

Sandscape, Soundscape

The surf is on edge today. Last night's tide
hauled in miles of coastal wrack and a wreck
from upstate's gale. Gull cries, raucous
as crows, pitch higher as patches of sun
fall between leftover clouds. Broken light
dips on plying wings, on piles
of ocean's damaged private stock,
on stacks of unknown flora from far and deep,
on buckets and backpacks of shell hunters.

They've haunted this shoal for years,
picking through the afterstrew of storms:
Birds flying in from the cays
with scooping beaks to fill their crops.
Shellers with prongs, arriving on bikes
with strapped-on bags. They flock the shore
sharing the shrill treble of discovery.

The Interloper

Beneath inverted black fir jungle
of water hyacinth roots underweaving
my hidden bayou, my diver's lamp
the only hold with my world, I disturb
a concert of stripes: Hundreds
of inch-long fishes silver-slanting
right or left as my hand directs.
A king size mud cat like Genghis Khan
eyes me from the olive drab floor.
And overhead! My lost boat! Impounded
since last summer-- clamped listing
in a wet/dry vise, sun-half of bulbous green
vases feigning innocence with flowers--
night-half of fringe and garland chain,
propeller upholstered in velvet.
I rip away the slimy grip and feel
hairy stalactites creep closer, determined
as topside kudzu. The gasoline-fed screw might
thresh a few feet before losing. A spring army
of trees wades out to make a stockade.
Roman-helmeted herons patrol
the narrowing perimeter above with lances.
Here, the mighty Khan rules, guarded by turtles.
And I, lingering, slave to light and lungs,
must fight myself free.

TO AN ORB WEAVER

Wildness is not a lack of rules,
our roles are merely different,
yours framed in precision symmetry,
ordained in metered links.

High noon predator, jewel on silk,
your realm continues beyond
my premises. Your design sways
faint promises in music of an alien school.
Your net of elided notes
only the sun knows how to play, stretches
between minor keys, filling chords
not resolved by my harmonic scale.

You ply the wisdom Athena gave you,
shining gold laced with black
she reserved for spiders.
I, beguiled, applaud your skill,
your patience-- also your choice of prey.
My potions will spare your artistry
while you rid my garden of vegetarians.

But beware. The red-wing blackbird,
another player, another wild difference,
admires you without deference to beauty.

CHEETAH, MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Felinity perfected,
you're released in full color
from my camera, my sketchbook.
I've even uncollared you from myth
and dark Egyptian tombs.
Your style is avant-garde:
sheet ice on smoldering charcoal.

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.

THE HUNGERING

My times have grown leafless, my core
rustles softly like a brown husk in the wind.

I long to find my niche, to believe
in ancient promises like the four-inch owls
living in mean places and whose bellies
are often hollow.

Yet they, with wings to soar and leave
do not leave-- choosing the desert,
choosing the wild knowing, the patience
of sand, the feral contentment of stars,
certain
those other kinds of emptiness are worse.

IN MEMORY OF

Scoffing at newness, my mother
returned each pretty dress, each cosmetic
and convenience I gave her. Once, she kept
a TV, a tiny black & white peep hole
that let her heap scorn on the world's doings.

Her kitchen was a dynasty of dull knives,
hand can openers, rusty wire egg beaters.
With impaired fingers, she sliced rutabagas,
beets, carrots, an assertion
that arthritic labor made the meals meaningful.
Untainted by motorized blades, laundry aids,
sweepers, she afternooned with a straw broom
and washed clothes in the sink of martyrdom.
After a lot of years, her lip curl perfected,
I stopped giving her things to enhance life.
Finally--I stopped giving her anything.

Mother, why couldn't you give me
something
I could miss...

--Glenna Holloway

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HOMING IN ON MOUNTAIN BEACONS

The oaks make their own light when summer's done,
Unmatched by aster blooms or greenest pine.
The maples even challenge Blue Ridge sun
As whitetails flash between their shade and shine.
The dogwoods keep their glow in twilight's rise
Like embers banked against the stirring wind.
We watch the moon's full splendor as it vies
With nimbus rings like cotton newly ginned.
The morning brings brief rain that bleeds the clay;
It dabbles in the marsh and dimples sand,
Exposes diamonds in bare granite's gray,
Strings opal beads all through the softwood stand.
Come share this native Eden like a child
Whose living neon colorsapes grow wild.

--Glenna Holloway

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ENCOUNTER WITH CANIS LUPUS
Northern Montana, 1989

His kind are few but he's no loner.
The stance, the stare
confirm him. Pack leader.

He feels no need to summon the others.
My rabbit gun stays shouldered.
Startled into perfect stillness,
neck hairs alert,
communion is a thrumming wire,
predator to predator.

So much is coiled in his laser eyes--
lessons in alpha honesty--
millenniums of wolf wisdom
filling the dark doors of his pupils.

Pale yellow eyes admit everything--
secrets of the dominant female,
of ritual shadows in moonfall,
defense of his rank,
the taste of warm blood.

In a swift curve of light
I enter for a moment
the pure heat of their certainty,
and forgive all their knowing.

OCELOT
(Felis pardalis)

She sat crowned with saffron light
in a jacaranda tree, her mauve-blossomed throne
her favorite surveying spot, a haven for her young.

She sat licking light from the faces
of two half-weaned replicas, eyes defined
blackly, clad in arcane hieroglyphics, dark on light.

