

## SPACE QUEST

## Hymn to the American Desert

Come traveler,  
be rid of recycled air and weighted shoes,  
(though you may want a heat shield by day).  
Come out on earth's sueded curve  
blown beige and bare, let light scour  
civilization from your eyes  
enough for you to see the lavender  
and cerulean fourth dimension foyer.

Read the coded map of the night walkers  
and the sidewinder's graven intaglio  
like shadows of a spiral galaxy. Leave  
human footprints on granulated layers of always  
where ocotillos comet their reds across solar winds.  
Agave rises like Venus, riding  
selected vertebrae of the planet's arched chine,  
offering salvers of gold to jealous suns.

Climb to the sculpted apogee built of itself  
without a spine except for cactus,  
borrowed bones and hoarded powder  
from other millenia's seas. Then follow  
Hogarth's curve downward, sunsetward  
to the perigee valley, clinging to the rim  
of the possible, just this side  
of incisive sapphire's edge.

Come wade a dry ocean of light, swim and sail  
its tides before the nearest moon steals  
its roar, before blossoming cosmos withdraw  
fuchsia rays, and the skink surrenders its warmth  
to dusk or the owl. Let the weightless part of you  
stalk coyote and badger through orbiting night  
and obsidian reflection, keeping tethered  
to legacy rhythms only your blood remembers.

Track Orion through creosote bush and saguaro,  
share his potluck until the life star  
returns to silence dark's movers and shakers  
with nails of morning, tonnage of light.  
And soon, if you come naked and alone enough,  
you can exchange all your learning for truth.

a clever and poetic  
invitator - The  
reader accepts -

Such syntax!

Such imagery!

Sentence starting with  
A GAVE was difficult to  
masticate but I chewed  
enough to keep chewing.

Very well done.

April 1940

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(5) GLENNIA HOLLOWAY  
 A judge takes a risk in admitting a subjective response to a poem. They admiration for the work of this Georgia O'Keeffe almost made selecting this poem a must. Had it been a "poem" poem, rejection would have been equally obligatory.

## CUTTING A FINGER ON OBSIDIAN

to Georgia O'Keeffe

Third  
Best  
Poem

Congratulations!  
Z.M.

ALEXANDRA,  
AVX  
NLAPW

Searching,  
plodding in sand-filled shoes  
through shimmers of heat,  
we never met  
yet I knew her  
in veinous ways--  
in behind-the-eyes ways  
where light strikes  
matches in the secret vaults  
of knowing.

Exclaiming aloud and alone  
when the desert showed me its bones,  
its spiny life-- still and green  
or sidewinding,  
I knew her.

We passed at angles on the parallax  
of light out on Hogarth's curve  
blown beige and half bare--  
palimpsest for colors and shapes,  
some knee-skinning, some cheek-soft,  
seeping in and out of each other  
under the mallet of light.

She is willful and wild  
as a spirit hawk. She is  
lava glass trapping fire  
beneath conchoidal wrinkles.  
She is hands brushes eyes  
no longer peeling light,  
feeling its pulse,  
shedding it like snakeskin  
and leaving it to iridesce  
and dry on canvas--  
but still living  
where I know her.

Good -

This poem is one  
answer to the  
epistemological  
question, "What can we  
know and how can  
we know it?"

A strong poem  
Poem is form & its  
language structure  
Virtually every line  
uses to a clearest.

One who believes in celebrating a broader audience for poetry has a problem with this poem since it is hardly a poem for "blue collar" readers. The cultural allusions ~~assume~~ presume a knowledge of art; but then, all allusions are based on assumptions. Even Biblical allusions suffer as the hearts of some readers today.

(59)

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## THE STAR SALESMAN

You must forgive my flippant prosey style,  
 It's native to this territory's scene  
 Like mini-calculators, cabs and booze.

Congratulations  
 on winning 3rd  
 prize.  
 1.m

I sprawl the king-size hotel bed and stare.  
 My all-wool alter ego hangs alert,  
 Fresh pressed and waiting for the morning's cue.  
 My forty dollar name designer tie  
 Most likely has a spot that must be sponged  
 Before I sleep. My Gucci shoes are shined  
 For each rehearsed approach. But there's no role  
 For sweet success tomorrow. Or next week.

