

Glenna Hollaway

Poems 03

GENTLE DELIVERANCE

We came from cliffs where threadbare limbs were patched
With scraps of ice— to sueded cypress knees
Where shade-stiped quietude is laced and thatched
With sun-bleached yarns festooned from wading trees.
For weeks we watched the sea; the folding foam
Dispersed like unresolved designs of men.
One day we recognized this place as home,
And trolled new warmth to mend ourselves again.
We learned to swim in light-probed wells of green,
To dive where sequin-flashing gifts appeared
Against a concave coral altar-screen;
We learned to smoke and sell the fish we speared.
Far from the welted rancor of our land,
Our raveled shores were soft resewn with sand.

Rivers water down
the glitter of autumn's gold
and bank the spilled change

SONNET FOR HIS NAMESAKE

(DuPage River, 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:
Stacatto 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.

BIRTHDAY AT THE STATE FAIR

From a distance

the hostess at the mineral display made him remember
watercolors and fine English paper no longer available.

His old longing surfaced like a burnt sienna stain,
part of him already laying the Titian wash of her skin,
but he shut off thoughts of painting or his shaky hands.

He sidled along booths and signs,
squinting back Day-Glow orange, examining dried corn,
frowning down his hurry, handling things

when he dared, asking the bearded man about bees—

On command he felt their warmth through the glass case,
nodded on cue, shuffled sawdust, mimicked interest.

Someone else came; he escaped the rest of the recital.

Indirectly he drifted toward her between jewel walls
of jams and jellies, watching her through amber,
passing on to magenta, pausing in dusky purple
before losing her in dark opaque.

He straightened as the row of jars ended,
crossed carefully toward her highlights.

Her voice was cerulean, describing crystal
formation to four Boy Scouts, her syllables
brushing the glistening spires in her hands.

He wiped his spectacles, a last hesitation. He expected
her cameo simile to fade with nearness, instead
she became a Botticelli palette, full face, and he stared,

avidly slack-jawed like the youngest stripling.
He pried at doors in his head that trapped him so often,
pretended to turn his back on a certain one;
it popped open as he hoped, freeing the fact he wanted.
He primed his throat: "Say, that looks like calcite."
She smiled right on him,
viridian eyes, velvet words upholding his. The boys
so slowly moved on, stock of questions spent.
He must see to it she understood
he was not some clod wandered in from the weedy midway,
he knew many things, he was polished as her obsidian.
He made small offerings of his thoughts
on geodes waiting eons to be opened like gifts,
the abstract art of agate, the spectrum lurking in white.
She called him poetic;
rich royal poured over him like ointment.
He stuttered a little, keeping his hands behind him.
He rummaged for a witticism, drew his lip
over the vacancy between his teeth. Presently he would pun
about her fossils and tell her he was eighty-nine today
and she would not believe it, but first there was so much
to say about life, and other people were coming.

Possible¹⁹⁹⁸
Contest
entrants
- NO NAME ON

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 smooth caress a clutch?
Ah, love, perhaps it is not wise to test
How malleable and 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 facts of me—
Or more enamored of fecundity?

(Old Willie was a chauvinist;
his poems make it clear
he's more concerned with a future heir
than the present her, I fear.)

should
speed
some pub.

RECLAMATION

To think such common clumsy things as words
Can flow into a sonnet's silken woof
And leave no ragged edge, no scattered sherds
To mock the lyricist with sharp reproof!
These things we stroke or hammer into forms,
Pass up and down the streets and through thin air,
These pieces of foundations, parts of storms,
Odd patches of old cultures past repair—
The tarnished heaps we've spat out, killed with, wasted,
Can often be re-used to build and mend
In spite of all the bitter tongues they tasted,
Can be exclaimed again, a better blend.
Applying human alchemy to curses
Recycles slag, gift-wraps new songs and verses.

THE WINTER BRUTE

Dakota Territory, 1886-87

We must have slept through his breaking and entering
our doors and windows, a long Christmas sleep,
a levitating sleep of rehearsed orderly snow.
Then we didn't wake clear,
our edges didn't release clean
from our crazed molds, and we were blind slow
groping through his stiff polar hair.
By the time we caught his beast scent
he had licked out our hearths.
Great albino paws slapped us like sloths,
snarled us under ubiquitous feet,
barred our cages with downpointing fangs
gnawing us away from our hold on earth,
setting us adrift.
His ravenous white hid the horizon,
demanded our cattle then our old mothers and aunts,
and in our pale vertigo we paid ancient tribute,
beseeching his heathen names, inventing invocations
of smoke. We burned the decorated trees,
the creche cut-outs for the schoolroom
and finally the precious desks.
But it was never enough. He ratcheted us
to intractable flanks and settled into hibernation.
Then with our pain still lining his den
we were afraid he had died here,
leaving his monstrous carcass
to cover our uncounted graves.

THE WINTER BRUTE

We must have slept through his breaking and entering
our gates, a cerebral Christmas sleep,
a high levitating sleep of orderly snow.

Then we didn't wake clear,
our edges didn't release clean
from our cracked molds, and we were blind slow
groping through his stiff polar hair.

