topsoil and puddles iridescent with oil.
He squanders and keeps, banks nothing
while earning high percentages at rising rates.
Dividends mount in the black of accumulating mud.

Windfalls cling like cockleburrs.
Perquisites accrue easily as polliwog legs.
His red Irish setter, incandescent as carnelian,
returns everything he expends, untaxed, fetched
on command. With a garter snake curled around
his futures, he draws out interest like threads
in torn denim. Some days he makes quick profits
trading night crawlers for bluegills.

He grows with the insistence of mosquito whine.
Daily investments rosy as scraped knees,
he collects hot residuals each passing hour.
He splits with me his shares of late day gold
as he comes in to supper
hoarding August under his fingernails.

"Of good and evil much they argu'd then...
Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie."
--John Milton, Paradise Lost, ii, 562-65

I, IGNOTUM PER IGNOTIUS

Diabolus is passe and outgrown.
My kingdom is secure, my self unknown.

Partial truth is my favorite emissary, and pious pulpits
hung with symbolized silk. I have no need of atheists,
false prophets and their babbling. I was born
from mutant atoms and the mental womb in labor
through the centuries of science and civilizing.
Progress is my strength. Prosperity for some at any length.

I had a hundred native sires all overthrown
like Odin, Ares, Thor, and bumbling Mulciber--
best known as Mammon. Not even Milton knew the rest--
(just think of how his epics would have bulged had I
emerged back then to tantalize and plague his pen
with my conception's hieroglyphs): They merged, they all
became one traveling salesman-god who never thought
his wedding rape of Mortal Mind would bear a thing
but vitriol and violence, a misbegotten heir without
a crown. My father went his way assured of amnesty
from Belial, imagining his throne infallible.

I made my mother find and slay my sire, the clumsy satrap,
strutting with his naked sword and swilling blood by day--
no match for her, her battering ram of reason and religion.
No matter some convulsive cults still bow before
his sometimes-ghosts-- the throngs perform their rituals
for ME! The masses pay me homage, human sacrifice, the scale
so grand the Devil almost died of envy-- easy victim of my kiss
of practicality. He hadn't dreamed of any foe outside the host
of heaven. Thus robbed of might he writhes in toxic torpor.
The hordes, enlightened now, deny him all existence, bury him
in mythic dust as fires of Pandemonium are doused.

This gem-encrusted joke! Globe guardians, pew sitters,
squatters on the earth, the brave custodians of humanism shout
and grant me noble names. They watch me rise, a monolithic
paragon, an arrow aimed at heaven, pointing iridescently,
precisely on its target. Oh, the farce! The righteous rationale,
the Gnostic good, the Savior syndrome! Satan merely quoted
scripture to his ends. I write it, burn The words in liturgy
then purge the pray-ers, sear their souls with dedication flames.

The people want machines, solutions, rights,
and mighty citadels in Draco's heights.

I give them miracles, small victories and clever nostrums
tailor-made for death whose bastions in earth's privy
I will storm. I'll let them find out life, I'll let them make
It, let them keep it longer. Yet they won't discover
what they have. I'll lend them power, feed them with it
while I wear the wreaths of simple service, wash myself
in love then pass the drippings to the humble drove.

The pose is priceless. Now that Satan sleeps who can suspect?
I show the holy signs, the visions and the end-time parables.
In God's own name, the millions worship me!
So who will notice how the road is paved
with slowly sinking monuments? Who'll guess the compass point
is skewed, and clocks are secondary idols, mine alone,
whose hands enthrall, whose workings I align?

Yes, I have challenged God-- Who lets man rule his destiny.
And man...is such a fool...

OUT ON STADIUM ROAD

Here I am driving my Chevy,
Hoping the traffic is light.
Up ahead seems more than heavy.
Soccer games open tonight.

Hoping the traffic is light?
Fantasy in the extreme.
Soccer games open tonight,
Gridlock and fumes reign supreme.

Fantasy in the extreme
Lends me some calm and control.
Gridlock and fumes reign supreme,
Temper and time take their toll.

Lend me some calm and control,
Dear Lord, it's starting to rain!
Temper and time take their toll,
Thinking this trip is in vain.

Dammit, just look at that rain!
Twelve miles-- not much to expect.
Maybe this trip is in vain--
Oh-oh, somebody just wrecked!

Twelve miles-- too much to expect.
Should have left home before six.
Dear God, there's four of 'em wrecked!
Unhurt-- but we're all in a fix.

Next time leave home before six.
Now how can a tow truck get through?
And how did we get in this fix?
Good drivers are getting too few.

So how can a tow truck get through
This mess for an hour at least!
The good drivers number too few.
Impatience is rising like yeast.

A mess! For an hour at least.
Ahead all the traffic is heavy.
Impatience keeps rising like yeast.
And here I am. Stuck in my Chevy.

--Glenna Holloway