A dozen times a month I play this lead--  
 Instead of hotdogs, dine on haute cuisine.  
 The bottom line is (don't you hate that line)  
 Our customers aren't clapping for our number.  
 However primped and powdered or threadbare  
 They make it sound, their script says NO, a word  
 Of lead and ice that lodges in soft parts  
 Beneath my vest, attacking gourmet spoils.  
 (I'm sure you note the comic undertones  
 That permeate this neo-classic farce.)  
 Still, I provide expected locomotion  
 For this fine costume to complete the plot,  
 To make the entrance and escort the client  
 To lunch, silk lining iridescent wit,  
 Lapels well tailored with sincerity,  
 Pants creased with confidence. Bright anecdotes  
 Emerge from pockets, practiced protocol  
 And uptown jokes, a little charge card magic--  
 Then when the show plays out, the wound-up mime  
 Propels the props to yesterday's airport.  
 And there this woven retinue, almost  
 Adept enough to give its own performance  
 Will go inanimate back in the plane,  
 At last unfolding in home's terminal  
 To wait in line in Ma Bell's crowded alley,  
 And from the slept-in depths yield change enough  
 To call-- report the bust to amateur  
 Directors of these high-camp one-act flops--  
 And maybe learn I don't still head the cast.

Judge's Note:

Star Salesman: Quite a good poem. Whoever wrote this has wonderful insight into the salesman's life. I am reminded of these lines from Archibald MacLeish:

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## OLD IROQUOIS WHIT, RED MAN WITH A WHITE CANE

To him our metaphors are recondite,  
Our modern terms are riddles to a brain  
Where long-gone wispy hunter's trails remain  
And only childhood images are bright.  
When man transcends his bone-imprisoned night  
To touch shore's gritty Braille or taste fresh rain,  
His lengthened grasp can snatch the key from pain  
To open what mere language fails to light.

We read to Whit then he becomes our gauge,  
Our guide for measures we can seldom find  
To pace the dark, to pacify the rage.  
For we, far-sighted, young and keen of mind,  
Are often trapped inside a blackened cage...  
Till life is lit with vision from the blind.

This is a beautiful sonnet with an unusual subject, extremely well-crafted. I can just see "Old Whit" poking his cane through his world of darkness. Well done!

Judge, Ann Gasser

## THE GARDENER'S CURSE

(On My Neighbor's Green Thumb)

43

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 rare 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 stinkweed grow up to your door.  
Next Garden Show they'll surely know  
Just who should get first prize—  
My brow of sweat was twice as wet,  
And twice as green were my eyes!

Good rhyme. A well-crafted verse that avoids the usual roses, daisies, etc.

Congratulations !

Judge, Lucille Morgan Wilson

3rd HM

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## SESTINA FOR A NEW WIDOW

Her friends were only trying to be kind;  
 They didn't mean to cause more pain. She knew  
 Most were sincere despite their awkward words.  
 The paper ran a piece detailing how  
 Her husband tried to save Breck's Bog-- "A man  
 Who gave his life for nature," she recalled.

Some criticized him while he lived, recalled  
 Him from his sheriff's job and made a kind  
 Of bargain. He could be the state's top man  
 At the Wildlife Agency-- a hat they knew  
 Would fit him. Then he couldn't tell them how  
 To run the town and quote each statute's words.

He loved the work and held them to their words.  
 Officials promised land would be recalled,  
 Returned to habitat for creatures pressed for how  
 And where to live. He understood their kind.  
 Their loss would be a grave mistake, he knew,  
 With future consequences passed to man.

He realized the frailty of man.  
 He came to find that binding legal words  
 Could still be changed by those in charge who knew  
 The right connections, debts to be recalled.  
 Developmental interests of a different kind  
 Were added to the politics of how.

Still he presented programs, showed them how  
 Preserving wetlands benefitted man.  
 He lectured, taught school children to be kind  
 To animals, excited them with words  
 and pictures, black snakes, live raccoons, recalled  
 Amusing stories of the swamps he knew.

He was a practiced woodsman, his wife knew.  
 Now day and night were plagued with questions. How?  
 He drowned. "While counting otters," she recalled  
 The captions, "Championed their cause" --a man  
 Who swam as well as they. "He slipped." The words  
 Changed nothing and no answers could be kind.

For her there'd be no kind of peace. She knew  
 She had to prove his words, insuring how  
 The only man she loved would be recalled.

This poem shows its fine intent with every projected thought and is quality writing sustained throughout. I do not believe it needs the many connotations of the word "recalled" to hold the reader. It is obvious in the last line that she wants more than casual remembrance. Lovely & purposeful. Judge, Eugenia Moore

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## SELF-CARVED EPITAPH

When I was twenty I believed John Donne:  
"No man is an island entire of itself..."  
But he was wrong. I wept-- and the mass pool  
didn't rise. I bled-- it didn't redden  
one grain of my neighbor's beach.  
I grew up and completed my island.

