

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



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TAKING THE CALL

I was near the phone, picked it up
on the second ring, clearly enunciated
the proper greeting. Three times.
Silence expanded like a bellows,
filled me with silence magnified.
A well's depth of deliberation pumped
through the wires before disconnection.

It was not a wrong number. I know.
It was all the calls I ever wanted
and waited for. All the lost letters,
messages, affirmations that somehow
dropped down the wrong slots,
went through the wrong conduits.

Something about the way I answered
changed the caller's mind,
caused a decision
I was not the right one. If only
my voice had conveyed more degage, more--

Or maybe someone I know was testing
me. Listening for the slightest clue
the resident beneath my skin
doesn't match the surface. And now
someone's heard the plea and the curse
and the discordant feral note
lodged in that last hello.

--Glenna Holloway

SOLAR VOYAGE

Come space quester, there's still much to learn
here on Earth-- coordinates you never understood,
codes never deciphered, surfaces never footprinted
here on your native mezzanine on the cusp of blue.

Be rid of packaged air, clumsy clothing,
weighted shoes, although you may need a heat shield
by day, a star chart by night. Come out on this curve
blown bare and beige, let sandshine burn shadows
from your eyes, lend you light enough to cross
the fourth dimension's foyer.

Desert. Deserted. Time's outback. Sun's hour glass.
Read the map left by the night walkers, the hunters.
Study the sidewinder's graven intaglio
like memos from a spiral galaxy. Leave your tracks
on granulated layers of always
where ocotillos comet their color across noon.
Find a century plant rising like Venus,
riding a vertebra of the planet's arched chine,
lifting a chalice to catch smelted gold.

Climb the apogee sculpted of itself, millenia
of milled spines, ground silica. Grain by grain,
each dune abandons the goal to reach
the reign of fire, content to hoard the candescence.

Wade this ocean of light until blossoming cosmos
withdraw fuchsia rays, and the life star docks
at heaven's vaults to unload its bright tonnage
just this side of sapphire's beveled edge.
Stand silent until your trespassed moon
silvers the corals and mauves, and the skink
surrenders its hoarded warmth to the pygmy owl.

Let the weightless part of you lead
through orbiting obsidian studded with planets,
staying tethered to rhythms your blood remembers.
And if you want it enough, want it all,
you can swap all your learning for seminal sands
of truth on this lambent rim of the possible.

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
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. Look,
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.

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.

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SOUTHWEST DRY SPELL

Scorched. Singed. Nothing tongues can say
is brittle enough. The right word would craze
like old pottery, fall apart and turn to dust
before it hit the ground.

Cattle lying down may never get up.
Already they smoke with black flies,
ears and tails too limp to flick off the biters,
more after moisture than blood.

This gray-brown heatscape has stopped respiring.
It's been over a year since a creek ran through
the landscathe. Fine grit fills creases
in our faces, upturned, searching the glare

threatening to combust. The only shade is
between cows' ribs, outlining their misery
like prison bars they tried to pry open
to escape the jailer sun. Stilled windmills

loom stark, branded on its fiery setting,
burnt into submission, blades welded to silence.
Now--- wind would be another enemy, sweeping
all worth from the surface maybe forever.

Lungs hurry to expel each breath. Forced
to draw another, they swell again on 106 degrees
until rolling thoughts of unresisted drowning
displace wisps of green breeze memories.

Brains are full of blips, short-circuited logic.
Sentences hang unfinished. Women's eyes
have forgotten how to make tears. Men don't look
at each other. We buy more imported water.

We add supplements to the last desiccated hay,
not for weight gain, just to give the cows strength
to beat their hearts. Knowing no one will buy them
or the land. Not even at the price of bone.

KEATSIAN CRAVING

In this, a new millennium, it's hard
to write a verse in Keats'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.

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LOSING THE FARM

This shaggy hump of land
Comes down to settle at the shallow pond
Like our old dog, paws in his water dish.
The man I married was my father's only hand.
His first job was to stock the pond with fish.
Young Phil was smart. Why he would work for us
Was hard to understand.

He built a barn without
Much help that March my father hurt his hip.
Spring's greening nap resembled sheared chenille,
Our fields embroidered by the tractor's seeding route
Like Mama's bedspread pattern, wheel-in-wheel.
She died that June, then Phil was hired full-time.
At night he cleaned my trout.

