

A DIFFERENT ROAD TO SUN-UP

Glenna Holloway

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 dicordant 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 still smoked, reversed itself
revealing a death's head just as she always said,
withholding its downshine, 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 on 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 her 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,
is the time to move back among my kind.