My play has one role. My song  
is a single perfect note.  
And no man's death can diminish me  
because I am not involved in mankind.  
Soundproof fog surrounds me, secession  
is secure. No one ever probes.  
Why, Preacher, would I send to know anything?  
My house is built of sand and furnished  
with restful dark. I polarized the currents  
and tides of my sea away from my placid steps.

And here I sink and die  
certain that no bell tolls and never will.  
None knows.

It makes a nice refrain, a clang--  
None knows...none knows...none knows.

Craftsmanship in this  
poem is good; tone  
is a bit off-putting  
Judge LB Canall

CSPS MONTHLY CONTEST FOR OCTOBER

Winner: Charles Dickson, GA. for "The Clown"

Runner-up #1 Maureen Cannon, N.J. Runner-up #2 Joan Auer Kelly, CA  
33 poets submitted 113 poems for \$80. Prize: \$40.

I regret that I will not be able to continue as Contest Chair past December. I have mixed feelings since I am relocating for a large part of the year in Mammoth Lakes, 7000 feet above the urban fray! I do feel sad about missing you. I will treasure this year. Your poems have been a feast. My replacement will be chosen by the Board and announced soon. Watch Strophes and our newsletter. My postman can be trusted to forward the strays! Happy Holidays

Dear Glenna  
The judge last time was  
Anne McClaughery  
4433 Meadowlark Lane, Santa Barbara CA  
over

(Judge who gave  
me 2nd runner up for  
Slant Rhyme for Gender  
Can't Forget)

95682

Horrors!!

I misplaced this  
until I was sorting  
for the Nov. Contest  
I am very sorry Glenna.

WINNERS' LIST  
CSPS Monthly Poetry Contest

*Animal, person or place*  
February 1988: ~~Light Verse~~, any subject/form

Ranked Winners:

1. Charles Dickson, Doraville, GA; "A Clangor of Wings"
2. Patricia Lawrence, East Sandwich, MA; "The Stranding"
3. Michael Caisse McCullough, Salem OR; "Fencelines"

Unranked listing of titles rounding out the judge's twenty overall favorites:

- "The Palace of the Quail"  
"Done, On Earth"  
"The Good Life"  
"Gypsy Fox"  
"The House and I"      *mine*  
"The Vining Age"  
"Meditating on Pine Panelling"  
"O, Golden Trout"  
"Azara, 10, Homeless"  
"Breakdown at Gail's Shell Station"  
"The Strength of Mountains"  
"Fantasy with Four Legs"  
"A Different Drummer"  
"Blue-winged Teals No Longer Call"  
"The Coyotes"  
"I Look for Him in Every Face"  
"Encounter with Canis Lupis, Canada, 1987"      *mine*

CONGRATULATIONS TO WINNERS AND PLACERS, AND THANK YOU ALL.

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3<sup>rd</sup> Place

A good winter.  
 The Alexander lines  
 don't seem suited to the  
 content of youthful  
 fantasy. However, it seems  
 to want a more  
 exciting rhythm.

## Rounds of Enchantment

Remember how we fantasized the fairy rings?  
 Those greener circles sometimes made a summer field  
 Look polka dotted from the peak of hilltop swings.  
 The giddy heights from rope-hung inner tubes appealed  
 To magic's possibilities beneath our gaze.  
 One day we thought an elf had startled our broodmare.  
 She broke into a gallop trailing high-pitched neighs  
 Then eyed the verdant spot and sidled back to where  
 The wheel-shape glowed and shimmered viridescently.  
 So we two dreamers visualized a pot of gold  
 Beneath the surface waiting there for you and me  
 But when we dug we found spadefuls of thready mold.

(One word  
unified)

Too bad our learning interferes with legend's hold.  
 Somehow life thrives around a little mystery;  
 New knowledge seems to pave the way for growing old.  
 I miss the colored overviews from our own tree  
 When blues were skies and eyes and ribbons at the fair,  
 And reds were Pop's tomatoes, barns and autumn's blaze.  
 We hadn't heard pollution's threat; we weren't aware  
 Of certain chemicals or acid rain and haze.  
 We learned to drive the tractors once we learned to wield  
 A hoe, plus all the skills between-- so many things--  
 And none of them can cope with man-made ills or shield  
 Us now. Still, I've found my smile. Look-- two fairy rings.