I asked him how he knew
So much, and why he didn't take a job
With more to offer. Phil said he loved farming.
Before the corn grew ears he said he loved me too.
At first, my father found the thought alarming,
But soon he recognized his stroke of luck,
What blessings could accrue.

And so they did. The years
Were mostly kind, the rains and Phil were faithful.
He turned the scrub to terraces of grapes
Where domes of purpling autumn almost vanquished tears.
The neighbors' spreads are gone, the city rapes
Its way toward us, my parents' hilltop graves,
And all our gravest fears.

Besides the pond, our lane,
The graveled last ditch lifeline left to drive
The truck to market, movies, church and vet--
Is now condemned--last ploy to make us sell. The pain
Of isolation's grip, our rising debt
And kneeling crops conspire to push us out
Of our homeade domain.

The arteries are closed,
The heartbeat stops in this uneven Eden.
No mall, no high-tech electronics plant
Surpasses corn, or sultans' beaded turbans posed
Against a moire quilt in day's last slant.
Bulldozers quickly level secret places
Where the dying dog once dozed.

THE ROAD NOT FINISHED
(An Evening's Chance Encounter)

New in town? I'm Hart Crane. Haven't seen you at any of Sam's soirees before. He mentioned you write poetry too. Are you blessed or cursed? Is booze a boon or bondage? Is sex driving, draining or definitive? Do you wish I'd shut up and go annoy someone else? Why, thank you. Glad you liked "White Buildings." No, I've never been to Africa but I don't shy away from images of other cultures-- twisted horizons, a carcass quick with flies, another man's stinking shoes. Poetry transports you anywhere, anywhen, anywhy.

At present, I owe my best work and my life to Sam. Priceless Samuel Loveman, New York bookstore owner who reads his wares and understands what he hawks. One Manhattan night like this-- good company, wine, music, laughter-- I suddenly deflated like a punctured tire, wobbled to the edge of the roof garden-- intending to jump. And there was Sam-- a fast firm grip on my arm from behind. Relentlessly, silently pulling me back. And I hated him for it. The next day I couldn't thank him enough for saving me. It was an epiphany. And my stanzas, my verses transcended mere rhetoric.

Oh, the reprieve won't last forever.
And I'll never be the mythos master I want to be.
But for now my words are alive again--
singing, pulsating with illumination
of all the colors in white.
Words are all I've got-- the same weary words
everyone has, but I strip off their linty clothes,
pry up layers of plating, pierce the rusty armor,
expose their nakedness shot with pumping veins
or sometimes the multiple faces
of flashing amethyst-- like a just-split geode
I'm the first human to see.

You say you know what it's like to hit bottom?
Most poets do. Seems to be part of the package.
Don't blame your parents. Mine couldn't bear
each other beyond eye-blink attraction
and the first belch of fact. Caramel-coated curare
for a mother, hide-bound ledger book for a father.
They can't help who they are.
You can't help who you are, poet.

Remember, words are your life boats,
your conveyances. Kindling words,
load-bearing words. Chameleon, ambisexual words.
Build your bridges across the voids with words.
Maintain them with words. Be ready to fight
anything coming between you
and what you're building.

Each word has a root, a stem to lift it, a calyx
of connotation holding petals posing as truth.
And some are the real thing. Words sail every sea,
stream and sewer. Words walk the city
after midnight, hustle through Harlem, swagger
or stumble or hobble down Wall Street.
I thread Brooklyn Bridge cables with them, strung
with shreds of starlight, riverlight, peoplelight.
Words merge with rain and wind
and pluck the superstructure's harp.
Words orbit earth, gather inventive cosmic dust,
settle in cellars, sift into a lost cat's fur
and wait. Words are all a poet can own, but first
they have to be rescued, warmed, persuaded
to be heard, forget the damage done to them.

Does that excite you? Good, but beware
unreined exhuberance. It teeters high
on a narrow rail above emptiness
unable to break your fall.

--Glenna Holloway

"Charles Vickery is America's foremost marine artist."
--Chicago Tribune

Watching Charles Vickery Paint the Christian Radich

First a lightning sketch of the vessel's outline
Smeared on canvas (minus its own great sheeting)
Bare and white, the tooth of the surface waiting,
Woven threads athirst for the promised ocean.

