

AQUARIUS ALLEY

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IT TAKES RHYME ROYAL FOR HUMPBACK WHALES

The salty core of my Aquarian dream:
To slither like a seal through loose wet warm,
Disturbing dozing bigeyes whose red stream
Will point the way and fling a fiery storm
Of living arrows across the scooping form
Of undulating outriders, what a pair!
Pagliacci faces grinning me a dare!

My bubble wake is coded melody;
Each globule rises to a treble staff
Of long-reached staghorn branching like a tree.
Green conveys whole notes from sonic graph
To ears attuned to each breath's epitaph.
High coral altars bless the tithes of sun
Along the reeftops posed as Helicon.

And now the dream is real and we are here.
Increasing time each day the sea is home.
The flanking porpoise escort pushes near,
Suspecting us for wetbacks, monochrome
Against a beige and turquoise catacomb,
Who crossed their borders holding rigged passports
And alien marques to dabble in their fortes.

My partner's dull shadow weaves its part
Of the collage, now sudden sequin-flashed
With black-masked angels practicing their dart
And pivot, ballet-tuned, pink-silver slashed.
Here, my partner can't direct the currents cached
Inside my ^{racing} ~~spiral~~ central motor cell.
He suffers bends outside his scholar's shell.

He has no feel for magic strewn between
Prolonged depth rapture, (the kind that lingers
On for days) and stolid degrees in Marine
Biology. Beauty slips his fingers
Like eels eluding grasp. His spinal tinglers
Seldom work; articulation never fails
His clinic facts. And yet he dreams! Of whales!

And he who sees no nuance changing peach
To tangerine, plies me with finest tools,
Hires my camera eye, goes all lengths to teach
Me what I need down here, precisely schools
Us to a peak, aggressive, but not fools.
He's handed me a world, made us a team.
He's readied and reeled my whale of a dream!

Each day
/ Our boat plows a ^{ripe} ~~trough~~ in deep Bahama blue;
Collecting ⁱⁿ ~~Sharky~~ dolphin dorsals ~~arch~~ our froth-skids.
^{parentheses arch} ~~Soon~~ a dozen ~~animals~~ ~~breach~~ on cue,
Rollercoastering alongside just like kids
Loose in a midway; unimpressed by grids
And charts, they trail confetti-glitter high,
And volley fragment suns into my eye.

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In Carribean moonwake overlying
Silver Navidad Banks, we hear them clicking,
Nattering, whistling, lustily trying
To fill our tape, mimic Marconis tricking
Our ears to their number, three or four sticking
Together in rich replying din.
Could these small whalekind talk with mammoth kin?

 week-long
Our/ search ends with midnight singing.
Humpbacks! Humpbacks singing as a choir!
Choruses, solos, duets, the deeps ringing
With guttural chanties climbing our wire.
We roll their voices on our spools, require
A second playing to convince our ears.
Whales sound like pinched chain saws and friction gears.

Three days we chase horizons, circle our bowl
And never see them. Goblets of glass-green
Endlessly overflow heads of foam, roll
And raise the brew, sometimes writhing serpentine
With shapes of life in skins of opaline.
Savant and poet coil separately
In quiet Cetaceous fantasy.

Cerulean has a taste, not rich as teal,
Sweeter than azure. Aubergine is flat.
Sun rakes up a loner ray from under the keel
Like housecleaned debris, a flapping floor mat.
Wind searches our seams, deft as a brickbat,
Stealing our spit before we can lick
Our cracked lips, scouring our eyes to the quick.

4/
Behind my lids my data banks recall:

Cetacea, sub-order— Mysticeti—

Posed on museum platforms near a wall,

The dusty hulls of mounted monsters lie.

Their orbs, suffused in facelessness, deny

Ferocity. I walked the sixty feet

Of male, could not mind-paint him live, complete.

The eyes aren't made for titans, (theirs or mine)

Their little lenses stud a misplaced butte;

I can't digest the precedent design.