"Possibly because of PCB, fairy rings, circles of luxuriant vegetation associated with pastureland mushrooms, are becoming scarce in the south and midwest." --Chicago Tribune

doesn't seem a necessary inclusion. As "inspiration" for  
 the poem, it detracts.

Glenne Holloway  
 Naperville, IL.

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## WAS THERE A CHILD NAMED YOU OR ME?

Were there really  
 satin-green bugs with wire-hairy feet  
 that made current zigzag down your spine  
 when you closed them in your palm?  
 Was there a vine with valentine leaves  
 that grew mini-potatoes for doll plates?  
 And easy-to-break chocolate rocks with insides  
 like sugar compelling your tongue to the test?  
 Now it's hard to find those tiny tunnels  
 in the suntanned meadow where you fished  
 for pale humped "camels" that bit and held  
 the spit-and-mudball baited stems of fescue--  
 and farther on, an oval pond, velvet-flocked  
 with yellow-green paisley that hid small swimmers  
 trading tails for legs-- and wilding wispy smells,  
 each matched in your mind with a color...

When was it over,  
 that swift season of knowing  
 and being  
 eye level in the clover?

But wasn't there for sure a certain crouching path  
 where you couldn't see ahead and you backed off slow,  
 tightened by little corkscrews of warning  
 in your middle?  
 Still-- the field must have tilted and swayed--  
 somehow you went that way without knowing.  
 The soft fronds closed behind you  
 and the brambles made you shield your eyes.

Judge, Betsy Kennedy  
 a strong entry,  
 thoughtful poem,  
 contrasting brief spring  
 of childhood to  
 unknown adulthood.  
 Well written.

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

### THE RELUCTANT HEIRESS

It started with the book from my ninety year old Aunt Beatrice, although I didn't know it at the time. The occasion seemed more of an ending than the beginning of anything. It was obvious that she was distributing her belongings to relatives and friends so she could be sure that who got what was done according to her wishes. Why she chose me as recipient of the Preston Family History I'll never know. I had never had the slightest interest in such tedious data and would have relegated it to limbo in the attic if my husband hadn't intervened.

My husband is a hunter, pilot, a man who likes to work with wood and metal in his spare time. In short, he is an even less likely devotee of genealogy. But his life-long passion for the Civil War caused him to take the Preston Family History to his favorite chair and begin searching for my predecessors who had lived during that period.

He turned up six brothers who soldiered in the war Between the States, one of whom was my great grandfather on my father's side. His name was Stephen Smith Preston and his wife was Anastasia Neves. Two of the brothers were killed in battle. "This says your great grandfather lived through the war but it cost him his health. He served as state representative for several years before he died in Memphis, Tennessee in 1905. Did you know all that?" my husband asked. "Did you know he moved from Nashville?"

(cont.)

The Preston Family History was published by the Deseret News, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1896. It is page 17 of 226, containing a pasted-in obituary of Stephen Smith Preston.

I confessed that I didn't. "I don't even know much about my grandfather, much less my great grandfather on Dad's side. His name was John Francis and he died when my dad was quite young."

Vaguely I recall an oval-framed portrait over my grandmother's bed. The man was mustached, had heavy lids and deep-set eyes. He looked nothing like my father or uncles. I don't know who has the picture but some years ago I inherited a rosewood lap desk that my grandfather made. The joints are beautifully dovetailed and the apron is carved and scrolled. It was then I learned he had been a carpenter by trade and was fond of saying that the greatest man who ever lived had been a carpenter.

"This book is before his time but there's lots about the great-greats. You should read it." My husband's voice was insistent.

"Look, I don't have much time to spend with my best friends. I can't see poring over the history of ancestors I never saw or heard of." Then I felt a tinge of guilt as if I'd denied the people between those pages a place at my table, maybe even the simple courtesy of saying hello. After all part of my blood came from them.

"You're right, I should read it. But I doubt if there's much on any one individual, is there?"

"No, but there's enough to research further. Let's see what we can find out about the Civil war soldier first and then—"

"My do I get the feeling you're looking for fungus on my family tree? What if you find an ax murderer or even a suffragette?"

He was grinning gleefully.

Time passed and I forgot about it. Then the mail began to bulge with fat envelopes from Washington, D.C. and others bearing state seals, all addressed to my husband. On several Saturdays he dis-

(cont.)

appeared right after breakfast and didn't return till afternoon.

"All right, who is she?" I said on the third Saturday in a row.