Square-rigged sails appear on the masts; they billow.
Ships like this reach tall in their quest for breezes.
Clouds collect, exciting the sky, the sailors;
Many recognize the potential weather.

Blues and grays predominate north's horizon.
Next the water covers the foreground deeply.
Light and shadows hurry to take their stations
Fore and aft. The captain completes the picture.

Restless sapphic sea, its devisive rhythm
Twisting out of synchrony, yawing, ceaseless.
See the combers drowning the artist's brushes,
Leading us from shore in a wake of colors.

All on watch have now gone aboard the Radich:
Painter's whim no more but a clipper straining
Every beam, her bowsprit aimed high then dipping
Down to taste the spume in the troughs before her:

Hull a rocking coulter, determined, thrumming,
Riding bias walls with their breaking turrets,
Blue and green and aquamarine with foam-trails
Washing her and hands at the rails with salt-sting.

Stowaways, we cling to adventure's rigging:
Half an hour vicarious voyagers linger,
Hear the creaking bulkheads and wind-strummed ratlines,
Smell the tar, the sweat of a proud tradition.

Putting down his palette and smiling slightly,
Charles begins to cap all his tubes of pigment,
Signs the work, surrenders it up for auction--
Losers watch it heave out of sight-- a memory.

Mr. Vickery died in 1999

--Glenna Holloway

ARIEL, 1995
PRAIRIE LIGHT REVIEW, 1999

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100-10000
100-10000

O'Keefe -
Writing
The Jaws

"Charles Vickers is America's foremost marine artist."
--Chicago Tribune

Watching Charles Vickers Paint the Christiana

First a lightning flash of the vessel's outline
flashed on canvas, then its own great sheathing
hull and white, the south of the sun's shining
hull and white, the south of the sun's shining

Then a flash of the vessel's outline
flashed on canvas, then its own great sheathing
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Mr. Vickers died in 1933

--Glenn Holloway

APRIL 1935
PRAIRIE-LIGHT REVIEW

LEAVING HOME

A man with a guitar sat in a swaying boat
strumming "Moon River." It was a hard song
to hear as the wet fact inched higher.

It rose in the night like a rheumy moon
despite here-and-there dark patches
the morning defined as dikes and dams.
It overcame them easy as clouds shimmering
across sight, surface shiny as the moon
but nothing like the celebrated satellite
you could gaze up at-- it was water!
Miles of it, loose as moonwash,
spreading daylight truth on the earthscape.

Water and moon: Some ancient arcane bond
still strong far from ocean tides,
beyond old midwives' tales.
A week's travail and nothing to show
for it but a slimy signature-- the receipt
for all your labor and all you owned.

Stink-filled sandbags, ribbons of rotting crops
bandaged the levees, mud-caked metaphors
and your life's artifacts--a frameless sorrowscape
no melody could carry, no lyrics could lift.

The last motorboat loaded, left a brown wake
like a fresh-plowed furrow in your best land.
The guitarist peeled off a few more
chords and floated them after the barn
gone downcurrent two days ago. He resumed
rowing in an oak valley grayly ghosted below him,
its moss floor coming loose, bobbing up
around his oars like swatches of lawn carpet.
One rafted a Barbie doll dressed in gold lame.

And you declared nature the master ironist.
And you tried to quit thinking
of when a fabled moon and river
made their appointed rounds and knew their place
and you could recognize yours.

--Glenna Holloway

A REASON IN THE WORLD

Once Mama goes
I'll use up the chicory and sorghum,
take the Mason jar of Kennedy half dollars
to the bank--silver circles for green rectangles,
get in the pickup and just start driving.
Swap steep gravel roads for fast interstates.
Joe-pye weed for laid out lawns and shaped bushes.
Coon dogs belling in the gap for traffic pulse
and streamers of light like music
I can sing the reason for.
I'll drive until I find a reason to stop
or a reason to turn around and come back.

Wet tires sizzle, heatless. My rhythm sometimes
ruckles and fades like the stations the radio
loses on the way. The next state's too-early frost
is a ditto of ours, limp crops leaning
like lines of ragbag refugees from some other war.
Old stores with gritty sharecroppers mumbling
over Pepsis and Moon Pies. Me,
separate as the lone gas pump out front,
not wanting to explain my hurry, not knowing
the lyrics to "Where you headed, stranger?"