Genus: Magoptera. Can we compute

Intelligence through noise? Can we refute

Old whalers' tales of boats harassed and followed

By Jonah's curse, attacked and/wholly swallowed?

My partner rubs his tiredness, mouth atwist.

Like private involuted whelks, we meet

An interlocking jog: Do they exist?

Are they really out there or has young conceit

Propelled us, squandering so much on defeat?

Guess we should leave with time and money left

Before this brine-bitch levies total theft.

The evening stirs its palette, bronze and puce.

Proof explodes the sea to flying shards!

As if Jehovah God would introduce

A just-made creature launched on gold petards

Against our gaze; unearthly bulk bombards

The amniotic fluid it returns to.

Then sameness swears no shock took place. No clue.

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There! A primordial reef wrenching free
From the hemisphere, and still another
In full silhouette, destroying simile!
We count six with a calf and its mother.
Again they shed one world for the other!
A finale: Downpouring shattered firedrops
Interspangled hotly with our heart-stops.

The lead bull's spirit and mine hold the leap
At its top in eternal dimension
Imprinted with all that words fail to keep,
Where none else can enter this sealed suspension.
And still we stare, our feet a lost extension.
The ^{We hear our own} ~~skipper's~~ ^{ing} ~~and my friend's~~ whoops blow ^{throbbing} ~~astern~~
As ~~afterimages~~ ~~still~~ rush, reel, ~~and~~ burn.

They come ^{back} ~~with the~~ morning; we gear for a dive.
In saffron gauze they loll a mile off port.
Our prying glasses see one more arrive.
My tenseness quips: "Looks like they're holding court."
"They may be waiting to try us for sport,"
My mentor grins, checking my hose and tanks.
We row our dinghy closer to their ranks.

Near the stub fins bobbing, we go down
Through a glare-gilded curtain of krill,
Festoons of light follow, fuzz us yellow-brown.
La Mer, the mother of us all, life's mill—
Some never grow the need for fin nor gill.
A glimpse of flipper-white in this deep allness—
Oh, Quasimodo, forgive our smallness.

If elephants are roots of heaven, whales
Are roots of earth, embodied in eons
Of wrinkled metamorphic rock that sails
Like ^{airborne} ~~silken~~ ~~scarves~~ the inner echelons
Of poles, their tails heraldic colophons.
Fear has its moment, even from here we yaw
In a flipper's downstroke, emasculated straw.

Somehow their sound should be deep gonging.
Thunder vibrating sarcophagus dark.
Or even low-note blues of bass sax longing
With andante beat to match the regal arc
Of vertabrae amid each piston spark.
Their four octave gamut full of reedy flaws
Can't prepare me for soprano power saws.

They may go higher, range above our ear.
Sometimes they're racers' engines on a speedway.
But now more than sound is transmitted here.
The water is charged with living interplay—
Chain-energy aplenty to relay
A simple message, received sure and bright,
A welcome of sorts: We see you; it's all right.

I'm drowning in exclamations and verbs;
My camera is heavy with disbelief.
The nearest humpback glides toward me, but curbs
Its thrust. Its hide hosts life in bas-relief.
I see texture, structure; a sargasso sheaf
Trails between us, patching reality.
My film may convince me such things can be.

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I long to thank my partner for this,
To enhance his excitement with mine,
Repay him with bounty he'll always miss,
Thread him through ripe literals, then align
Him with pulsing aura, wide-angled shine,
Finally to implant the kaleidoscope-
~~Ceaseless~~ receptors ~~forever~~ in ~~his trope~~.
the center of his hope.

I see him thinking: Why do they breach?
Why do they roll and wave a flipper skyward,
Sing, sound, pound the surface, curl their flukes, beach?
He'll auger every answer past the bywords.
I wish him countermedley, not just my words.
He reckons weight, age, girth, length; he spooks
A cow and risks too close to sweeping flukes.