Her sovereign eyes half-surrendered
to sun, her scepter tip probed morning warmth,
wavered in flowered air. She stretched, giving back

light from neon dapples
limned with silver, foiled with ebony.
Soon something alien moved in the underlight.

Her nostrils filled with strangeness
that tainted her tongue, new presence deformed
order, disconcerting the flux of sounds and scents.

The man was jungle wise. His canoe crossed
swatches of sunwake, slid quietly onto her bank.
He tracked shadows, leaf-light, snake hiss, macaw cry.

She watched him circling below, culling
colors from bias light, unraveling camouflage.
Her brood obeyed her, motionless. He raised his weapon.

Sun exploded like glass, crazing silence.
Her tree quivered with her pain, broken flowers,
shards of darkness, distorted time, falling, falling,

trying to overtake the first blood down,
torn teats, red-stained milk, dying all the way,
trying to stop, catch each twig, settle for the life left

at each petal shattered, each panicle passed.
Falling through hole after hole in reticulated light,
streaks of cerulean crosshatched on failing brightness,

down and down, bruise shapes, reeling
splotches, recoiling forest, protests of verdure
the hunter could not hear. He only heard the ground

receive her. It embraced her with green,
made a mossy hollow for her body, soft against
her stillness. The shredded shade followed her drop

then spread across her, a mended shroud.
She lay in grace, a note fallen from a treble staff.
The man bent over her, called her beautiful, claimed his prize.

ELF OWL
(Micrathene whitneyi)

The saguaros lose weight and pleat
as they enter the death phase. It may last
for years. It's been so long since water
made good the sky's promises
there's a rattle in the desert's breath
not made by the sidewinder.

Leafless ocotillos comet lone blips of red
across day's end, one-spark blossoms
dangled from long arcs
like bobbing semaphores
signaling the elf owl to hunt.

In midnight sandshine, the tiny raptor
withdraws to its hollow
in the oldest saguaro. The cactus tightens
on its own tall thirst, narrowing its cells,
its clustered spines like medieval maces
guarding its deep secret moisture.

Twice more the pigmy predator haunts the night,
silence feathering swiftly over empty silence,
coming home empty.

CHALLENGED POET

He read my new poem and sighed.
"You never write about anything
but the sea or ships," he said.
"Don't mountains turn you on?
Don't I? And what about love?"

I've been remiss, I know.
I saw a mountain once--
rising from the rippling green
wet-clinging, immersing its keel.
I saw its white-capped crest,
a mighty wave of geologic time.

I saw this same man once and still--
tall and sure as a clipper's mast,
eyes blue-deep as summer undertow,
caresses soft as neap tide surf.
I was swamped like a skiff
and rocked in his wake.

His kiss is a salt-sweet promise
of trade winds speeding us home.
And his love is all the anchorage
this dreamer needs of port.

I will write him a proper lighthouse
to shine through his coastal squalls.

Generation Gap

My memory banks bias snippets
from distant moving reels--
buttons I counted on his gray vest,
its tailored points over matching trousseurs
in a wide-arm willow chair-- the view
from inside a lap. And glasses
clamping his nose. But I can't recall
the nose although people say I have it.
An oval place in my mind frames him
in gentle obscurities.

I can still see a doctor lightly pressing
a dome of white flesh on a brass bed.
That night I tried to say a new word--
appendix-- over and over
after strangers carried him out flat and slow.

But I don't remember him, my grandfather,
except as a haven. Not his face
or anything he said. All my inside eyes can see
is a pale abstraction in a casket
on a curtained table-- with flowers all over
where only one vase of iris had ever been
in what my grandmother always called
"the reading room" of the old house.

And a silent aunt who refastened the spring
high on the front screen door the next day
after everyone else and the flowers were gone.

A Hex On My Neighbor's Green Thumb

HONORABLE

MENTION

May your shovel break, may your fertilizer bake,
 May your droughts be long and dusty.
 May moles make holes, may blights take tolls,
 May your pruning tools get rusty.
 A killing frost on the hybrids you crossed,
 May your pink chrysanthemums sicken.
 A pox on your phlox, may your seeds fall on rocks,
 May your aphids and mealy-bugs thicken.
 And to add to your woes, may you slice up your hose
 When you run your power mower.
 One last incantation: While you're on vacation
 May stinkweeds grow up to your door.
 Next Garden Show they'll surely know
 Just who should get first prize--
 My brow of sweat is twice as wet,
 And twice as green are my eyes!

This delightful poem was a contender for one of the prizes--it's too bad that so few can be awarded. When there are perhaps a dozen poems of relatively equal merit remaining in the running, one must resort to nit-picking to eliminate some of them. The first line or two of a humorous poem should of course firmly establish the rhythm in the reader's ear, and the extra syllable in the word "fertilizer" breaks the rhythm a bit. How about "compost heap"? "Mower" and "door" do not quite make a perfect rhyme, so desirable in humor, but this is picking a tiny bit of "nit"! Upon reading the last two lines, one wants to say, "Twice as wet and twice as green as WHAT?" something on the order of "My brow of sweat is drippy-wet/And bright green are my eyes"? This suggestion is made with diffidence, because the poem is very good indeed--I'd like to have written it.