"Well, she's the daughter of a long line of officers and statesmen, starting in Ireland and culminating in that noble breed, a Confederate captain. Unfortunately, there's a New England branch of Prestons who produced a Union general. But I think your genes are untainted." He went to the basement and came back with a large folder. "This is six months of research not counting today's."

This was my husband's gift--the carefully connected threads of my ancestry. I had no idea so much information was available nor did I dream that it had to be gathered in bits and pieces. He had written the National Archives in Washington many times. For each question, a specific form must be filled out. Marriages, deaths, military service records are not all kept the same place. He had queried the state archives of Tennessee and Virginia, state libraries, and the Nashville Masonic Lodge. Unknown to me he had read through old cemetery records and church files on our last trip south. The mysterious Saturdays had been spent at the Mormon church library in Naperville, which keeps all U. S. census records dating from the mid-eighteen hundreds on microfiche. He had put together a history of my maternal and paternal grandparents for 3 generations back. He discovered errors in the Preston book. Dates, places, even names were sometimes wrong. The book had also called my great grandfather Stephen Smith Preston, a colonel. But he was a captain of C Company, 45th Tennessee Infantry. I have his enlistment and discharge papers, even his widow's application for a pension in 1914. It was granted because of his service-related disability. It was interesting because many witnesses were called to attest to his character, his illness, his years in service, and there are hand written accounts,

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Mostly they were from neighbors and men who served under his command. They lend a flavor of the era. It's from these notes that I learned most about my great-great grandfather John, for many of the writers had known him, too, and referred to his son as "true to his father's kind."

John was a blacksmith, gunsmith and grocer. He tutored all six sons in marksmanship and at least two of them earned Whitworth rifles. John had also been a lay Methodist preacher. He was born in Virginia as were all the earlier lines. He had nine children who lived to adulthood.

But of all the information my husband gathered, and all the family he has introduced me to, it is Stephen S. who captures my fancy. I can imagine the six brothers deciding to enlist after talking with their wives, writing long letters to each other, thinking about the impending war every night before blowing out their lights. I can't appreciate their motives or their rationale today since my views are those of Lincoln. Back then I'd have been labeled a copperhead. However, had I actually lived then, it's likely I would have accepted the stand of my menfolk as other women did. It would be interesting to know their reasons for stepping into that awful war. None was a slave owner. All were Christians. They must have passionately believed in states' rights. There is evidence that Stephen and perhaps two others were acquainted with Robert E. Lee. Given their Virginia origins, they were probably all devoted to him.

While I was thinking about it, my husband came back into the room.  
"Well, how does it feel to have a Civil War hero in your background?"

"Hm?"

"You must not have read the hospital records yet," he said. "Look, Stephen S. was confined two weeks in early March, 1862, with fever and chills. Then he was back again on April 4th. He requested release from the hospital on the morning of April 6th, in order to lead his troops at Pittsburg Landing in the battle of Shiloh. This is a copy of the hospital register from the Confederate Archives in Mississippi. I think

(cont.)

"that's pretty gutsy to talk yourself out of sick bay and go take command of your company in one of the bloodiest clashes of the war. He was discharged from the army not long after that because he was so ill."

I began to see a lot of my own father in Stephen J. Stubborn, competitive, fiercely loyal. Dad's loyalty to a friend once cost him a job promotion. His stubbornness almost cost him his marriage. But active duty in there was nothing spectacular in his life. He just missed World War II because of his age. He was conservative, quiet, a devoted American. Being my father was what he did best.

I ran my hand over the thick file. The inhabitants of those pages were just average men and women, too. Six of them and their families were caught in a terrifying and dramatic time, a period my husband knows more about in many ways than his own. If not for his interest, his patience, I'd never have met my people. They have given me a new perspective, a sense of continuity in my very transient life. Maybe a new sense of nationality says it better, for whether our ancestors came from Scotch or Irish peerage, Huguenot vineyards or Newgate prison, we all share certain qualities peculiar to Americans. For better or worse, we know we are special hybrids grown in a spectacular land and we're proud of it. Thanks to my husband I've had the privilege of getting a closer look at my own deep roots.

I see just submitting this  
next year —

Dear Hazel:

Saturday, Apr, 13

Well, I've tried 3 copy machines. One blackened the whole page and left ink on my fingers when I touched it. The last two are too pale. I'm sending the best of the lot. Since I presume you only need it for identification, it shouldn't matter. I refuse to go anywhere else looking for another machine. My original is pale, too, because my little supply store was out of ribbons. My husband brought me one this morning. I do hope there's even a contest! But I decided to go ahead and write the piece because it's sort of a tribute to my husband. If you read it, you'll see what I mean.