By the time we caught his beast scent,
great albino paws were slapping us like mice,
snarling us under ubiquitous feet,
barring our cages with fangs.

His ravenous white warps the horizon,
and in our pale vertigo we pay ancient tribute,
beseeching his heathen names,
inventing invocations of smoke.

But he is heedless; this Siberian mutation
ratcheted us to intractable flanks
then settled into hibernation. And now
with our fevers lining his den
we are afraid he has died here,
leaving his monstrous carcass
to cover our uncounted graves.

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SAPPHICS FOR FLOWER AND HUE

Glenna Holloway

Love of purple consciously colors living,
Willed to me by grandfather's genes and painter's
Palette rich with cobalt and reds he blended.

Wandering many
Prairies, marshes-- violet territory
Hoarding secret colonies schooled in beauty,
I present my emptiness wide for filling.

Patiently searching,
Buried pirate contraband couldn't tempt me
More than scrabbling under the layered deadness,
Finding all the earliest troves of purple.

Violets triggered
All my other sensuous childhood questing:
Easter eggs established the taste of purple,
Certain kinds with marshmallow, grapish-tinted.

Textural sense is
Shapes of polished amethyst, feeling purple.
Purple's sound is minor-key nocturnes, trombones.
Even more than violets, summer midnight

Serves up its fragrance.
Shaded all my days in its aura makes me
Cool to other essences, other floral
Offers. Many lavenders, so appealing,

Fail the comparing
Eye and fail in lastingness, substance-- spirit
Most of all. Humility, too, is lacking.
Children learn the violet's secret language;
Grown-ups forget it.

(cont.)

Johnny-jump-ups, Arrowleaf, Beckwith, Birdfoot
Share the basic honesty always centered
Posing golden compliments, spots of happy.

African hybrids
Show the same invincible traits less humbly,
Blameless cousins following scripture's bidding:
Never hide your radiance under bushels.

Purple addiction
Peaks in spring personified, leaving later
Needs to potted relatives. Thanks to breeders'
Skills my cravings find a reward each season.

People may judge this
Weakness silly, having no symptoms like it:
"Why be so obsessed with a hue? It's nice, but--"
Thralls don't have an alternate taste or fancy.

Nothing can change me.
Let me value violets more than roses,
Peaches, salmon, cinnamon, jade and silver--
Rich and restful helpings of soul's ease, love winks--
Simple perfection.

SALES FIGURES

Hot-wired for sound and motion, Hendrix sat in the outer office already tasting every word he and the man inside would serve. Two of his own kind waited in tan lounge chairs near Hendrix. They had traded small nods as each entered the arena. The clan was thinning. Once there would have been four or five grinning their clean-shaven double-breasted confidence at their rivals. Once they warred sportingly. Now it was kill and eat if they could. Lately Hendrix woke all hours of the night, a weird feeling in his chest or belly or down his spine, always trying to scrape sleep back over it till time to bathe and cologne the reek of failure.

Every morning he put on his well pressed lies, emulsioned the kink in his colon and headed out again to another reception cubicle, ten-by-ten designer spaces for people who worried their ties and wearied their creases. Now he declined the presiding blonde's offer of coffee, thinking about the clown in the inner office, imagining him swiveling around in his imported smoke chrysalis between his Wall Street Journal, his damn computer and his crystal decanter. Hendrix toyed for awhile with the idea of a clone or two of himself he could send to the other chambers he must visit; they could all finish in time for a golf match. One of them would have to win that at least.

He didn't play much anymore except when a client preferred to say "no" over the back nine. The embroidered bottom line of the executive encounter was always the same, over drinks, over lunch, over fair-traded joke stock. And however cerebral, handsomely holstered or steel-jacketed in necessity, it was always a scorching stinking lead slug NO going straight to the gut.

The inside door opened, ejected the first salesman, pale and older: The indecent exposure revolted Hendrix. The man lurched out into the corridor. The second salesman, suddenly infected by the same germ, lumbered to his feet mumbling, "You think he forgot his overcoat?" The blonde looked irked. "Maybe he's coming back," said Hendrix, vowing never to let anyone see like that into a torn opening. The second salesman gathered up the coat; they all heard the shot in the hall. Only Hendrix was sure what it was.

"WE MAY INHALE DESPAIR" ...Emily Dickinson

for another Emily

This stark cubicle stays closed:
No green grows; only the walls
Are tender. Your prodding finger knows—
But found no entry,
No valve for compressed dark to drain.

This cold crucible stays filled:
Refined slag, a purity of dross.
Your hopeful hands bruise
And now they ache with losing.
On your way home, gather for pressing
All the dying anodynes from this old garden.

RECLAMATION FOR A NEW YEAR

To think such common clumsy things as words
Can flow into a sonnet's silken woof
And leave no ragged edge, no scattered sherds
To mock the lyricist with sharp reproof!
These things we stroke or hammer into forms,
Pass up and down the street or through high air,
These pieces of foundations, parts of storms,
Odd patches of old cultures past repair—
The tarnished heaps we've spat out, killed with, wasted,
Can often be re-used to build and mend
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Can be proclaimed again, a finer blend.
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