How
about

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"NOT OF THIS FOLD"

Another look at John 10:16

As herders watched their flocks and wished for light
from their twin suns to change thick gray to green,
to put the viscous rime to shallow flight--
a practiced angel came and blessed the scene.
His message quickly calmed familiar fear:
"I bring you wondrous news from Paradise!
Transmit the holy words for all to hear.
Your Savior's born in Chalgor's cave of ice
beyond the fiery gonfalons of Glark.
You'll know Him thus-- a baby in blue fur
asleep in borrowed nests of frostbirds. Hark!
Celestial choruses draw near to stir
your souls with love on this young asteroid."
The angel vanished like echoing chimes
to travel through the next galactic void
to where more planets whirl, and wait their times.

--Glenna Holloway

CAT-WALK
Glenna Holloway

Her name is Nefertiti, this tabby
asserting ancient wiseness
beyond our alley suspending
all my substance against the wall
in her gaze-- secret lenses
of Alice's looking glass eye-level,
unguarded for an instant--
Always I've known if I moved with dark
quick as light I could descend
one of those twin tunnels when they opened
to receive impatient night.

As I entered, (did she know?)
the passage vibrated, still hot
with her last wild leap from cellar to bookcase.
My trackless feet swirled faint smells of fennel,
toadflax and humus. Tiny sparks flared,
died deeper in iris mazes of mist
and whispers of small things hiding
in crevices. I opened the first door. Ahead
the shafts converged, a vaulted corridor
of oak bark, sun-stain, leaf-shine.
Joy was magneto rhythm, probing prongs
of root forks and moon-shed. Next,
a trophy room collaged with grasshoppers,
shrews, bright wings. There were
hoarded summers, spare willows, stacks
of overgrown trails, adventures
still wrapped in assorted furs
and sensuous string. Convolutions
of shapes and sounds flowed
on a weft of black, approaching, receding,
on a vector of velvet. Green was a flavor
and all other eyes a strong scent.
Motion was a prolonged spring, a dive
that never reached water,
reversed upward at will.

Deeper was slow cryptic drumming, a sudden
sinewy flash of untame guilt with ebony spots
lancing through scorched grass
and vines dissolving into jungle dusk.
Another door. A sly stir in a chamber
beyond. A brink. A river noise.
A rush of olive and indigo.
At my feet a beetle-- No, a scarab jewel!
And I returned to my place
without crossing the Nile.

BLACK OPAL

Glenna Holloway

The soft stone soon to grace my hand is now
in yours, Lapidary. Dismiss old wives' tales
of the bad luck gem. As you cut the domed cabochon,
don't look too deep in the wicks of arcane atoms
 flickering in the midnight catacombs
that fuel on legend and steal light from your eyes.
Bow your head, Lapidary, but keep your mind
at some high cool level safe from sorcery
not user-friendly to those not October born.

Long past decaying Australian sands,
gone beyond hyalite lining the sediment
of centuries, gone beyond the rationality
of layered defraction grids and trapped moisture,
 what you hold is the molten spectrum--
but don't stare too long into that sensitive core--
 watch the heat from your grinding wheel,
 the grade of your diamond grit.

Under the green and gold schiller you expose,
down where the sun bends in redding stress--
adjust your eyepiece, Lapidary, can you see it?

Something's home-- exactly there is where it lives--
 reveling in its experience with fire.

There's a mystery hiding in this wildness.
We keep hearing cannon fire-- way off.
Course we know it really can't be that, Ma.
Danny jokes and calls it "Vulcan's cough."

Sometimes in the dark I feel a tremble
Coming through the blanket at my back.
Never know if it's the ground I sleep on
Or if fear is making an attack.

Danny is the smartest man we got here.
Shows us how to find things we can eat.
Better in a pinch than our good captain.
Nights he shares his warmth with my poor feet.

Daybreak, we start hauling, cutting, sliding,
Dreaming all these razor ridges end
Piled with slabs of meat and mashed potatoes--
Smooths our craziness if we pretend.

Ain't no northwest passage in this country.
Mr. Jefferson's fond hopes are wrong.
Bad investment any way you slice it,
Even if we'd got it for a song.

Ma, I cried last night I got so hungry.
Some of us cooked up a mess of leaves.
All they did was make us sick and thirsty.
Dreamed about our farm and all those beeves.

Ain't no human ever put his foot here,
Even Indians avoid this place.
Over three weeks since we stood up level--
Longer since we walked a decent pace.

Guess I'll never see you any more, Ma.
This high hell has claimed us as its fee.
Doubt if I can hold Dan up tomorrow,
We're afraid he's got a busted knee.

Lordy, Ma, we sighted us a prairie!
Maybe we can make it after all.
Even spied a herd of deer down yonder--
Thanksgiving will be earlier this fall!

(The Lewis and Clark party rejoined, crossed
the last of the Bitterroots in September, 1805.)
Bitterroots in

CALLIGRAPHY BY NIGHT

Three migrating cranes
Brushed their inky strokes across
The waxing moon's empty page.
In silvered silence
We read their cryptic verses
Like an ancient haiku scroll.

African Synopsis

Reunited in twilight,
birds and boughs compose
cryptic measures of quiet
rising above
the voices of the veldt howling hunger.

The Ignis Fatuus

Through thorns and pools of brackish black,
past raven jeer and diamondback,
we search the swamp for once-seen fire
among mud-rooted, mutant trees,
and pause as night wind's snake-tongue hiss
wrinkles stagnant water near our knees.