I'll look forward to seeing you in May. Don't forget to bring your belt.

*✓ we had three  
all counted -  
so needed yours —*

Warm regards,

Glenna

P. S. I decided to enter the poem at the last minute. Not very good but maybe it will make enough entries so the awards can be presented to a worthy one.

## SOME OF THOSE BEFORE

Old John was a Blue Ridge man, tall and bearded.  
 He came down off the hump-back vertebrae of granite  
 plushed with moss to the sueded gray-green valley  
 so his "chillun could stand up straight," he said.  
 He taught six sons to hunt, to aim  
 their long muzzle-loaders so they didn't waste time  
 and powder. Their prey was white-tail deer, ~~now and~~  
 now and then black bear, and always staple rabbits.  
 They kept their larder full and never dreamed  
 their marksmanship would one day turn on men,  
 even some of their own kin. But Will and Stephen,  
Earl, young Johnny, Tom and Rollin all  
 put on Confederate gray, the color  
 of mountain storms, and afterward  
 two wives wore black, and Stephen's wife  
 would plow and harvest and do it all  
 because he came home frail and sick then died  
 before his time. But the eyes of Stephen's sons  
 glimpsed some light to guide them.  
c word?  
 They must have yearned to build and mend, to aid  
 and comfort others. There were means  
 for only one to go to school. The choice was easy.  
 That one became a physician. The other one,  
 John Francis, became a carpenter,  
 and late along his busy way, my grandfather.

Some of Those Before

Very very interesting! It would indicate  
 the subject matter in the title. What about  
 "Before My Grandfather?"

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#### SOME OF THOSE BEFORE

Old John was a Blue Ridge man, tall and bearded.  
He came down off the hump-back vertebrae of granite  
plushed with moss to the sueded gray-green valley  
so his "chillun could stand up straight," he said.  
He taught six sons to hunt, to aim  
their long muzzle-loaders so they didn't waste time  
and powder. Their prey was white-tail deer, now and  
now and then black bear, and always staple rabbits.  
They kept their larder full and never dreamed  
their marksmanship would one day turn on men,  
even some of their own kin. But Will and Stephen,  
Earl, young Johnny, Tom and Rollin all  
put on Confederate gray, the color  
of mountain storms, and afterward  
two wives wore black, and Stephen's wife  
would plow and harvest and do it all  
because he came home frail and sick then died  
before his time. But the eyes of Stephen's sons  
glimpsed some light to guide them.  
They must have yearned to build and mend, to aid  
and comfort others. There were means  
for only one to go to school. The choice was easy.  
That one became a physician. The other one,  
John Francis, became a carpenter,  
and late along his busy way, my grandfather.

October  
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### Generation Gap

My memory banks bias snippets  
from distant moving reels--  
buttons I counted on his grayish vest,  
its tailored points over matching troussers  
in a wide-arm willow chair --the view  
from inside a lap. I recall glasses  
that clamped on his nose, but not the nose  
although some people say I have it.  
There is an oval place in my mind  
framing gentle obscurities.

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

But I don't remember him, my grandfather.  
Not his face, voice, or anything he said.  
Only 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  
on the front screen door the next day  
after everyone else was gone.  
#04?

October  
47

For Hannah

A neighbor murmurs, "Hannah was so sweet  
and caring." She clucks and says it again,  
lingering over "so," letting her voice catch.  
Another adds, "So thoughtful and unselfish."  
All around the ritual room of shaking heads,  
sometime-friends recite Hannah's praise  
in psalter tones. The cloying sibilance  
laced with carnation overkill  
thick enough to replace her bier  
fuels my anger like splashed grease.

At least no mawkish mass  
will ever fill a space like this  
once my lips are cosmetically closed.  
They could never muster enough charity  
to honey their tongues with me. What right  
have they to my name in their warm mouths!

Maybe even Hannah wasn't always wonderful.  
Or maybe she ran on low amperage--  
never knowing how it is  
to operate on your own hot crossed-circuitry,  
splicing with scorched fingers  
your own frayed smoking wires.

Or maybe  
she did it all and knew it well  
under insulation of infinite grace.

In silence  
I will make myself her monument.

