

Glenna Holloway  
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WHILE HE'S AWAY

This vase is designed to celebrate the delphiniums  
he planted-- these dolphin-shaped sucklings nursed  
on light, turning light to pigment, demanding of me  
a competent complement for their perfected blue.

Imagining him battle-gear'd somewhere on a landscape  
where nothing blooms blue, I write him about my urn--  
how it began, a fat gray coil of earth, cold-slimy  
to my touch, reluctant to accept my warmth or my will.  
I insisted a deep reservoir to prolong blue,  
a fluted collar to flatter the soft indigo spurs  
soon to brush its curved flanks.

Free of my hands, its molecules shrank fossil-dry  
on a shelf. A week later, successful graduate  
of the first firing, country coarse  
as big buck-toothed zinnias in baskets in my studio,  
its brown rind avidly soaked up latent color  
as I smoothed on manganese and copper unguents.

Today, in a final revelation, it vibrated  
like a nascent nova, orange to white in a cosmic furnace.  
Maybe suspecting its future, it ripened in the last lap  
of hereditary heat on its way to azure-- then settled,  
content in its glaze, replica of sky, sea and flower.

My letter avoids similes of fire and human clay  
lodged deep in my mind's kiln. I describe  
only the product of a potter's faith,  
and the beauty of this love-shaped tangible fact  
filled with delphiniums. Waiting here on our table.

WHILE HE'S AWAY

My kiln held magnified, multiplied desert suns  
to fire the vase I designed  
to celebrate the delphiniums he planted--  
those dolphin-shaped sucklings nursing on light,  
turning light to pigment, demanding of me  
a competent complement for their perfected blue.

Writing him, imagining him battle-geared  
somewhere on a landscape where nothing blooms blue,  
I tell him about my urn-- how it began, a fat gray coil  
of earth, cold-slimy to my touch, reluctant to accept  
my warmth or my will. I insisted a deep reservoir  
to prolong blue, a fluted collar to flatter  
the soft spurs that would brush its arched flanks.

Free of my hands, it made no promises, rearranged  
its molecules slowly, shrank fossil-dry on a shelf.  
Later, graduate of the first firing, country coarse  
as big buck-toothed zinnias in baskets in my studio,  
its brown rind avidly soaked up latent color  
as I smoothed on cool manganese and copper unguents.

Today, in a final revelation, it vibrated like a nova,  
orange to white in a cosmic furnace. Maybe suspecting  
its future, it ripened in the last lap of hereditary heat  
on its way to azure-- then settled, content in its glaze,  
replica of sky, sea and flower.

My letter avoids similes  
of holocaust and human clay lodged deep in my mind--  
it speaks only of the product of a potter's faith,  
and the beauty of this love-shaped tangible fact  
filled with delphiniums. Waiting here on our table.

### POTATO SECRETS

A week they lay cribbed in the cool  
of my pantry, secure in their symmetry  
and size, their smooth pecan-colored skins,  
their long Irish lineage. Now  
they push their earth smell into my head,  
an insistent musk reeking of history  
and ethos. Their heft in my hand insinuates  
gravity, longevity, hints of hidden power.

Darkness activated their eyes; pale blips  
poke out of their sockets. My mother says  
these pointed knurls reaching for new life  
must be dug out: they're poison raw,  
they steal flavor if cooked.

No more lazing in warm hills beneath  
urgent green, their future ends in a sack  
hurried past my cat while their bulbous brown  
origins hiss at me from the oven.

And my mother, humming, prepares to anoint  
their sizzling finality with her own secrets,  
part buttermilk, salsa and chives.

## AMERICAN OUTBACK

After all the deadlines, f/stops, Bangkok  
to Belem, film saturated with foreign colors,  
he craves blue in his lungs,  
his old migratory route  
where Gaia's great bellows blow. Where he  
is the only lens, and light readings fly up  
like cactus wrens.

Tollways vanish in a chuckwalla's crevice,  
a sidewinder's intaglios in sand.  
A shedding spring coyote flings itself leanly  
into the chase of shadows, silent as a star shooting.  
Custom-made cacophony is lost under the humps  
of hogans listening to Venus rising.