SONNET FOR HIS NAMESAKE
(DuPage River and County, Illinois)

Some nights when fog crawls up the river's flanks,
A sleepy mallard sudden-turns its head
As cycling waves soft-smack the muddy banks
Recalling rhythms of an age long dead.
The water holds old songs in many keys:
Staccato notes from flying hoofs and paws
Or dancing moccasins and tune-slapped knees,
The drumming, humming steeped in every clause
Of time. Tonight a Frenchman called DuPazhe
Inspects his traps for beaver, muskrat, mink;
He moves with shade and bough for camouflage,
Then squints at streetlights, lingers at the brink
Of bubbling passage, doffs his hood at fame,
And disappears once more, leaving just his name.

--Glenna Holloway

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TO HIM WHO PROPOSED WITH SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Oh love, were I to know the larger truth,
Would I find feigning in thy patterned prose?
If flatter-fogged eyes and sweetened tooth
Could truly gauge the metal of thy pose--
Would it be pure and precious? Would it hold
My imprint dearly, yielding to my touch?
Or would alloyed resistance make thee bold,
Revealing in thy fond caress a clutch?
Ah love, perhaps it is not wise to test
How malleable or rich thine offerings.
And yet one answer my soul must request
Before we move to merge our profferings:
Art thou in love with all the sums of me--
Or more enamored of fecundity?

--Glenna Holloway

Anniversary, Driving 101, Washington State
Glenna Holloway

Putting aside the lap model computer
you had me bring, I recline my seat,
gaze at your face, your hands on the wheel.
The blue of your eyes, the blue behind mine
doesn't color-code like flow charts
or mountains and the Pacific.
Watching you scan the visuals scrolling
from the highway, I long to know
what things you save and what you delete.

Lodgepole pine interfaces with sun.
See it. Smile me warm, smile us synchrony.
My data banks have space for more
than cryptics and fractions.

Be keyed with whole things, natural
and animate: waves straining on tiptoe
to rake the tops of seastacks,
yearling elk trumpeting the fir forest,
aspens learning green.
Input the green of my eyes.

Memory me with summer verbs,
unstress my shade with cerulean,
the sound and taste of azure. Program us
for being. Gentle your touch and your time.
Process all your softest wares and words
with me.

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. I was so used to the fit,
the feel-- I even slept in it.
I've never been anything but young.

You always loved the gold crest in the center,
the ivory unicorn with ruby eyes.
My fingers store the touch of cool jade
and emeralds. Other gazing eyes relayed
the glinting play of myths back into mine.

I remember all the paths it opened
in the crowd-- all the doors--
shining, manipulating the dark,
keeping the years kneeling.
It must have slipped off
while I was forgetting something.
You shouldn't hide it from me like this.
Now suddenly, time is rampant--
no dancing lights refract through my shadow.
My head feels weightless
and cold.

THE SPIRAL GALAXY

My mother used to dress up and go out the door
in soft fabrics I thought felt like sky,
fanning shadows and glitter, smelling
of moonlight as she swirled by me.
I loved watching her pin a diamond starburst
on black or royal blue, right over her heart.

I'd get sent to my room for touching things
she wore. Only Orion ever knew I got out
of bed when the maid began to snore, drawn
to the magnetic field of my mother's closet.
I'd wrap her sleeves and skirts around me,
a caterpillar making a cocoon, and quiet as.
By feel, I knew the color of each dress,
every step of her room and the night it held.
She kept her jewel box on top of her highboy
holding her favorites and the piece I called
my wishing star. If I could close my fingers
on it once, all its magic would pass to me.
But standing on a chair, I couldn't reach it.

One night she changed her mind, took off
her first dress, star and all, and finally put on
something red. For the first time, I couldn't wait
for her to leave. Just then my blood
swarmed hot in my head, drained down suddenly;
I felt myself floating to the floor.

In Children's Hospital, the maid sat by my bed
nodding occasional assurance between novels.
Feverless and home by Saturday, the jewel
was no longer accessible. Nor my magic theory.

Later I saw a picture in a book-- a supernova
exploding in a spiral galaxy, bright patterned
like a whirling windmill. It pleased me
to decide that's what became of her in the end
when she stopped coming home at all. Sometimes
I still think she's up there-- flaring brooch
on black silk breast, pirouetting
in the eye of luminosity, radiating sparks.
Now and then I go to the library and look,
knowing the page number by heart. I gravitate
to anything with arms that could sweep me in.

MAJOR RHAPSODY IN F SHARP MINOR

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

Son of a thin ragged line inhaling used smoke
mixed with applause to blow from rubber cheeks.
Son of the hard-molded case-followers,
those rolled-up bus riders
down the stretched streaking nights,
closing their painted eyes and seeing brass
hanging over them-- begging to be snatched
and hidden for a night or two of peace, watching it
turn to an armored snake in their jealous hands,

hearing it tongue out tarnished laughter
on three ribs, belling out morning and a hangover
in some town they mispronounced.

You didn't see this loose-angled one pick it up.
The instrument came like quick cell division
from his lip. And the sound began--
uncoiling slow, coming for you, crawling
into your head, changing the texture
of your bare arms. You know that sound, mama?
Nothing as simple as ever-popular heartbreak
or phantom train whistles-- nothing
as definite as a tenor sobbing Eili, Eili
or wild animals moaning up the moon. His eyes
ignite and lightning arcs from his hair,
striking the conductor zapping it
into your gravity center. The sound, mama,
leaching tones out of the marble statues,
out of your wine glass, rearranging molecules,
making them glow like neon fog, fulminating
red and purple, alive like magnified ocean drops.

