

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 tons of light.  
Without a trident, does he wield a spade,  
this unknown deity whose angst we rasp?  
What sacrifice will he require of us?

Back on patrol at dawn, the goddess glows;  
Homeric rosy fingers earn their poems.  
The crews are sobered from the bite of combat.  
Now, animated sights demand decisions.  
The shapes we read are not precise enough  
to leave no doubt. But if we wait too long  
then we'll be in their range. Commanders all  
have grappled this chimera in their craws.

"Sweet Jesus, Cap'n, time we oughta shoot!"  
the gunner cries, a blonde Telemakhos,  
his tongue undone, his trigger in control.  
The radio confirms no other tanks  
of ours are in this sector. No more choice,  
our time runs out, I order the attack.  
How many gods and men have we provoked?  
Please my dear God, don't let us torch our own!

(cont.)

As images explode we hear the news.

An error. Static, curses, "Hold your fire!"

We hit two U.S. tanks, off course for hours.

No one survived our deadly friendly blasts.

I must not break, must keep my men from breaking.

Penelopes must learn they wait in vain.

And who explains such useless costs to them?

And in this world who can explain to me?

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW IF I SAY YES

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

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

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

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

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

I'd make her promise to behave, then we  
wouldn't speak for several nights.  
She'd wait till I was studying, stomach in knots,  
then talk about clothes or cars; she wanted it all.  
Next day I'd hear her laughing as I rode the El,

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

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

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

You've seen fawn eyes offer praise, trust, then steam  
with sudden rage, and back again to blue-greened  
layers of velvet empathy, deep ingrained  
with kindness, reflex lenses of compassion. Right now  
transmission is past tense, how long I never know.

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

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

or just the basic elements of humanhood.  
Are we so different after all? If you had  
a psychic scalpel would you sever  
all your selves, or keep them in the brew for savor?  
Flavor may flourish more with more than one receiver.

--Glenna Holloway