

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
Naperville, IL 60565

ELF OWL
(Micrathene whitneyi)

The saguaros lose weight and pleat
as they enter the death phase. It may last
for years. It's been so long since water
made good the sky's promises
there's a rattle in the desert's breath

not made by the sidewinder.
Leafless ocotillos dangle blips of red
against day's end-- one-spark blossoms
like bobbing semaphores
signaling the elf owl to hunt.

In midnight sandshine, the tiny raptor
withdraws to its hollow
in the oldest saguaro. The cactus tightens
on its own tall thirst, narrowing its cells,
its clustered spines hard as medieval maces
guarding its deep secret moisture.

Twice more the pygmy predator haunts the night,
silence feathering swiftly over empty silence,
coming home empty.

--Glenna Holloway
--NATIONAL FORUM, Summer, 1995

NEFERTITI

Her name means "beautiful woman."
Her sculptors made sure we'd agree.
Her fame rivals most in Bronze Age lore.
Her appearance is like an omen.

Murals glorify her form,
paintings, statues, etchings.
Egypt's eighteenth dynasty
delighted in Queen Nefertiti.

Each mention of her in history
makes us want to know more.
Blank pages surround her latter days.
Her ending is a mystery.

Akhenaten, her royal husband, sired
the most exotic king of all,
now known world-wide as Tut.
It's said her stepson was inspired

by her. Perhaps she tutored him,
modeled him to rule (and model
for his sculptors too) while learning
life behind the regal scrim.

It's not known who Tut's mother was,
Akhenaten never told.
But Nefertiti loved him as her own
and raised him up to sit the throne.

Both Tut's and Akhenaten's tombs
were found with all their treasures.
No mummy, crypt or cryptic measures
carved in stone reveal her fate.

Somehow her poem failed and faded,
unsure rhythm, random rhyme,
then total disappearance
from all annals of her time.

Perhaps she trod on men's ambitious toes.
Perhaps she gathered more than she could keep.
Perhaps she made vindictive, jealous foes.
Perhaps she wound up murdered in her sleep.

She flared so bright, so brief, a wind-blown flame.
Leaving just her beauty-- and her name.

--Glenna Holloway

Author's note: The irregular patterns of rhyme and rhythm are intentional to accentuate the unpredictable life story depicted.

LAST CARD DOWN

Aunt Anastasia drove three hundred miles
to take her place in the deathwatch
with Jack and me and our old dog.
"Don't let her in," said her favorite nephew,
my husband, when I told him she was coming.
He called her the Queen of Clubs for her lack
of tact, her bossy bluntness. "She'll advise me
how to die, lay a Bible on my chest, instruct me
on eternal protocol, drill me in correct address
of angels. Next, she'll move her self portrait
from my desk to Jack's, rearrange his paper piles
while she's there, then she'll put
the dog's bowl and blanket out in the yard."
Holding hands, we shared chuckles
until she arrived to prove him right.

She told our son he was improperly dressed
for the occasion. Proudly we watched Jack
refrain from saying what surfaced in his eyes.

Bedside she bid and trumped until
the impatient patient feigned sleep. She made
a list of things I should do. Then I insisted
she get some rest after her long trip.
Jack firmly escorted her to the guest room.

My husband and I were dealt another hour,
a final royal flush. You might say Aunt A
was the ace. Our joker king died laughing.

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THE TRUTH ABOUT POEMS

Word designs are painted, carved,
a diverse array to ponder, lighten
and enlighten, or just make
the noisy world fade away for awhile.

Do we create them? More likely
they infect us, incubate in us,
dividing cells colonizing, expanding
their claim on our space. And I try
to be available as a volunteer host.

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

A few scuttle off like scorpions,
stingers raised, spring loaded,
patient in dim dusty corners,
waiting for their chance.

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 shine and heat
and power to disturb idle apathy.
Not meant to finalize breath or beat
but maybe to make each tremble--
if only for a moment.

TAPESTRY

My oar wrinkles gray water, raveling the reflection:
A giant warp of steel crawling with traffic spans
the river. Miles of bleary borders scratch dirty sky.
Creeks now gone used to keep my stitches unfrayed,
kept me close to the patterns of bass and beavers.

My origins were up there in a garden-patch bungalow
years before that burrowing segment of tollway
displaced willows and wind chimes. Nothing green
remains. The new tunnel, breechloaded with cars,
blasts a volley across the bow of my rowboat.

An oil barge passes me, rocks me under the bridge,
into its shadow and roar. And I think
of the old hilly thunder prowling the pinestands,
unmuffled by stacked concrete bins of people
thwarting its rounds, teasing the lightning.

The barge shuttles slime around the east bend
where my fever thinks scraps of my old home lie.
Too many torn things underweave the weft of the city.
And I've run out of flosses and strong thread.

SEARS TOWER

Refusing to concede the title of world's tallest,
it juts its own big shoulders above Chicago's,
convincing the sky of its rank, stray clouds
and leftover moonlight caught in its pylons.

A few years ago, on an infamous day,
unnatural clouds found their way inside,
small clusters on stair landings, dark fragments
in elevators, offices, restrooms. Mostly unseen,
they still circulate softly, now and then
fingering neck hairs, changing the texture of skin
or faintly damping low-voiced discussions.

Aeries of elegant ladies still give luncheons
for forty, layers of high risers and rollers
animate the interior, eye level with lakelight
or lightning.

Contained in 110 stories, life stories continue
on all levels, encased in custom-made climate,
flourishing on bilingual premises and promises surrounded
by glass and pink marble with its own zip code.