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

REFLECTIONS OF A SEASHORE WEEKEND THIRTY YEARS PAST

Unwilling even then to serve their sticky eyes,
normal they and them perched high on hotel verandas,
peering down like buzzards at his differentness,
making buzzard sounds, snatching him up
with grainy tongues to volley him like a hare hide
between them-- then on to those on the beach
sharing sameness, secure in naked nonentity enough
to peel him with clumsy questions, unskilled pointing.

No matter now if that Saturday,
that nine-year-old had taken off hot anonymity
and gone ignoring to the ocean's feet,
felt wind and foam, played with sand and periwinkles.
Instead, he clutched his artless camouflage closer
and ran back to his parents' room
where other childrens' joy attacked walls and windows,
where he wished for deafness, invisible and unstrange--
or something worse-- from which eyes swerve
quick blessed look-away and let-alone-- anything
to keep their curiosity, their distaste
from surfacing like sweat, dripping down on him,
lodging like lye in his pores.

No matter now that he owns the old hotels,
the beach and some of the population.
He is his own-- a man leached out inside a man:
One in patented laminate coated with success.
The other, unwhole and unholy, no one has yet seen.

URBAN TAPESTRY

My oar dollops the water, ravel the reflection:
A giant warp looms across the river,
the lanes and tracks of my childhood.
The creeks now gone were my pastel flosses,
keeping my linings from fraying, keeping me close
to the ways of bass and beavers.

My origins were up there in a garden-patch bungalow
years before that burrowing segment of super highway.
The new tunnel, breechloaded with cars
blasts a volley of steel across the bow
of my small boat. The half-hoop of iron bridge
steadies the warning appliqued against carbon sky.

An oil barge passes me, rocks me under the new span,
into its shadow and roar. And I think
of the old hilly thunder prowling the pinestand,
unmuffled by rows of stacked bins for people storage,
thwarting its rounds, teasing the lightning.

The barge slides the river, a shuttle of filth
spinning its slimy wake near the bend
where my fever swears the shreds of my old home lie.
Too many torn things underweave the weft of the city
and I've run out of thread leading to freedom.

A PASSING ACQUAINTANCE WITH DEATH ON THE DESERT

It was here I met you--
sidewise and slowly on earth's curve
swept bare and beige, slumped under tons of light.
No black hood and scythe-- you're nothing
like poets and painters imagine. You
rattled me dry as ghostwood, bubbled my skin,
swelled my tongue. I clamped my teeth
on hard brightness, refusing your soft advances.

The desert needs no bones of mine.
Built of itself, the hoarded grains
of millenia's mills, it piles and plunges
like a tidal wave over fallen spines of cholla.
Flowering agave rides selected vertabrae
of the planet's arched chine.

The light is molten alloy in a pouring crucible,
casting keys in crevices and fissures
to unlock the fourth dimension's doors.
Wind scours leftover civilization from my eyes;
I can read the coded map of the night-walkers.

Sometimes I smell you in trailing fringes
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.

Wading an ocean of light, struggling
in its currents, I wait until the nearest moon
steals its weight. My evening footprints fill
with mauve in granulated layers of always.
Blossoming cosmos withdraw fuchsia rays
to meditate on seed. The skink surrenders
its fading warmth to the owl. Ocotillos
comet their color above graven intaglios
like shadows of a spiral galaxy. I'm tethered
to ancient rhythms only my blood remembers.
Here is my space quest, cordless and alone.
Out beyond your waiting.

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

But rigid she stood and he raised her chin.
"Still jealous of water?" he teased.
"Of course. If not husband, then bastard son.
And you'll never forsake your kin."

He turned her squarely to protest,
"I'm telling you, girl, I'm free.
Unlike some men, I'm not obsessed--
Except by your sorcery."

"And how many heads have you beguiled
With pirate's mouth and mahogany chest?"
"Far fewer than you with the lift of your lip
And the up-tilt of your breast!"

"Oh sailor, go follow the farthest tern,
My father invented your creed.
He lured my mother out there where she died.
I know all about your breed.

"And sister, mistress, mother, nymph,
She'll claim you quarry yet.
She'll pull you down on her altar rocks
Where skulls like yours are set.

"With sequin flash and coral beads
She'll weave your mossy shroud.
And blazon your bones with turtle dung,
And crown your grave with weeds.

"You'd bring me squid and a stillborn child
With your nets and sails to mend,
And serpent horizons of swallowed stars,
But my cage would never bend.

"You talk about flowers and gems down deep,
All mine if I'll be your bride.
It's slimy sand and chains of kelp,
Shell-cuts on my shins in the tide.

"You offer rats, hardtack and rust,
A drunken lamp, a creaking floor,
The hidden claws of the lurking reef,
And that green eternal door.

ROLE REVERSAL

She laid out my days with hand-knit sweaters
and fresh-squeezed juice, unfolded my nights
from a brass-bound chest. The scent of cedar
still brings back the cool feel, the sound
of taffeta comforters puffed with down
and bedtime stories of her own making.
She ironed my manners between Sunday ruffles,
unrolled plans from pink rag curlers. For years
we giggled in duet-- mine the alto part,
hers the same three notes as our door chime.
She filled my head and my big blue cup
with warm good things; she shaped me in her hugs.

Then her years turned toxic. The woman she was
moved away in medicated stages. Now for longer
than I childed her, I have mothered her.
Days rattle past like the withering dryness
of unspilled tears. The brass-bound chest
is the same but there is no comfort.
And our mouths spread no laughter
between unrehearsed folds of strangeness.