THE ANSWERING  
A Sequel to Browning's Evelyn Hope

Because no one has ever spoken  
Back from here, we've all supposed  
This colding seal remains unbroken,  
This ancient passage always closed.  
If only you who think I died  
Could know this is a sweet exchange,  
Could know how boundaries fade inside  
The spectrum's unimagined range!

You never would have come to me  
Had I remained a normal length  
In mortal phase. Oh, can you see  
The structured weave, the narrow strength  
Of patterns granting us a place  
In that frame's weft? A giddy girl,  
A proper gentleman of grace  
In middle years allowed to purl

Into the fabric of acceptance?  
Not while I lived, but only after,  
Could you speak this without the chance  
Of shock, rebuke, or even laughter.  
Like you, I never dared express  
My secret. Silly child, you might  
Have thought. But by this leaf you press  
Into my hand, we will unite.

Don't grieve, my dear, your words are not  
Earthbound. I hear your lover's heart  
With mine and don't despair our lot.  
New dimensions reweave my part  
As they will yours at your last breath.  
The cycling portals pivot and spin  
On far-off stars that hinge on death--  
An old wronged term that means begin.

And by your token I transmit  
My pledge through leaf-veined stillness;  
We'll meet renewed, a better fit  
With time, my touch free of chillness.  
It's fitting that my name was Hope--  
Please never abandon its muffled call  
No matter how long transition's scope.  
Here, time is nothing; love is all.

## THERE WAS A WOMAN WHO USED TO GIVE ME FLOWERS

When I was ten I heard her called a whore,  
the sentence fletched with barbs that stung my spine.  
I'd followed her through years of phlox before  
that word bored itching in my brain. Define  
the user of a hoe: But that could not  
explain the rancid tones of voice that fell  
like spattered ale-foam on my father's hot  
hearthstones. Unfitting with her bouquet smell.  
I later learned the meaning of the slur,  
through tears watched twitching suns contort with lies.  
Then wicked moons mimed coins, men's grins and her--  
while rage enlarged to learn what to desp[ise].  
My childhood, white phlox petals, all my prayers--  
quicksilver dropped on jagged granite stairs.

Long days uncoiled the ancient codes within,  
preparing me as resident temptation.  
I saw the pausing eyes my next of kin  
imposed on me, their sullen fascination  
with hip and thigh, my budding breasts. Were they  
designs of sin? Oh, for an older friend!  
The one I'd cherished so had moved away  
when father "had a word with her".... "You tend  
your lessons, girl, forget that piece of trash,"  
he growled when I inquired. I missed her more  
that season watching her garden's backlash  
of weeds where beauty used to rise and pour  
against our wall. At summer's end, I knew:  
What my father called her wasn't true.

But why did he degrade her? Why such hate  
a child could feel its pulse? The evening fire  
hissed and cracked like a rabbit gun, a spate  
of sparks gnawed on the rug. He cursed the spire  
of smoke that rose like one ghost finger prodding  
prospective hosts. He drained another glass.  
He started teasing, yellow-smiling, nodding.  
I never learned effective ways to pass  
him off. A choking feeling, hot and brittle,  
abashed excuses trailed me to my room  
attended by his grinding "Surly little--"  
My door closed on the rest. The quiet gloom  
encased my mind till sleep brought amnesty.  
I woke, my father reeking over me.

## THE HUNGER MOON

Summer is sweet on the tongue,  
soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,  
unlasting as the corn god's shades of green.

Yesterday when the sun centered on my roof,  
the red-tailed hawk reeled round the hot yellow  
forcing shut my eyes, tightening his circle  
and hurling down his cries on my doorstep.

He is back with the dawn.  
Down and down he hurls his keening  
like splinters of cold. That hawk is a prophet  
of the hunger moon-- the time of no more corn--  
a time when the deer goes--  
making no tracks to a place no man finds.  
And before he sleeps, the black bear  
eats bark and small things that crawl.

None of us will starve, not even the hawk.  
For me, famine is of the spirit  
while the body fuels on dried fare  
and sweets that come in jars.  
The wings are first to wither,  
then the deep singing.

Someday I will follow the hawk. I will climb  
past wilding mounds of dead-gold buckwheat.  
My foot will rattle shards of ancient lava,  
startling a lizard into range of talon and beak.  
I will face the she-wind  
angering in the cinder cones,  
prying at broken shadows of the sacred peaks.

There in the secret heights I will master  
the proper maintenance of wings.