The ripe moon mounts an agate steeple,  
hailing the appointed time for celebrants  
of some ancient rite his cells seem to remember.

He inhales morning's turquoise horizons  
unscaled by tall containers stacked  
by corporate cliff dwellers. He moves through  
granite halls posing for the centuries,  
staging endless similes, enclosing nothing  
but samples of light  
and a lone hawk's two-note keening.  
Old angers slough off like snakeskin.  
He looks for the shine and sharp of obsidian,  
touches pinyon and a sweating pinto.

Leaving, he turns to stare at pronghorns  
as they wheel back to stare at him,  
freezing in last year's pose on the same rise.

Undiluted azure anoints him now,  
his mouth tastes of last night's royal.  
And the crimped mass of wires within him  
loosens like the brittle clench  
of a resurrection plant greening open in rain.

FOLLOWING OCTAVIO PAZ

From a safe distance  
I wanted to have a serious talk with Death  
but it's always too busy.  
Creeping beneath the floorboards,  
dropping out of the sun on a single filament  
like a spider. Right in someone's face.  
Always practicing its craft, its stealth.

Lacking humanity, I suspect Death lacks gender  
as well. But perhaps "it" offends it. Perhaps  
it is indeed male--as usually designated by poets.  
Or perhaps a Yang-Yin combination. Maybe  
it has a given name we don't yet know,  
and its own personal pronoun. Another enigma.

I wanted to ask the lichen questions,  
the ones with wet black smell clinging  
to the undersides, arcane queries  
knotted in coils beneath slimy earth  
where worms tunnel as they please. Questions  
wrapped in hand-me-down vanities and fire's greed  
and the hauteur of stone.

Why couldn't Death just reply sidewise  
while following its agenda? It needn't disrupt  
routine. Sotto voce, it could converse with me  
as it continued its regular rounds.  
There are things I demand to know as I stand  
in morning's disappointing light, still able  
to reason, still able to watch the city  
mimic itself in academic incandescence and dust.

Nameless, sexless, or not-- Death has no call  
to be snobbish. Maybe if I join  
the roistering revelers-- an ethnic melange--  
hire an eloquent spokesperson-- surely  
it can't snub us all. All we want is a few answers.  
See? I'm in the company of like-minded companions,  
just one of the crowd. Each of us wants to know  
the same things. Maybe Death could toss us  
a few quick words of explanation in passing.

I don't want to wait  
until I have its undivided attention.

BEFORE A POET KNOWS WHAT SHE IS

Eyes wild with light as a puma's,  
blossoming breasts up-tilted to summer,  
topaz and nectarine heraldry of Erato in jeans.

Marriage pleas began in high school,  
arms and lips she liked, bottled forest scents,  
denim and leather always near.  
New sums to sift at the deep waking.

Suitors spoke hoarsely of apartments,  
TVs, beds, money, children.  
Two promised a car of her own.  
She ran alone to wrap night around her.

Without secret pages,  
too shy to say how warlock winds  
hurried her blood, how river tongues rhymed  
with hers, promised more. Too new

to tell how strings and reeds in minor keys  
leaned her on shoulders of granite,  
closed her eyes with breath of living green  
while wilderness sinew held her closer.

Too unsure to speak of her unnamed babies  
sleeping in an outgrown cardboard box  
pressing blue gentians from ditches.

## DRIVING THE MIDNIGHT LOOP

As Sunday ends the city is as vacant as I am.  
Blisters of light sting bare streets and sidewalks.  
Michigan Avenue voltage shivers through me.

My wires cross and short out. The Chevy's worn tires  
make a heatless sizzle. The engine tenors its monotone  
to the sibilance of sudden lakefront rain. I turn off  
radio arias of alienation and hum my usual obbligato--  
no flatted fifths, just aniline-dyed sharps. Same tune  
as last year when you left me in the dark.

Night is a long leech. I feel it fattening on me.  
Millions of rounds of electric ammo fire at it,  
bounce off. Brilliant white shrapnel pelts me.

I try to stuff some in my jacket but it goes black.  
And I'm riddled with shallow concavities  
bleeding faint shades of light I've been hoarding.