King Tutankhamun:

Once There Was a Boy Who Loved to Whistle

Young pharaoh, I studied
your museumed effigies catching light,
posed on the threshold of blue and saffron,
paused in the old dreams from the head of Horus:
Morning renascence out of a lotus--
rolling across the arch of heaven on sun wheels--
rafting under-earth rivers near shoals
of Osiris, wrapped in the shawls of Ptah.

Mortal eyes are splended with your accessories,
a glut of gold and gods. And everywhere
your face with your ankh-eyes
reflecting on your mirror world.
You must have seen eyes when yours were closed--
always looking full at you--
a thousand replicas to fill your own.

I saw you at the bowstring-- hunter, warrior,
hero-murals of a lord, a moral for your subjects,
foiled with lapis, carnelian, turquoise.
And in the end, failed by the vulturine wingspan
and splayed serpent hood.

But back in the trailing edges of light,
beyond the artists' tales and the godsmith's tolls,
before you changed your name--
there was a smiling boy. I saw him
through a tear in the papyrus, rollicking
barefoot on sands old when legends began:
You on an ungilded afternoon--
learning how to whistle.

It is he beneath the priceless mask:
Amarna child with puckered mouth
framing melodies for the songless ibis,
and turning Selket's head.
On moon-chilled desert I can hear him
softly behind the myth of death.

DECEMBER DINNER, MANHATTAN ISLAND

Embossed and tasseled menus offer sole,
Fresh-caught, sauteed with lemon, chives and dill,
For fifteen dollars. I'm not hard to sell.
My mind flies back to offshore Maine: A shrill
Breeze blows; two fishermen are braced until
A wave plows by. One checks the last end-knot
In seven-hundred pounds of ice-caked net.

The day drains into dark-- an eerie glow
On bitter spindrift near Three Dory Ridge.
The pair make ready for the longest tow.
The hungry net flares out to form a bridge
With mud-slime ninety fathoms deep, to nidge
Through ancient green dimensions. Spools unwind,
The dragger boat aims high into the wind.

Dan begs the cable not to twist. "All down!"
He cries, his teeth bared in the salty cold.
The trawl will prow the bottom until dawn.
Five hours on a northerly course, a bold
Approach near the ridge's curse. Jarl can hold
The dragger true if anybody can;
One eye is cocked on weather, one on Dan.

They keep their senses honed on winter, knowing
No one else is out, slipping into troughs
More calm than either side, and always going
For the fissures between storms. Jarl coughs,
A brine-hack, one of fishing's ons-and-offs.
Whenever seas are docile, all the boats
Come plying, trailed by waves of white wing-beats.

The price of fish sinks like a weighted trap.
Now grays will bring a buck a pound or more,
But then it drops to forty cents like tripe.
If these two drag luck's lap enough before
She rolls away and orders them to shore,
They'll own their boat. Moon dirties comber caps
As numb lips hover over coffee cups.

The latest catch stinks illing-sweet, no matter
How hard the blowing scours the culling pens.
Afoot in mucus, ice and offal-spatter
On a writhing deck, Dan guts fish, and pins
The rattling tarps, working out his back pains.
A sprawling hillock angle-slaps the bow;
He almost slips. He wipes his spray-stung brow.

Their thoughts are never easy in the bag
They tow. They're after flounder, giant hake,
Gray sole and other flatfish if they're big.
Is this place right? The time? They watch their wake
And wonder. Far below, did something break?
A different dip and shudder in the pull,
Uneven drag. They don't believe they're full.

They man the winches, play the cable, reel
The snarled mouth of the mesh maw up. They set
Their own jaws, wrestling with the plates of steel
To free them. Spirits start to rise with net;
It isn't ripped! They see enough to whet
Their hopes again. The back half holds its fill;
Enough good ones, maybe they still won't fail.

The struggling sack is pierced with bony fins,
A single gasping monster hoisted high
To dangle and then burst into the bins
As Jarl yanks on the knot. With sharp know-how
Dan wades the mound, outlandish alien who,
With crystal in his hair and beard, assort
The flapping gourmet silver from the quartz.

The North Atlantic pickets round their craft,
Hurls foam invective. Jarl shoves in the throttle,
Eyeing shifty winds. Dan shouts from aft,
"Mostly grays! We pay off the Aristotle
Tomorrow!" Pre-dawn brings a bluish mottle,
Bias-lighted clouds. Spume climbs the hull,
But grins crack tension as Dan works the haul.

The biggest part of being best is knowing
When to leave and live for next-time risks.
Now in the wheelhouse they begin renewing
Silent pride in their boat, their skill. Whisks
Of rain accent aloneness. Panel discs
Of light ignite their eyes. I long to rub
Their poor shocked hands and draw them a hot tub.

My husband doesn't know, nor does my brother,
How much I miss them now, how much I pray.
I should have known there couldn't be another
Place for me. My most is in Boothbay.
My plans swirl by in mounting disarray.
Our New York waiter pours our fancy wine;
I watch his hands instead of drinking mine.

He spoons the ritual lemon butter on
My sole as my companion nods and smiles
And I would give up everything I own
To put behind me all the stubborn miles
Between the spot where ocean reconciles
Ambition, love and discontent. I hear
Another diner say the price is dear--

I long to say he only pays a fraction
As he complains that sole should cost much less.
Beneath my skin I feel the rising friction,
And tell the man I'm with: "I can't say yes.
I'm sorry, but more time won't help. I guess
The job is not for me. That sounds insane
I'm sure. Good night. I'm going home to Maine."