Away from you, I might shout. Away
from what I know and don't know. Away from
familiar nothing to maybe more nothing
that just plays like a magnet beyond slopes
and valleys. Live songs, trumpets, guitars
enough to fuel my tank to Chicago. To sleep
under sheet music, inhale hot jazz for lunch
and wind me in a gospel-slapping choir robe.

Practice runs I call them. Short riffs
across the treble staff, quick upwardly rolls
on a limited mobile scale and down again.
Mama's not gone yet.

But I've taken the whole trip
on so many midnight turntables, her stories
on my back like a hand-me-down coat
that weighs too much and warms too little.

Today I found a forty-year-old road map
in her Bible, the highways traced and dated
with quarter note rests all the way to New York
in red. And by a different, dimmer route,
all the way back in blue.
She never told me that.

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
chattering from center to corner,
make deep fingernail tracks
on the sides of their thoughts.
Hurriedly they rummage in old bins for things
they put somewhere. 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.

Alberta, Canada, 1980: A Different Road to Sun-up

My mother would have muttered a secret chant all day.
 Omens from old mountain tales appeared early:
 Sickly sun plunged wide shafts into the valley,
 sucking it dry, giving no warmth, only taking,
 leaving a swath of cold-parched earthworms
 and rock/clay crumbs. Strange paws signed
 the ground by my door. In 4 p.m.'s dimming,
 my calendar fell off the wall as something wailed.
 The first wind pried the shutters, crashed my lamps,
 spilling the oil far from my green firewood.
 Alto afterwind crooned and whispered between
 slaps of chill and wavy scents of damp animals.
 Racing decaying light, my half that is hers
 gathered wolfsbane, the reluctant rest of me
 swallowed a drugstore round of dreaming. I united
 under a blanket woven with my mother's designs.

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,
 rabid and howling. A night to grow everything old.
 I lit a trembling candle. Morpheus had fled,
 leaving an empty bottle, floating me in vertigo.
 Pluto remained to breathe out my frail flame.
 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 walls and air. 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 and clutched
 the stems of aconite, flung them on the bed.
 She rose in me like ether. I groped
 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
 fueled with her hand-hewn chair. Leftover night
 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.

BUYING BANANAS

Vivid and verdant as giant pea pods
it will be four or five days
before you can eat them.
If you peeled one now
and left it on the table
it would turn to an ivory tusk.
If you swallowed one now
it would sink like a petrified log
inside your moist tropics, tasting
of gall green and primeval evolution.
Whiffs of warehouse wizardry
have rescheduled their secret golding
after their cut from the mother tree.
Nothing can hurry them now,
time tickles the codes within.

My love, when I brought you home
stiff and unripe, everyone said
marriage would mellow you, warmth
would tender you.

I'm still waiting
for those first freckles of sweetness.

WEATHER MESSAGE

The northland starts on its old score
with pressure in my head. Outside
stops doing its job of pushing back.
The radio says we'll get fringes
of an anticyclone about ten o'clock.

Miles of sea have scrubbed
this migrant air. Now the wind tries
to pry open my mouth like an angry nurse
with a dose of salts. Currents of cold
tore their tethers from the pole,
spiraled down to harass my window shutters,
planting sand and salmon scales
in wood pores. Mine sting pink
with Katmai pumice and oily smoke
of Athapascan cookfires. My teeth grit
glacial silt; my lungs fatten on the breath
of rutting moose. Seals' hair tangles
with my gray as this prelude cry
rolls from throats of Tlingit fishermen,
old grizzlies, falling spruce.

Hybrid rose trees on my lawn
can't resist kneeling. I can't hear
their breaking. But the time is near
and I know what this wind wants
after raking the backs of guillemots,
scraping up swatches of taiga moss,
banking off centuries of guano and granite.

All the vagrant gales converge in the stoop
of a raptor, arrowheaded by an ancient narwhal
nailing me outside on the last barrier
until I feel it going down

and my hand lets go the roses.

SWAMP STANDARD TIME

Long-legged appetite in courting plumage,
still as the stylus on a sundial
the great blue heron presides
over his reflection in a circular pond.