Way back I passed something I need, maybe  
on the verge of the Magnificent Mile or in the gorge  
between highrises. Nothing I ever bought was it,  
pricey or cheap. In reflections, sometimes I think  
you're still out there on an angle of shine,  
on the bright bias of the possible.

Light drifts away. Warmth escapes me. Maybe  
I'll recharge in the a.m. like a lizard on a log.  
Somewhere are people I forgot, people I promised,  
people I owe. They roll up in winter potholes  
and old shadows with broken names. The moon comes out,  
sheds a pale legend all over the roof-scraped sky;  
it rides the leech's back, irisless eyeball sporting  
a cold wet halo. The road ahead's closed for repairs.  
No right turn. I shake my head at two leftover tourists  
who hope my roaming headlights are a cab's. I scoop up  
each shard of loose illumination, rub it in my wounds.  
And the leech is still hungry.

## CRUCIBLE

He used to stop late at night and stand  
on a certain lip of Shades Mountain, staring  
down in the red-rimmed bowl of Birmingham.  
Now, when his thumb and finger press his eyes,

he can still see harsh crimson flare up  
like an old Bessemer converter spewing  
across Alabama dark. He can smell the hot rush,  
feel the burn smack his face.

He thinks about the ways work molds a man, pours  
him out of a boiling river of iron, an offering  
to old Vulcan's 55 feet of rusty arrogance  
pedestaled on Red Mountain, guarding the ore seam.

Matching mettle deep in his Welsh breed rises  
above slag, turns him, magnetized, toward  
the final furnace, believing he can ignite the sky,  
no longer envious of the statue's raised flambeau.

He hits the mid-channel popping, sparkling,  
blinding heaven-white, spraying fire  
hell could be proud of, knowing his worth  
better than when he was young and molten.

And after 40 years, he can look up at the old god  
he refused the sacrifice of his sons; he can watch  
as welders repair the sagging torch and arm, and he  
can laugh as he flexes the ingots of his biceps.

DESERT ODYSSEY, 1991... AND NOW...

This dreaded sea is dry: its wavy crests  
Designed of sand, its granulated tides  
Eternally unscheduled, owned by wind  
Or gravity when overburdened heights  
Slide down a concave swell. Or when disturbed  
By men in motion and their weaponry.  
A mortar shell will spew a mighty splash.  
The hole fills up like leakage in a bilge.

Could be the desert has its own Poseidon.  
And if he chose this realm for peaceful rest,  
His hideaway for secret meditation,  
He's still incensed from those first noisy lights  
That ripped the dark and crazed the blistered sky.  
No doubt the god remains enraged enough  
To heap more bile on mortals who set fires  
That char the clouds, and blasts that crater hell.

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 cruel sun.  
Without a trident, does he wield a spade,  
This unknown deity whose spleen we rasp?  
What sacrifice will he require of us?

My tough seaworthy ship: a tank with eyes  
To leap horizons, pierce the dark and relay  
Images Athena couldn't conjure.  
My crew: well-trained but none so battle-wise  
As those who followed brave Odysseus.  
I make myself no such comparison,  
No hero. No enchanted sojourns, nymphs  
Or ogres-- ah well, maybe counting colonels.

Eng-Lit Professor, weekend warrior  
For years-- small incongruity in that.  
My Army unit called me up and shipped  
Me out, late of a college classroom where  
I taught the classics: Homer, Virgil, Dante,  
Themselves no strangers to the Fates and strife.  
And like most men who fight on foreign ground,  
The mind survives on memories of home.

(cont.)

## MEGA CITY MARVEL

Safe from weather and vehicular distraction,  
you enter a pedestrian paradise called The Skyway.  
Exemplar of the good life: umbrella and coat unnecessary.  
The yonder concept: neo-magic non-yellow brickless roads  
leading you on. Warning: Wear shoes built for mileage.  
Fine tune your sense of direction. Check your levels  
of credibility, your synapse spark plugs. Know where  
you came from. Carry plenty of thread.