FOR FORTY DAYS OF DROUGHT

Sun is the peen of a smith's hammer.
Under its blows
we're heated red but not much reshaped.
Sparks from the forge
bounce off the rim of prairie nights
while old folks call it heat lightning.
Nothing to do with rain.
Aunt Vi visits kin, sharing our Mason jars
and icy cartons of last year's green largess.

The earth rattles like a giant gourd
filled with dead seeds.
Desiccated leaves of our crops
scrabble against each other surrendering
dust of three states to corkscrew breezes.
Wind-coils tighten to etch our windows
with looted topsoil. Hourly it insinuates
into drawers books teddy bears
and coffee cups before we can empty them.
Our teeth grit on all we can talk about.
Late model dreams are scorched incurled
and littered with spores that won't sprout.
Aunt Vi seasons the meatloaf with grated irony.

Stubborn midwest faces refuse to dry
in sketches of rancor. Something in the genes:
saturnine satirical sudden turning
on a private joke, giggle to guffaw to knee-slap.

We listen to Bach Gershwin Little Richard
while anvil-heads gather and great thunderclouds
mushroom without spilling their promises.
Aunt Vi vows to go live with her son in Seattle.

Gravity tugs the cumulus into a shape like Italy.
It sags lean black. The boot's tongue
flops down, licks away our silo. We find it
hours later half a mile off. In one shiny wet spot.

Aunt Vi can tch! better than anybody. Grinning,
she unpacks.

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

Puzzle

IDENTIFYING LONG LEGGED WADING BIRDS

Using clues from the preceding poem, see how many of the birds you can correctly identify. Give yourself 5 points for each right answer. Give yourself 10 points if you find the crane. Answers on page —.

Answers

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

A CRANE IS NOT

A crane is not a stork.

A stork will perch and nest in trees;

It has a long hind toe

Besides a shorter neck and knees.

A crane is no flamingo.

Flamingos nest in noisy groups;

They're pink, their feet are webbed.

Their bills are black and shaped like scoops.

A crane is not a heron.

A heron has that long back toe;

Its neck is angled sharply,

Its voice is raucous like a crow.

A crane is not an ibis.

An ibis sports a curving bill

And never grows as tall,

Nor ventures far in northern chill.

Discover what cranes are

By learning all the things they're not.

Compare their feet, their necks and bills

To figure what you've got.

ICEMAN

He was Azelkot of the Lake Clan: Bravest hunter who dared the blue toothed mountains. Keeping the village larder full, earning him tattoos enough to ride the moon's marble boat past death someday, to the peaks that pierce the sun.

Coming home through the high pass he saw snow falling black, a bad sign he had seen once before. He was out of tune with the pinnacle voices; he could not quiet his rattling jaws. Fear warned him the loftiest nymph could hear his discord.

His implements weighted him; he must abandon some. But not the axe. He felt its cold metal outline through his pack. He hated parting with his bow but it was unstrung since no obliging hares offered gut or warm meat in his traps.

He would make a cache, mark it, dedicate it to the mountains. He could retrieve it all in spring. He knew that alpine swale, often he followed that crescent east when edelweiss perfumed it, trekked home when sloe purpled it.

Like offerings on an altar, he laid his new bow and quiver on a rock mound. Even under winterfall, he believed the hummock would keep the shape of a ram's head. In his grass bag was a goat tail, a talisman tassel from dark-eyed Antotwila. He tied it to his hiking stick, plunged the pole upright into a fissure and packed it with snow. He beseeched the mountains to bless his gifts, to tune him anew to the great singing tongues.

He mouthed a hymn to the heights, countersong to the wet mouth that held him, inhaled him, exhaled him, pushing its breath against his chosen route. Snow swept down the lower fangs and clung to his back. Moaning like a lover, keening like a widow, one nymph promised a hare was now in the trap he left behind.

As the goat tail became a thrashing demon, Azelkot knew the perfidy of his gift was known. He must offer the treasured copper axe. His knees folded. Brittle music spiraled into his ears, augered into his bones. He would give the flint knife and fire striker too. Face down in the snow, he vowed not to try to recover them come spring.

I hear his last chant, see the savage white. I used to wonder where such strangeness came from. When headlines and pictures hailed the finding-- a five-thousand-year-old man in ice-- strangeness magnified, unrolled, the source certain.

I know now why I know your name. It was I-- Antotwila-- you never returned to, Azelkot....

ICEMAN

He was Azelkot of the Lake Clan. Finest hunter in the mountains: keeping the village larder full, earning him tattoos enough to ride the moon's marble boat past death someday, to the peaks that pierce the sun.

Coming home through the high pass he saw snow falling black, a bad sign he had seen only once before. He was out of tune with the pinnacle voices, he could not quiet his rattling jaws. Fear warned him the loftiest nymph could hear his discord.

His implements weighed heavily; he must abandon some. But not the axe. He felt its cold metal contours through his pack. He hated parting with his new bow but it was unstrung since no obliging hares offered gut or warm meat in his traps.

He would make a cache, mark it, dedicate it to the mountains. He could retrieve it all on his return in spring. He knew that alpine swale, often he followed that crescent east when edelweiss perfumed it, trekked home when sloe purpled it.

