

The coast guard station men came out to help,
No longer snickerers, but not convinced.
So many things gone wrong, so many times.
The shapes, the shafts, the theories of lift.
Just yesterday the half-tamed hawk had failed
When guards helped pulley Flyer up the hill.

It blundered down Kill Devil, broke a skid.
But now with gawkers gone-- today-- today
Could unchain history from gravity,
Could free man from the limits of his lot.
As Orville's big Ohio hand lay on his dream,
He felt it thrum with life, its substance sound.

Fresh winds concaved the dunes as Orville prayed,
An upturned-head, an unclosed-eyes petition.
Then Wilbur slowly nodded, yanked his cap
And hurried up the strand where Flyer stood
A hulking hawk with wings of forty feet,
Repaired, impatient to perform its role.

Old Bankers cooked fish stew and mended nets.
Out on its tracks, the hawk was warm, intent
On lifting its own weight with man along
To hold it true. And Orville mounted, prone,
The trembling species growling to be freed
Upwind, his leanness part of Flyer's form.

The hybrid, flesh and fabric, wire and oil,
Left wooden rails and climbed its element
As startled gulls veered from the creature's path.
And high as they fled, cheers went higher still.
In flight for thirteen seconds--but enough!
It vindicated its design, its name.

As Orville grinned, his brother ran to meet
The clumsy crate he rode. To take his turn
To keep the noisy dream aloft, inhale
Its fumes, extend its reach, exceed the time.
Twice each, the brothers broke an earthly law
Until almost a minute Flyer flew.

It claimed the air and arced the emptiness,
Its altitude eight-hundred-fifty feet
For half a mile above the ancient shore
Of Hatteras, above the tossed-up caps
And shouts of coast guards plus one Dayton "boy,"
Half-owner of the dream he pushed so high.

--Glenna Holloway