Turbulence folds him like a pillbug;
He recovers, grinning, studies tongues, teats, baleen.
Does he also see the flying prayer rug?
The lapis Chinoiserie, the muraled screen?
He labels and sorts, ignoring damascene
Chiaroscuro, the solid and light,
The minor-key shadow-play someone must write.

Under what genus do we classify
These attendant mermen? Do they fit
In the food chain? Are they sailors' incubi?
And the one with the crown and trident? I admit
It's time to leave for ship and shore, acquit
My goggled eyes. Ascend is not the word;
I'm higher now than a frigate bird.

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My partner signals for a final shot:

My belly tightens; I move in and nod.

He paces with a humpback, finds a spot;

We are encircled deep within the pod.

He sidles closer. Touches! RIDES, wing-shod!

All know he's there; they gentle their slipstream.

They graze. Content to grace our living dream.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:
LAST NOTES FROM DR. LOY'S RESEARCH LAB

The jar of reprieves is empty.
I have entered the complex process
called death. And my dear colleagues,
(who labeled me loner, prima donna, bastard)
despite all the times we've seen it, heard it, caused it,
we don't know much about it, do we?
If all my calculations are correct, my time will run out
near midnight. Till then I write my thoughts like a poem:

No more late hours to haul my heaviness up the ladder
to inhale library dust, mine the only fingerprints
at those heights since my old professor's.
No more mornings to peer through the lighted shaft
probing the mindless obscenities feeding on healthy tissue,
nor afternoons to breed and stalk
the seething child-killers in glass cages—
(Having defeated one of them, I am driven
to destroy others, but now my demon, destructive
as any virus, has come again with the fuel bill.
Unpaid, he is evicting me, shutting my shop.)
No time left to isolate the mutant entity
I suspect lay each day beneath my eye
imitating enlarged innocence. My life's goal—

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to expose it to world attack, to unlock doors, to stand
on raised portals and throw Messianic lightning
down the corridors of science; I would deal with the devil
to do it. But the dream, steeped in my sleepless adrenalin
and sulphuric tongue, must be delivered by someone else.

Almost midnight, and the devil is disinterested.

I move away from my cells, from magnification
and atomic rhythms, to culture my notebook in starlight.
What do I know of poetry? Yet the minutes allow
for nothing else. My molecules must restructure
to pass through ancient walls. Now is distilled sediment,
vitro-essence of failure, sealing my cloudy siphons
with unanswers. And no life
will be better ^{because} /of an eleventh hour poem.

The clock parts slow. Faint ticking. Heavy hands.

If only my other theories were as flawless
as this forte for human horology.

So much waste. Great strides to standstills.

Unless— That one! That wire-drawn pupil
who yesterday challenged the godsmith,
and turning to face me in the color of discovery,
ego-lashed and laid open a moment, gave me a glimpse
of the bright burning edge of a demon I know.

To that damned and holy host, that one pupil,

I leave all I have:

The harsh shine of my keys,
and my only poem.

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 smoked, reversed itself,
revealing a death's head just as she always said,
withholding its down-shine, 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 over 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 a 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,
I will move back among my kind.

BALLAD FOR A BAD QUEEN

Unnumbered songs and sonnets lie at Nature's feet—
The sentimental drippings from the maudlin tongues of those
Who try to play her essence in a pentametric bleat—
Who do not recognize a whore because she wears a rose!

There was a time I mouthed her psalms, believed her cliché-sweet
In days when April softly feathered hidden wrath's repose—
The resting time before the harlot showed her vast deceit
Concealed in casual breezes and causal freshet flows.

Her ritual rhymes of season seem to charm the fool esthete;
I see a certain 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.

Her languid sighing promise makes her treachery complete.
While all her panders purify her soul with Sunday prose,
She kills a hundred humans spreading out her molten sheet
To lie and birth a bastard peak where no man ever goes.

cont.