Too far away, the Saturn rings
of his gilled bull's-eye rise
to the surface, spreading.
The heron's leg must not quiver.
He must let the fish come trusting
into the jurisdiction
of his spring-loaded waiting.
All the heron knows of speed is cocked
in the curve that propels his beak.

The feathered fishtrap fires and misses.
Slowly the bird moves his blue shadow
toward another quarter, reckoning the hours
in increments of hunger.

AFTER ACQUAINTING WITH DEATH ON THE DESERT

I've met you here before in passing--
sidewise, lost for awhile on my way
back to ordinary. You've had
some bad press. You're nothing
like mortals or poets imagine--
not malicious, no scythe, no black hood--
just old and overworked.

It was here as a stumbling novice
my half-closed eyes found yours out. Here
on earth's curve swept beige and bare,
slumped under tons of Sonoran light,
you rattled me dry as ghostwood, swelled
my tongue, bubbled my skin. I clamped
my teeth on hard brightness
and refused your advances.

The desert needs no bones of mine.
Built of itself, the grindings
of millenia's mills, it piles and plunges
like a tidal wave over spines of cholla.
A century plant raises its tall finality,
its flowering fin de siecle
riding selected vertabrae
of the planet's arched chine. It offers
salvers of gold-beaded tithes to the sun
reminding you to claim the remainder.

Every hollow is a crucible running over
with light, molten alloy for casting keys
in the sand to open arcane locks. I come
often to the fourth dimension's foyer,
letting the wind scour civilization
from my eyes so I can read the coded maps
of the night-walkers.

My evening footprints cool
and fill with mauve. Ocotillos
comet their color above graven intaglios
like shadows of a spiral galaxy.
Here is my space quest, cordless and alone
out beyond your waiting.

(Cont.)

Sometimes I smell you in the trailing fringe
of breeze sliding the dunes.
Deep in the perigee, sometimes you finger
my neck hairs or vibrate the sidewinder
as I cling to the rim of the possible.

I wade an ocean of light, struggling
in its currents until the nearest moon
steals its weight. Blossoming cosmos
withdraw fuchsia rays to meditate on seed.
The skink surrenders its hoarded warmth
to the pygmy owl. I follow the coyote
and badger through orbiting night, tethered
to rhythms only my blood remembers.

It was here you learned my name, here
I encountered a language never spoken.
And when we came gaze to gaze, you and I,
remember-- it was yours that looked away.

WAITING ROOM

There are five of us,
practiced sitters, digging channels
in our outpatient heads. We devoured
all the magazines last month.
Disjointed phrases settle like dust,
syllables regroup, connecting knuckles,
elbows, a string of beads.

Our impatient cells divide quietly.
The pimply girl stares the brown floor tiles
into forbidden chocolate.
The young stud in bandages
disconcerts the collective mind
numbed with drapery swags, wallpaper ivy,
yesterday's song fragments--
all steeped in predictable scent
from behind the inner door
making sure we don't stray far
from the bodies brought in to be explained.

In common we have the clock
with its unsteady hum and impaired face
probably damaged by our eyes.

Holloway
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville IL 60565

OBLOQUY FOR A CRUEL QUEEN

Unnumbered songs and poems lie at Nature's royal feet,
The sentimental drippings from the maudlin tongues of those
Who wish to praise her essence in a pentametric bleat,
Who do not recognize a whore because she wears a rose.
Her ritual rhymes of season seem to charm the fool esthete;
I see an awful sameness to her sins I would expose.
She trysts with Satan at the poles or on some wild arete
Then takes back everything she gives, each favor she bestows.

There was a time I mouthed her songs, believed her cliché-sweet
In days when April softly feathered hidden wrath's repose,
The resting time before the tyrant showed her vast deceit
Concealed inside caressing winds and tranquil river flows.
Her languid sighing promise makes her treachery complete.
While panders sonnetize or sanitize with Sunday prose
She kills a sleeping village spreading out her molten sheet
To lie and birth a bastard peak where no man ever goes.

Benignly fertile silt and sod belie her ancient heat
As many miles below, the devil's cauldron seethes and glows.
Unfathomed plates and fissures and a sunken gulch compete
In stealthy silent movement of opposing jagged rows
Until one day some unsuspecting residential street
Is swallowed writhing, spewing brick and glass and bloody snows.
And then the sea is seized again in manic fists to beat
Its hapless shores and hopeless hearths, defenseless to her blows.