Seven square miles of urban core lie far, far below.  
Polished glass on all sides affords sweeping views,  
mysterious, speculative, unimagined panoramas, billed  
as "Unmatched Elsewhere." And there's a story about  
soul mates who met up here, married in Shoppers Chapel,  
stayed, opened a poetry slam venue, made a deal  
to be demos while sleeping in a mattress store.

A space walk without a tether. The city is down there;  
it's crucial to believe that. Winter fog engenders  
speculation akin to insider-trading from natives,  
and risky bravado from out-of-towners. You soon learn  
some of the locals are lost. Exit directions on elevators  
and winding stairs are written in Martian idiom. Entries  
to eye level fast food, fashion, fine art, footwear,  
a French salon, photo studios and five star restaurants  
are flawlessly pinpointed and explicit.

It's necessary to always be somewhere definable,  
needful to know where somewhere is. You scan  
the high outside ether for UFOs, maybe lunar landers.  
You expect a straw man and a silver someone in a funnel hat  
to cross your path. Now and then you allow your theories  
on position to be scrutinized by fellow travelers who seem  
knowing. Your nose moistens a tinted window as you point  
down to stationary shapes you suspect are landmarks,  
identifiable terrestrial structures. Again, you share  
your fondest beliefs with a man who shakes his head.

Your afternoon rambles, lacking closure. A girl's voice  
rises. She and a small dog pass you from behind. How long  
have you been sealed in climate-controlled ambiguity,  
post-modern steel and glass running all over town,  
bridging every possibility but yours?

#### BEST OF SHOW

Their names are Jan and April, Mae and June,  
four artist friends of mine who paint the scenes  
around them to their own, their female tune.  
They see with poets' eyes; the blues and greens  
they ply in unique ways are new-coined words  
to say each hue in tones unheard before.

And yet, the viewer/reader recognizes birds,  
and rivers, gardens, though a different door  
has opened on their forms-- apprised  
on levels offering a deeper look.  
They've captured insight into light-- surprised  
and pleased that sketches in their newest book  
of unrehearsed and random angles caught  
the painters' focus and will be preserved  
for other devotees-- who may have thought  
impressionists had claimed the oeuvre and curved  
the ultimate in bright refraction's play  
to ends unparalleled by womans' strokes.

With former preconceptions brushed away,  
my friends blend pigments, textures as they coax  
my eye. Then Jan invokes her nuanced theme:  
Three herons fly in haiku silhouette,  
a spread-winged arc as lightning rips the seam  
in hoarded blue to pay off March's debt.

As April paints in shades of lullabies  
and shadbush-stippled air, her spectrum blends  
with Mae's and June's like summer fireflies  
aflash with hints of late-evolving trends.  
A dash of Dada, feminine designed,  
appears in images of bold rebirth  
(retitled "Mama" in my biased mind),  
enhancing old perspectives of this Earth--  
romancing all the qualities of worth.

"--she thinks I'm a bit of class, [and] I know the way to get around her, man. She's a bit gone on me."  
TWO GALLANTS-- James Joyce's DUBLINERS

DUO UPDATE

The pair of sports from Dublin days of yore  
stepped on a time machine. Their vessel's yare,  
its secret route, has brought them to our year.

Deposited downtown when they arrive,  
they see enticing places they may rove.  
A woman with a mike begins to rave.

A mob of feminists is on the street.  
The men start past, one with his studied strut.  
The women cut them off and back them straight

against a wall. "It's you we're here for, chaps,  
two specimens from former days, two cheaps  
who need someone to tenderize your chops.

"You two can stand before us with your tale;  
we'll listen, sympathetic, as you tell  
of making that poor servant girl your tool."

These women don't resemble those they've known.  
They snatch the fellows' clothes until they've none  
between them and the winter's sunless noon.

Each stands unclad, self-conscious as a clone.  
Each wonders if his underwear was clean,  
and neither understands the role of clown.

As one, the women laugh a chilblain laugh.  
The men, amid jeers, try to be aloof.  
This isn't worth their coming back to life!

Attempts to flee, to protest, come to nil.  
A distant tower clock begins to knell.  
A blue-jeaned mama points a fuchsia nail:

(cont.)

"You, Corley, made a simple maid believe  
that you were more than greedy hands and love  
of gin. And that you'd earned your right to live.