Like offerings on an altar, he laid his bow and quiver of arrows in a depression on a rocky mound. Even under winterfall, he believed the hummock would keep the shape of a ram's head. In his grass bag was a goat tail, a decoration from dark-eyed Antotwila. He tied it to his hiking stick, plunged the pole upright into a fissure and packed it with snow. He beseeched the mountains to bless his gifts, to tune him anew to the great singing tongues.

He mouthed a hymn to the mountains, countersong to the mouth that held him, inhaled him, exhaled him, pushing its breath against his chosen route. Snow swept down the lower fangs, swirled around him. Moaning like a lover, keening like a widow, one nymph promised a hare was now in the trap he left behind.

As the wind-whipped goat tail became a thrashing demon, Azelkot knew the perfidy of his gift was known. He must offer his treasure, the beautiful copper axe. He took it from his pack. His knees folded. Music spiraled into his ears, augered into his bones. He would give the flint knife and fire striker too. Face down in the snow, he vowed not to recover them come spring.

Sometimes I hear his last chant, see the savage white. I used to wonder where such strangeness came from. When headlines and pictures hailed the finding-- a five-thousand-year-old man in ice-- the strangeness magnified, unrolled, the source certain.

I alone know your name. It was I you never returned to, Azelkot.

1.

DECEMBER DINNER, MANHATTAN ISLAND

Embossed and tasseled menus offer sole,
Fresh-caught, sauteed with lemon, chives and dill,
For sixteen dollars. I'm not hard to sell.
My mind flies back to offshore Maine: A shrill
Breeze blows; two fishermen are braced until
A wave plows by. One checks the last end-knot
In seven-hundred pounds of ice-caked net.

The day drains into dark-- an eerie glow
On bitter spindrift near Three Dory Ridge.
The pair make ready for the longest tow.
The hungry net flares out to form a bridge
With mud-slime ninety fathoms deep, to nidge
Through ancient green dimensions. Spools unwind,
The dragger boat aims high into the wind.

Dan begs the cable not to twist. "All down!"
He cries, his teeth bared in the salty cold.
The trawl will prowls the bottom until dawn.
Five hours on a northerly course, a bold
Approach near the ridge's curse. Jarl can hold
The dragger true if anybody can;
One eye is cocked on weather, one on Dan.

They keep their senses honed on winter, knowing
No one else is out, slipping into troughs
More calm than either side, and always going
For the fissures between storms. Jarl coughs,
A brine-hack, one of fishing's ons-and-offs.
Whenever seas are docile, all the boats
Come plying, trailed by waves of white wing-beats.

The price of fish sinks like a weighted trap.
Now grays will bring a buck a pound or more,
But then it drops to forty cents like tripe.
If these two drag luck's lap enough before
She rolls away and orders them to shore,
They'll own their boat. Moon dirties comber caps
As numb lips hover over coffee cups.

The latest catch stinks illing-sweet, no matter
How hard the blowing scours the culling pens.
Afoot in mucus, ice and offal-spatter
On a writhing deck, Dan guts fish, and pins
The rattling tarps, working out his back pains.
A sprawling hillock angle-slaps the bow;
He almost slips. He wipes his spray-stung brow.

(cont.)

Their thoughts are never easy in the bag
They tow. They're after flounder, giant hake,
Gray sole and other flatfish if they're big.
Is this place right? The time? They watch their wake
And wonder. Far below, did something break?
A different dip and shudder in the pull,
Uneven drag. They don't believe they're full.

They man the winches, play the cable, reel
The snarled mouth of the mesh maw up. They set
Their own jaws, wrestling with the plates of steel
To free them. Spirits start to rise with net;
It isn't ripped! They see enough to whet
Their hopes again. The back half holds its fill;
Enough good ones, maybe they still won't fail.

The struggling sack is pierced with bony fins,
A single gasping monster hoisted high
To dangle and then burst into the bins
As Jarl yanks on the knot. With sharp know-how
Dan wades the mound, outlandish alien who,
With crystal in his hair and beard, assort
The flapping gourmet silver from the quartz.

The North Atlantic pickets round their craft,
Hurls foam invective. Jarl shoves in the throttle,
Eyeing shifty winds. Dan shouts from aft,
"Mostly grays! We pay off the Aristotle
Tomorrow!" Pre-dawn brings a bluish mottle,
Bias-lighted clouds. Spume climbs the hull,
But grins crack tension as Dan works the haul.

The biggest part of being best is knowing
When to leave and live for next-time risks.
Now in the wheelhouse they begin renewing
Silent pride in their boat, their skill. Whisks
Of rain accent aloneness. Panel discs
Of light ignite their eyes. I long to rub
Their poor shocked hands and draw them a hot tub.

My husband doesn't know, nor does my brother,
How much I miss them now, how much I pray.
I should have known there couldn't be another
Place for me. My most is in Boothbay.
My plans swirl by in mounting disarray.
Our New York waiter pours our fancy wine;
I watch his hands instead of drinking mine.

He spoons the ritual lemon butter on
My sole as my companion nods and smiles
And I would give up everything I own
To put behind me all the stubborn miles
Between the spot where ocean reconciles
Ambition, love and discontent. I hear
Another diner say the price is dear--

I long to say he only pays a fraction
As he complains that sole should cost much less.
Beneath my skin I feel the rising friction,
And tell the man I'm with: "I can't say yes.
I'm sorry, but more time won't help. I guess
The job is not for me. That sounds insane
I'm sure. Good night. I'm going home to Maine."