Don't trust the warming solar rays she hangs out in retreat,
Or feel at peace because a wanton woman changes clothes.
I've watched her fiery ensign burn the fields of prairie wheat;
I've seen the crops I planted hosting hordes of worms and crows.
She sees our need for rain; she concentrates on our defeat
With flood. The people flee or die, the toxic water grows.
She leaves her slimy signature, her bona fide receipt
For missing homes along the miles of sorrowing she sows.

She drives the revolutions, making rival pressures meet
To funnel down for bridge and barn as though they were her foes.
She builds a pyre of pines to light her masses of conceit,
Then sprinkles forest bone and ash with every blight she knows.
I've smelled her perfumed breath and heard the mockingbirds repeat
The legends of her lilled fields, her famous fabled pose.
Oh yes, I've marveled at rebirth, her flaunted favorite feat,
And drunk her moontime magic full of myth and false agos.

She parodies my sadness with her tears of slashing sleet,
Yet I, long bitter, tremble still in autumn's passion throes.
Despite her endless treason, once again I will entreat
Her mercy, all the while recalling cattle that she froze.
She, the brute, the beautiful, capriciously will greet
Each future generation with great wonders and great woes
Until we storm her secret doors and steal the keys to cheat
This reigning house's charnel clutch, this queen we must depose.

Glenna Holloway
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ON THIS EDGE

This day, this shaper of air
to fit a skin of salt marsh scent
This sound falling through a treble staff
to merge with dark bass my soles can feel

This deep width I can't see around
or across and could wander weeks
and still be on the outmost dimension
This text, my tongue tasting of pewter font
below antique welkins

No more magnetic north, no roads
Miles turned inside out
leaving no tracks where they went

These grains, part sea salt, part drift
of forgotten continents, no line between
solid and light from this lunar ghost
never walked on, this chilled eclipse

This spiral galaxy colonized by spartina grass
This hand of mine reaching down to neap tide
to sift out my grandfathers' footprints
running before the always wind

COMMUTER TRAIN REGULARS

Let all the passengers know
in the dark of their heads
that the 7:15 will pile jackknifed and jagged
in a ditch tomorrow. Leave Gabriel feathers
on their doorstoops so they're sure.
Some will ride it anyway,
ratcheted to their private reels, racked
on indelible rails in sweat-fitted hides.

Knowing now, knowing nothing else,
they rattle their loose change, dash
chattering from center to corner,
make deep fingernail tracks
on the sides of their thoughts.
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 7:15.

To the Master Poet From His Student

Knowing how it all hangs on the turn of the lathe,
on the ordinary wooden phrase, reshaped,
I try to miter your favor around my small corner.
I nod like leaves in the breeze
of your observations, answer your questions
with what I hope won't split or you can't chop.
Someone with a louder voice
has already routed the heartwood.

I search the forest for perfect pith
to drop your jaw, make you file me away
in the gray rings of your head--
oh, not near Dickinson or Pound or Jarrell--
I hope for just enough good grain
to make you consume my unseasoned burl
with a hunger-- the hunger
of lone trees for other trunks and canopies,
ferment of kindred humus at their roots.

But the timbre of my pitch bends,
my carved sentences are cut mid-stroke, drilled
by other voices, upended and left dangling
like stringy hemlock participles. My presence
scatters like pine pollen.

"Who?" you will say a week from now
should you hear my name. I struggle to rivet you
with possibilities, rummage my tool box
for sharpness, anything pointed,
find my needles too soft and green. But watch,
long-time hero and sometime summer mentor,
I may yet slip a splinter beneath your nail.

CHEETAH, MASTER OF FINE ARTS
(Acinonyx jubatus)

I've released you in full color
from my camera, from my sketchbook,
even uncollared you from dark Egyptian tombs.
Capturing your style (medallions
of smoldering charcoal on sheet ice)
takes all the illumination and motion
camel's hair can muster.