Benign black clay and sod belie her ancient heat
While many miles below, a devil's cauldron seethes and glows.
Unfathomed plates and fissures and a gaping gulch compete
In stealthy silent movement of opposing jagged rows

Until one day some distant unsuspecting street
Is swallowed writhing, spewing brick and glass and bloodied snows.
And next the sea is seized in manic fists to beat
The fallen shores and hopeless hearths, defenseless to her blows.

Don't trust the warming sunrays she hangs out in retreat,
Or feel at peace because a wanton woman changes clothes.
I've watched her fiery ensign burn the prairie wheat;
I've seen the crops I planted hosting hordes of worms and crows.

She saw my need for rain; she came to my defeat
With flood! The land and I cry out, but still the water grows.
Her slimy signature is the tragic trail's receipt
For homes and roads in muddy shades of sorrow that she sows.

She drives the revolution when rival pressures meet
To funnel down for bridge and barn as though they were her foes.
She makes 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 birds 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.

cont.

She bears my sadness well with her tears of slashing sleet.
Yet I, long bitter, tremble still in autumn's philter throes.
Despite her timeless treason, I once again 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!

SONNETS 2020 A.D.

(2.) THE RIVER

The travelers disembarked and checked their chart;
Was this the mighty stream they came to see?
A warp of rotted vines, a rheumy part
In gray Medusa hair on death's debris?
What happened to the scenes deciphered books
Described? The strangers searched the fossil land
For shards of hope, for hints of inglenooks.
They found the poisons lurking in slime-sand.
One took a crusted rock and turned to go,
Then saw scratched words the nodule held in wait:
"Within this case beneath corruption's flow
A primal spore survives to germinate,
Evolve new plants, food crops, and someday trees—
But rivers need more time than Pleiades."

LONG NIGHT HOMESIDE

I should learn to speak Japanese.
There may be something more to say.

You smoke too much in Kyoto
under the blue tile roof of your father.
Why did I go? Why did you stay?

Out of cigarets and choices,
bored and huddled again on the prickly davenport
with my stewardess indigestion,
moon caught in the bared oak at my winter window.

Look. Two tiny stars, more alike than different,
impaled on California twigs
going unerringly to the heart of the matter.
Like Haiku. Like Shokwa. Needing no embellishment.
Impelled into jet-lag sleep on a wingless plane,
prodding grounded dreams while a jilted sun
hits bottom beyond the eastern arch, jarring
our paper fortunes near the gold pavillion,
jolting my moon free.

And at my periodic waking, the escapee
sheds no light on the fate
of lost pierced stars.

BUTTERFLIES AND OTHER NOBLE THOUGHTS

What about those that wobble wet and wingless
on the torn flap of the chrysalis?

Born too early or late, too much, not enough.

Some do soar via bird beak and maw;

most fall unknown in the ragweeds

to be savaged by ants before flying as dust
in the jaws of prominent winds.

Do their glistening granules return

to incubate again in more fertile capsules

or must they wander wasted

forever looking for their missing colors

and a womb?

Tonight I found these fragments.

Recall all the good atoms and let me intend
harder.

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(1.) ON MAKING A RIVER AN OLD MAN

The river was an athlete sprinting south,
A whistling boy with rhythmic summer stride.
The settlers drew cool sweetness from his mouth,
And made themselves spectators on his side.
Efficiently he handled rain and thaw;
He grew their wheat and cotton into fame.
His flanks became a city; those who saw
Desired to stay, and daily others came.
Pure drinking, mallards, trout were not enough.
Machines re-routed him. They built a dam.
They stole his power, dumped their poison-stuff,
Then cursed him for the filth where once they swam.
Now reeking, limping past a factory,
He seeks a nameless burial at sea.