"You try to hide one party to the crime,  
you sorry sleaze, not worth a cracker crumb.  
Your kind would steal a little kid's ice cream.

"And Lenehan--- abetting is a sign  
of sloth. Impatient for the final scene,  
you profited from someone else's sin.

"Now entertain us with your charm and wit.  
Oh, gee, it's started raining-- you'll get wet.  
Just have yourselves a shower while we wait

"for you to taste the errors of your ways,  
the gall of all your perpetrated woes--  
before we send you back-- we hope, more wise.

"As drivers curse, you'll snarl the traffic lane;  
you'll dance its length, each like a crazy loon,  
as you repeat in unison this line:

"It's dangerous to victimize a female.  
We think you'll see the light within a mile--  
and things you'll have eternity to mull."

HOW COME HE DOESN'T LOSE WEIGHT?

He gets plenty of exercise:  
Walking on peoples' toes,  
Running others down,  
Climbing the social ladder,  
Seesawing on issues,  
Jumping to conclusions,  
Juggling the facts,  
Dodging responsibility,  
Throwing everyone a curve,  
Pulling fast ones and  
Pushing his luck.

--Glenna Holloway

## A MOON FOR OSCEOLA

All things Floridian belonged to Spain  
Whose local regents had enough complaints  
From neighbors to the north to fill their casks  
(Still empty of expected gold not found).

South Georgia settlers said their meat and corn,  
Their tools and guns were crossing borderlines  
To disappear in Seminole encampments.  
The Indians hid fleeing slaves to boot.

When both sides fevered up like flesh with deep  
Infected sawgrass cuts, the fire began  
To flare in thatched-roof huts, and swiftly spread.  
Americans torched Osceola's land,

Destroyed an Apalachicola fort.  
He pushed them back each bloody time until  
Invasion came from Andrew Jackson, staggered  
Osceola, captured Pensacola.

Unauthorized, the clash embarrassed Congress.  
But Jackson was admired; his government  
Did not reprove his actions or his gall.  
With artful diplomatic moves, outrage

Was soothed by buying the peninsula  
From Spain. The Indians agreed to leave  
Their almost-island home for lavish lands  
Described to them in hundred-dollar words:

Their own abundant boon called Oklahoma.  
But Osceola knew it was a trick.  
When agents came to take his slave-born wife,  
He killed one white man, killed a Creek chief, fought.

A new war, longest war of all, began.  
By treachery foes captured Osceola.  
They chained him in a Georgia jail. Three months  
He cursed his white blood, died not knowing what

Became of family or Florida.  
His own adopted people called him "hero."  
Even whites who knew him paid him tribute.  
On winter nights, full moon's called "old Creek moon"

By some, or "Seminole tiara" when  
It's new, designed to fit the fairest bride.  
But many call it: "Osceola's moon,"  
The pagan light an army could not douse.

## 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. The fit was so perfect,  
the feel-- I even slept in it.

People always envied the blazonry  
in the center, the ivory unicorn  
with his ruby gaze. My fingertips store  
memories of pearls and emeralds. Your eyes  
relayed every mythic glint back into mine.

Such obvious cachet opened paths in the crowd,  
manipulated the dark, kept the years kneeling.  
You must have playfully slipped it off  
while I was forgetting something.

You shouldn't tease me like this.  
Suddenly, time is rampant.  
Smiles don't approach me.  
No dancing facets shine through my shadow.  
My head feels weightless  
and cold.

## COUNTERPOINT: THE LOST CORDS

The therapists all gave her up: "No hope,  
why waste your time? She'll never speak a word,  
she's closed her mind. The case will break your heart."  
Like high-pitched bees trapped in an envelope,  
an idea whined inside my head. I heard  
concertos in my sleep; they could impart  
a healing strength, if not to her, to me  
if this approach should fail. My reasoning  
was simple: Savagery had caused her state--  
let human heights expressed harmonically--  
the smoothing, prodding shades and seasoning  
of music throb down walls and activate  
her frozen cords and self-imprisoned tongue.  
Re-tune her soul to beauty, played and sung.