Draining my sienna palette,
you refuse to keep your canvas context.
Unhampered by layers of super-polymer,
you complete your spotted streak
across the papyrus on my other easel.
Your dissident design brushes past my strokes,
tracking shadows in my studio, haunting
the old passageways, hunting
the presiding tomcat, a drab native mouser
who may not submit to your dynasty.
Shoulders knotted like Osiris's fist,
your precedent pushes into dimensions not resolved
in pigments or even the bas-reliefs of Pharads.

I warn Tom of your Isis eyes coming, your speed
matched with light, and hope he hunches himself
in a small niche you can't enter
with your leggy serpent length,
your heathen haunches and expletive head.

Confrontation comes spitting sudden:
Arranging himself on a vacant pedestal overlooking
my work, Tom bristles his long lineage,
his black leopardship. Smoothing the smug cap
of Ptah, he arcs down sovereignty from arkh eyes.
Below, your tail tip conveys grudging recognition
of your high-flown ebony kin.

It is the artist confronted:
You've both made the point. I put away the paints
and reach for the sculpting clay.

At midnight my palm slides over your undulating spine.
At last, cheetah, you're free--but mine!

WAS THERE A CHILD NAMED YOU OR ME?

Were there really
satin-green bugs with wire-hairy feet
that made current zigzag down your spine
when you closed them in your palm?
Was there a vine with valentine leaves
that grew mini-potatoes for doll plates?
And easy-to-break chocolate rocks with insides
like sugar compelling your tongue to the test?

Seldom seen now-- like those tiny tunnels
in the suntanned meadow where you fished
out pale humped "camels" that bit and held
the spit-and-mudball baited stems of fescue--
and farther on, an oval pond, velvet-flocked
with yellow-green paisley that hid small swimmers
trading tails for legs. And wilding wispy smells,
each matched in your mind with a color--

When was it over, that swift season of knowing
and being
eye level in the grass?

But wasn't there for sure
a certain crouching path
where you couldn't see ahead
and you backed off slow,
tightened by little corkscrews of warning
in your middle?
Still-- the field must have tilted and turned.
Somehow you went that way without knowing.
The soft fronds closed behind you
and the brambles made you shield your eyes.

Master of Fine Arts

Cheetah. Felinity perfected.
 Released in full color from my camera,
 my sketchbook. I've even uncollared you
 from mythic times and dark Egyptian tombs.
 Draining my sienna palette,
 you refuse to keep your paper context.
 Unhampered by layers of super-polymer,
 you complete your spotted streak
 across the papyrus on my easel.
 Your dissident design brushes past
 my stroke, tracking shadows in my studio,
 haunting the old passageways, hunting
 the presiding tomcat, a drab native mouser
 who may not submit to your dynasty.
 Shoulders knotted like Osiris's fist,
 your precedent pushes into dimensions
 not resolved in pigments
 or even the bas-relief of kings.

I warn Tom of your Isis eyes coming,
 your speed matched with light,
 and hope he hunches himself
 in a small niche you can't enter
 with your leggy serpent length,
 your heathen haunches and expletive head.
 Confrontation comes spitting sudden:
 Arranging himself on a vacant pedestal,
 Tom bristles his long lineage,
 his black leopardship. Smoothing
 the smug cap of Ptah,
 he arcs down sovereignty from ankh eyes.
 Below, you tail-tip grudging recognition
 of your high-flown ebony kin.

It is the artist confronted:
 You've both made your points.
 I close the paints
 and reach for the sculpting clay.

TROMPE L'OEIL

It means deception of the eye,
this unique art form
making the willing
believe nonexistent things.
Your den's north wall appears lined
with shelves of brightly-bound classics,
a bust of Homer, a Ming censer, brass pots
trailing ivy and lavender inflorescence.

Your clever painter lies and you provide
real scent of lilacs to satisfy the nose
while the hand that tries to grasp
a volume of verse or feel jade's coolness
resents being made a fool.
Yet still the eye insists--
forcing another tactile confrontation
with flatness.

So must I resolve you
in the brain's right and left privacies,
in the unlighted offshoots
that don't remember facts.
The artist has blue'd your eyes
with faithfulness and burnished your skin
with soft premises. Sometimes
my hand finds heat and contoured strength
much more than a match for illusions
of sight.

Yet I know I'll touch again
that one-dimension hardness,
try to hold the light that isn't there,
face that depthless smile.
And all your old false colors
will shame me for my blindness.