(2.) HOPI GIRL TOUCHING WATER

Blue Corn stared at her hand—a glove of slimes
And evil smells that made her back away.
Her mother had related smiling times
Upon this bank where she had dug fine clay.
Blue Corn was glad she couldn't see it now,
For potters love the earth, this was a sin;
This hand was from a horror film. Oh, how
Could people kill their river? He was kin!
A cousin to their kind, their ancient dreams—
Now host to noxious networks spewing scum,
Receiver of these *progress laden* social structured streams,
The dregs of greed— depraved viaticum!
Someday they all must answer to a judge...
Perhaps unknown mutations bred in sludge...

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.

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.

UNTITLED

When I was twenty, I believed John Donne:

"No man is an island entire of itself..."

But he was wrong. I wept—the mass pool failed
To rise. I bled—it didn't redden one small grain
Of neighbors' beaches. I grew up.

I shrank down. Became a total island.

I wrote a play with one brief role,

A song with just a single perfect note.

And no man's death can now diminish me

Because I am not involved in gross mankind.

Soundproof fog surrounds my guarded ears.

Secession is secure. No one ever probes.

Why, preacher, would I send to know a thing?

I rubbed my eyes with night and polarized

The currents and tides of my sea away

From these my placid thighs. And here I sink

And die. And no bell tolls. Or ever will.

None knows.

Repeat: none knows, none knows, none knows

DRIED ARRANGEMENT

All those long cattails of longing,
Sprung up in the soft marsh places
Of my inlands:
You picked them green and strung them upside down
To desiccate in your cellar
Along with laurel leaves and strawflowers.
Now and then you show me the stiff brown bouquet
On your altar.
Hung up on the hard harsh places
Of my island
I cling to rock ridges
That scar my eyes, and cannot even
Weep among the weeds of my desire.

52
"LIKE A PANTHER IN THE GLOVE" ...Emily Dickinson

(For Another Emily)

"She was so thoughtful"— "So caring"—
her friends recited in psaltar tones.
"So sweet." "So sad." The ritual room
of shaking heads, furred sibilance of whispers
and carnation overkill thick enough to replace her bier.

My two-pronged anger crackles and strikes:
Is this worth living as she did?
This maudlin mumbling mass?
Their sentiment a sentence!

At least such pious pap will never drip
from mobile mouths once mine is cosmetically closed!
They can never muster enough charity
to honey their tongues with me.
What right have they to my name on their warm lips!

Maybe she wasn't always wonderful. Or maybe
she ran on low amperage—never knowing how it is
to operate on your own hot crossed-circuitry,
splicing with scorched fingers
your own frayed smoking wires. Or maybe
she did it all and knew it well
under insulation of infinite grace.

In silence

I will make myself her monument.

COASTAL COLLAGE

Mason Sonnet

We breathe silk fog that strokes the beaver-run,
Then climbs the day to flee from spears of pine.
The lowlands blue again with twilight's rise
Describing sueded negatives of sun
In secret brakes where deer and heron dine.
From fir-napped hills we watch as moonshed vies
With nimbus rings in new-ginned cotton skies.
An artist rain will bleed the clay and sign
The shore in red, accenting dimpled sand.
We bloom in this kaleidoscope design:
Sweet-salty mix alive with seasoned fun,
Where puddled whitewash opals our fruit stand,
Ourselves new textures on this ancient strand
Infusing us in patterns just begun.

REPARATION

We came from cliffs where threadbare limbs are patched
With scraps of ice to moss-plushed cypress knees,
The pile worn smooth by shade and shuttling tides.
Thick sun-bleached yarn festooned and thatched
In awnings custom-made for wading trees,
Gentles ocean glare; our long gaze glides
The uncommitted folds of foam and rides
Green fringe as unresolved intent may please.
We learn to swim where gold-finned flash appears,
Learn, at last, the water will not freeze;
We learn to smoke and sell the fish we catch,
To troll new warmth for mending sharp-edged years.
Far from our bony land of frigid tears
Our raveled seams are sewn with hope, now matched.