## 2nd Runner Up

## OBLIQUE RHYME FOR THE GARDEN WE CAN'T FORGET

Having found it by being lost  
 I don't know if we can ever go back.  
 A gardener yourself, this won't bore you, at least.  
 Actually, we were following an antler-shedding buck.  
 By the time we picked up the left side of his regal rack  
 We'd wandered to an unknown spot  
 overgrown with corruption and the stinging reek  
 of grotesque excrescence with the breath of spite  
 and rot. We fled that oozing nightmare  
 but just as in a terror dream, each step  
 was hobbled by conspiracies of roots and mire.  
 Hulking forms of fungus made us stoop  
 as they reached to slime our hair.  
 Scratched and gasping, we came to a clearing;  
 fog isolated us, but we could hear  
 frantic groans and thrashes declaring  
 some animal (likely the buck) was trapped  
 in that hideous bog. The mist began to disappear.  
 Our feet stopped sinking. Then we tripped  
 on stones fallen from an old wall in disrepair.

When we stood and raised our eyes  
 lilacs surrounded us. A heart-shaped leaf  
 brushed my face. Our lungs filled with ease;  
 sweetness cleansed our tainted mouths. Allness of life  
 combined iris purpling together with asters. Sky-shine  
 laced petals and panicles, stippled the moss-napped floor  
 with sueded negatives of sun. Iridescent sheen  
 on shades of cinnabar and carnelian in a flower  
 never seen before drew us ahead. Wherever  
 we turned was beauty: Rhododendrons of maroon and coral,  
 thornless roses, a night-blooming cereus by day. Over  
 and under florescence we moved, accompanied by a chorale  
 of posing birds. There were no paths, just solid bloom,  
 yet our feet walked unimpeded. Nothing was random or wild  
 but there was no pattern or restriction-- only sublime  
 existence, glory of being, natural but willed.  
 The master gardener left no trace of rake, pruning shears,  
 no shriveled calyx, mulch or stakes to mar perfection.  
 Maybe we'll find it again-- hidden behind old shores--  
 But of this much we're sure, she and I-- Eden wasn't fiction.

so fully shaped - wonderful eloquence and easy-sounding  
 masterful slant rhymes - A+ vocabulary

### TROMPE L'OEIL

It means deception of the eye,  
this unique art form  
making us believe nonexistent things.  
Your den's north wall appears lined  
with shelves of brightly bound classics,  
a bust of Homer, a Ming censer, brass pots  
trailing ivy and florescence.  
The clever painter lies, then provides  
real scent of lilacs to satisfy the nose.  
But the hand that tries to grasp  
a volume of verse or feel jade's coolness  
resents being made a fool.  
And still the eye insists,  
forcing another tactile confrontation  
with flatness.

So must I resolve you  
in the brain's right and left privacy,  
in the unlighted offshoots  
that don't remember facts.  
Another artist has blued your eyes  
with faithfulness and burnished your skin  
with sweet shades. Your walk is smooth  
and the line of your throat is gentle.  
Sometimes my hand finds heat and roundness  
much more than a match for illusions  
of sight. No place wanting softness  
or substance goes empty.

Yet I know I'll touch again  
that one-dimension hardness,  
try to hold the light that isn't there,  
face that depthless smile.  
And all your old false colors  
will shame me for my blindness.

September  
72

## ROUNDS OF ENCHANTMENT

Remember how we fantasized the fairy rings?  
Those greener circles sometimes made a summer field  
look polka-dotted from the peak of hilltop swings.  
The giddy heights from rope-hung inner tubes appealed  
to magic's possibilities beneath our gaze.

One day we thought an elf had startled our broodmare.  
She broke into a gallop trailing high-pitched neighs  
then eyed the verdant spot and sidled back to where  
the wheel-shape glowed and shimmered viridescently  
and we two dreamers visualized a pot of gold  
beneath the surface waiting there for you and me.  
But when we dug we found spadefuls of thready mold.

Too bad our learning interferes with legend's hold.  
Somehow life thrives around a little mystery;  
new knowledge seems to pave the way for growing old.  
I miss the colored overviews from our own tree  
when blues were skies and eyes and ribbons at the fair,  
and reds were Pop's tomatoes, barns and autumn's blaze.  
We hadn't heard pollution's threat; we weren't aware  
of certain chemicals or acid rain or haze.  
We learned to drive the tractors once we learned to wield  
a hoe, plus all the skills between, so many things,  
and none of them can cope with man-made ills or shield  
us now. Still, I've found my smile. Look—two fairy rings.

(Fairy rings are circles of luxuriant vegetation associated with small mushrooms common to pastureland.)