The reels unrolled their offerings in her room.  
Soft-spun sonatas, choirs and symphonies  
recorded on her brain as sure as wax.  
Rachmaninoff-- her eyes began to bloom--  
Dvorak, Brahms, Tschaikowsky's melodies  
seeped in and out the conscious parallax  
of time and tone, entwined inseparables.  
Romanced, wing-shod, string-plucked-- who could resist?  
One day I stopped the sound-feast. She must ask  
for more. She must end the silence. Miracles  
began. She'd felt some chord resolved with Liszt--  
Les Preludes-- wanted it again. Her task  
was plain. She had to name or hum the thing.  
And music won. She found the notes to sing.

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appears in images of bold rebirth  
(retitled "Mama" in my biased mind),  
enhancing old perspectives of this Earth--  
romancing all the qualities of worth.

### POTATO SECRETS

Smooth as Moroccan leather, they rolled  
each time the grocer tried to make pyramids  
of them. I selected them one by one,  
each perfect individual,  
paying more than the 5-pound bag price.

Matching in size and symmetry, the shade  
of pecan shells and almost as firm,  
they lay basketed in my pantry  
a week, dreaming their long lineage.  
Now when I open the door,  
they insinuate earth smell  
into my head, an old insistent musk  
reeking of history and ethnos.  
Darkness has activated their eyes;  
pale blips poke out of their sockets.  
My mother, honing my kitchen skills,  
says these pointed knurls reaching  
for new life must be dug out;  
they're poison raw, and they steal  
flavor if cooked.  
Their future ends in a trash bag  
hurried past my suspicious cat  
while their bulbous brown origins  
hiss at me from the oven.  
And my mothert hums in alto monotones,  
lacing sour cream with salsa and chives.

## JOURNEY FROM JAUVE

The travelers watched their home sun fade.  
Engines thrusting blind,  
they sped past stars, through shine and shade,  
their mission a desperate kind.

Their craft turned Earthward as they planned.  
The crewmen knew each risk  
to save their desiccated land  
rode on their aerodisc.

New water sources they must find  
through intercosmic aid.  
With hope, they sought a mastermind.  
They carried gold to trade.

Jauve's metaphoric basilisk  
turned lakes to smoking sand  
and crumbled hills with one tail whisk.  
Would Earthmen lend a hand?

Jauve's early natives once had flown  
to many far off spaces.  
Their ancient books said some were known  
as incubative places

for enterprising anthropoids  
and healthy atmospheres.  
Intelligence was well-employed,  
no signs of war or fears.

This time, would welcome shape their faces?  
Maybe they've now grown  
ill willed, with battle-ready bases  
framing all they own.

The strangers were all volunteers;  
their blistered asteroid  
had bred a race of engineers,  
life's outpost in the void.

They prayed to any god below  
who guided Earthly turns  
to pour his mercy on their woe,  
and help with their concerns.

They slipped through threats of surface burns,  
their ship's odd shape aglow.  
The universe both lives and learns  
where daring travelers go.

#### TABLE SETTING

Last night your only daughter prepared  
all your favorites-- wild rice and roast duck,  
pink champagne, centerpiece of mauve asters  
for our gourmet silences to orbit.

Exuberant bubbles flung themselves on linen,  
condensation crept down cut glass. I tested  
my words for doneness, thoughtfully tasted  
each seasoning before my tongue released it.

I hoped you'd be pleased with the good things  
I served. I sheathed my knife edges, quietly  
swallowed your rummaging fork remarks.  
My voice stayed in the alto range all evening.

How long do mother/daughter banquets last?  
I left your premises years ago, a lone moth  
escaping the cakes in your closet.  
Still we feed at these movable feasts.

You sat staring off, oily opalescence gaining  
on the entree, the trail of our sentences.  
I smiled and touched the flowers: "You once  
made me a velveteen dress the same color."

You said you didn't remember that at all,  
and shades of purple just reminded you of pain.  
You ignored a second helping  
of my dated appetizers, then sniffed

at the current kettle and declined the ladle  
designed for your grip. Why  
must you keep saving the old torn giftwrap?  
Slipping it under my pillow at bedtime, fanning

the mustiness of it as I shower, fluttering it  
against my windshield on the tollway.  
Then after last night's table was cleared,  
leftovers saved for another venue,

you unsnapped your purse, picked  
at the foil-wrapped roll under your tissues,  
and offered me a broken lozenge  
coated with the lint of love.

!%.

## CONTINUUM

Today  
Is always less  
Than hope would have it be.  
Tomorrow is what could not be  
Today.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT POEMS

Do poets create them?  
More likely they infect us,  
incubate in us,  
their dividing cells expanding  
to claim space. And we try to be  
available as volunteer hosts.

Some stanzas form like stars,  
engines of generation  
followed by a trail of sparks.  
Others smoke with modernism.  
Some are fueled by ancient stock  
simmered for centuries.  
And if they survive and fly,  
the sum of each orbit  
will ember in places  
where nothing else can lodge.

The rarest, most elusive kind  
scuttle off like scorpions,  
stingers raised, spring-loaded,  
patient in dim corners.  
Watching. Waiting for the moment.

I go after them with a torch  
and a bare hand, no creator,  
not even a capturer,  
just a willingness to suffer  
their strikes for the chemistry  
they transmit:

Potent instruments of thrust,  
animate with substance and heat  
and power to disturb  
idleness and apathy. Not meant  
to finalize breath or beat--  
but maybe to make each tremble--  
if only for a moment.

## LEARNING YOUR OWN

After ages of staring blind into empty glare,  
searching for wisdom, hoping,  
squinting into the white whelm of clouds,  
suspecting music just under the surface  
if only you could get close enough to hear it--  
you suddenly see the birds:  
Grace notes from the highest scale,  
perched on the treble staff.  
Maybe they were there in the beginning,  
dreaming their wings; maybe they arrived  
this moment on the first faint edge of harmony.

They free fall, arc and gyre,  
then pose as finials on spires of light.  
They soar again on vowels of exultation, vibrato  
of tenors and sopranos holding at the top  
of their range, mindless of time or breath.

They orbit the sun and return, dipped in azure  
and indigo, trailing fire from tertials and tails,  
circling at eye-level until you recognize them,  
sing them-- your own human joy:  
Saved in small increments, amassed over years.  
Anthems flown from their long-dim cage.

## TEXTURE TRIP

After the storm, a found art collage:  
Opal-studded flora nodding yes,  
inlaid pocks and crevices,  
dimpled topsoil, stippled velvet  
and silvered fissures. Microcosmic  
oceans in lily chalices, random droplets  
sending tides around their coral walls,  
stamens bowing with second-hand drips,  
dollops rolling off long leaf veins.  
Wind-roughed green waled with straw,  
stems mud-beaded like frog hide.

Light making glazes,  
bubbled paint on a wrought iron bench  
sloughing oxide flecks, free-form sequins  
falling on the dusty miller fuzz.  
Blossoms like hand-wrung wash  
littering the grass with their memories  
of the rainbow.

My trowel, stakes and shears  
are reluctant to restore my will.

## SUMMER STOCK

Ten-year-old boy: tan face, grass-stained bottom,  
trading heavily in risky ventures and strong sun  
while girls retreat to shelters. He speculates  
on topsoil and puddles iridescent with oil.  
He squanders and keeps, banks nothing  
while earning high percentages at rising rates.  
Dividends mount in the black of accumulating mud.

Windfalls cling like cockleburs.  
Perquisites accrue easily as polliwog legs.  
His red Irish setter, incandescent as carnelian,  
returns everything he expends, untaxed, fetched  
on command. With a garter snake curled around  
his futures, he draws out interest like threads  
in torn denim. Some days he makes quick profits  
trading night crawlers for bluegills.

He grows with the insistence of mosquito whine.  
Daily investments rosy as scraped knees,  
he collects hot residuals each passing hour.  
He splits with me his shares of late day gold  
as he comes in to supper  
hoarding August under his fingernails.

"Of good and evil much they argu'd then...  
Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie."  
--John Milton, Paradise Lost, ii, 562-65

I, IGNOTIUM PER IGNOTIUS

Diabolus is passe and outgrown.  
My kingdom is secure, my self unknown.

Partial truth is my favorite emissary, and pious pulpits  
hung with symbolized silk. I have no need of atheists,  
false prophets and their babbling. I was born  
from mutant atoms and the mental womb in labor  
through the centuries of science and civilizing.  
Progress is my strength. Prosperity for some at any length.

I had a hundred native sires all overthrown  
like Odin, Ares, Thor, and bumbling Mulciber--  
best known as Mammon. Not even Milton knew the rest--  
(just think of how his epics would have bulged had I  
emerged back then to tantalize and plague his pen  
with my conception's hieroglyphs): They merged, they all  
became one traveling salesman-god who never thought  
his wedding rape of Mortal Mind would bear a thing  
but vitriol and violence, a misbegotten heir without  
a crown. My father went his way assured of amnesty  
from Belial, imagining his throne infallible.

I made my mother find and slay my sire, the clumsy satrap,  
strutting with his naked sword and swilling blood by day--  
no match for her, her battering ram of reason and religion.  
No matter some convulsive cults still bow before  
his sometimes-ghosts-- the throngs perform their rituals  
for ME! The masses pay me homage, human sacrifice, the scale  
so grand the Devil almost died of envy-- easy victim of my kiss  
of practicality. He hadn't dreamed of any foe outside the host  
of heaven. Thus robbed of might he writhes in toxic torpor.  
The hordes, enlightened now, deny him all existence, bury him  
in mythic dust as fires of Pandemonium are doused.

This gem-encrusted joke! Globe guardians, pew sitters,  
squatters on the earth, the brave custodians of humanism shout  
and grant me noble names. They watch me rise, a monolithic  
paragon, an arrow aimed at heaven, pointing iridescently,  
precisely on its target. Oh, the farce! The righteous rationale,  
the Gnostic good, the Savior syndrome! Satan merely quoted  
scripture to his ends. I write it, burn The words in liturgy  
then purge the pray-ers, sear their souls with dedication flames.

The people want machines, solutions, rights,  
and mighty citadels in Draco's heights.

I give them miracles, small victories and clever nostrums  
tailor-made for death whose bastions in earth's privy  
I will storm. I'll let them find out life, I'll let them make  
It, let them keep it longer. Yet they won't discover  
what they have. I'll lend them power, feed them with it  
while I wear the wreaths of simple service, wash myself  
in love then pass the drippings to the humble drove.

The pose is priceless. Now that Satan sleeps who can suspect?  
I show the holy signs, the visions and the end-time parables.  
In God's own name, the millions worship me!  
So who will notice how the road is paved  
with slowly sinking monuments? Who'll guess the compass point  
is skewed, and clocks are secondary idols, mine alone,  
whose hands enthrall, whose workings I align?

Yes, I have challenged God-- Who lets man rule his destiny.  
And man...is such a fool...

OUT ON STADIUM ROAD

Here I am driving my Chevy,  
Hoping the traffic is light.  
Up ahead seems more than heavy.  
Soccer games open tonight.

Hoping the traffic is light?  
Fantasy in the extreme.  
Soccer games open tonight,  
Gridlock and fumes reign supreme.

Fantasy in the extreme  
Lends me some calm and control.  
Gridlock and fumes reign supreme,  
Temper and time take their toll.

Lend me some calm and control,  
Dear Lord, it's starting to rain!  
Temper and time take their toll,  
Thinking this trip is in vain.

Dammit, just look at that rain!  
Twelve miles-- not much to expect.  
Maybe this trip is in vain--  
Oh-oh, somebody just wrecked!

Twelve miles-- too much to expect.  
Should have left home before six.  
Dear God, there's four of 'em wrecked!  
Unhurt-- but we're all in a fix.

Next time leave home before six.  
Now how can a tow truck get through?  
And how did we get in this fix?  
Good drivers are getting too few.

So how can a tow truck get through  
This mess for an hour at least!  
The good drivers number too few.  
Impatience is rising like yeast.

A mess! For an hour at least.  
Ahead all the traffic is heavy.  
Impatience keeps rising like yeast.  
And here I am. Stuck in my Chevy.

--Glenna Holloway