Wrapped in its own designer winds,
the great stack moves denizens side to side,
dependent on its whims, holding them all in sway.

ASSATEAGUE SILVER
(Equus caballus, feral)

Wrinkled, shimmering in shallow backwater,
the moon's image quivers with the crossing
of a brindled mare. She leaves
the milling passel of ponies, moves toward
a curved hump of beach carved by wind,
fringed with a mane of sea oats.

She pauses on its crest, poses farthest
from the new master with the white blaze,
now pounding after a wayward filly. He herds
her back to his clump of conquests,
tightens the circle, whinnies soft reprimands.

The brindled mare stays motionless, apart.

The stallion's ebony head raises abruptly
then lowers and swings like a pendulum.
Watching from a hummock of salt-marsh grass,
the old deposed leader backs his wounds
deeper into the night.
The victor gallops toward the brindled mare,
muscles undulating lunar light.
The mare waits a moment, turns, prances away.

The flat surf is almost soundless
with the year's lowest tide. The dunes
are ripples of sheen, dusky shapes. The mare
snorts at a scuttling crab, an oblique shadow
crossing her domain. The stallion nears,
nicks and nips at a moon streak
on her flank, hurries to block her premises.

Claiming his right to her promises, throwing
his ardent cry to the ancient salver
serving light, he declares himself best
of his remnant kind. Here in their only home
of barrier island sand biased with silver.

--Glenna Holloway

Assateague
Magazine
(Signed)

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INFRA/ULTRA

Jealous of how light lies on you
slant-sharp
probing deep
beyond my sight
beyond my touch
Long rays pattern you
seeking you out pore by pore
circling you claiming you

Shadows are not as possessive
Not like shine melting over you
sliding glorying adhesive
your skin taking it all in
radiating reveling in it
reflecting it magnifying

New day flirting through the windows
lamplight neon lunelight
you make them worshipers
Even candlelight becomes potent
winding you as an icon

How can I compete
with sun moon bulb
or flaming wick?

"Air Traffic Personnel Resign in Protest, FAA
Insists System is Adequate"
--caption, Chicago Tribune

CONTROLLER

5 Today will be his final day. Today
4 the screen will not go home with him,
3 will not cast blips astray
5 throughout his troubled thoughts, awake, asleep.
3 Forget the box of wires
4 too old for constant overloads,
5 the fragments of blown whistles, little fires

he lit beneath their apathy, the static
of officialdom-- to hell with it,
he tells himself. His attic
clear of chaos, he will walk away,
forget the scope, the strain, the weather.
His mind replays a recent night--
how cursing close the blips had come together

when he went blind and silent, and his voice
acquired an edge as if to pierce
the pilots' phones. No choice
in his remembering the iced sweat bath
before his sound and sight
were backup-patched. Now, two airliners
near a wayward Piper in his light.

Three planes, a quick synapse away from trouble,
a rain squall filling up his glass,
they speed across his bubble
parenthesized by left and right brain, judgment
held between. These dots
are why he's giving up the job,
a part of his own viscera, these spots.

He vectors them through mazes drawn on time,
each factor hung on unseen threads,
on fallible junctures, rhyme.
He prays against a failure-- mechanical
or mortal-- calls the courses,
covers odds with everything
he's got, his skill, his cells, his inner forces.

Wet turbulence outside repeats on skin.
His data banks project four million
flights this year, a spin
of numbers winging past the warning signs.
Round brightness claims him now,
his eyes burn only for these three--
for whom he knows he must provide the how.

11 lines per stanza
1+3 rhyme
5+7 rhyme
A poem septet
"A poem flows from me"
Amazing! This poem flows from me
very nicely, but it took a lot of effort to write.
I always try very hard to write poems.
As always, your friend
-Caroline

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not a poetic point, but I don't think it's that easy to put these images aside - never the poem, with its omniscient perspective, can do it.

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- standard is without spaces on either side - however, my preference is to put a space on each side of the en-dash (here represented as two hyphens).

again not so easy - the guilt being avoided is not so easy to avoid
when he went blind and silent, and his voice
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(in wonderful prose)
attic

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A wonderful poem. Leave it alone!

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Wonderful
Jew

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a tour de force!
a tour de force!
Glorious!
Wonderful.

Bailey

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I can't imagine a more
repellent or more demeaning
job. You get the tension
across to all of us who are
made before such care?
Maggie

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Can't image and
patience and
perseverance
in writing this.
CJF

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before his sound and sight
were backup-patched. Now, two airliners
near a wayward Piper in his light.

Three planes, a quick synapse away from trouble,
a rain squall filling up his glass,
they speed across his bubble
parenthesized by left and right brain, judgment
held between. These dots
are why he's giving up the job,
a part of his own viscera, these spots.

He vectors them through mazes drawn on time,
each factor hung on unseen threads,
on fallible junctures, rhyme.
He prays against a failure-- mechanical
or mortal-- calls the courses,
covers odds with everything
he's got, his skill, his cells, his inner forces.

Wet turbulence outside repeats on skin.
His data banks project four million
flights this year, a spin
of numbers winging past the warning signs.
Round brightness claims him now,
his eyes burn only for these three--
for whom he knows he must provide the how.

Wonderful
vocabulary

I am totally
unaware of this
form
but it doesn't
matter

This is a
great piece

John G.

WOMAN BEHOLD YOUR SON

The little boy was hungry,
the little boy was cold.
Not more than nine or ten
with eyes so tired and old.

His coat was torn, his shoes outworn.
His face was pale and gaunt
with deep sad eyes designed to haunt.
His stance defined forlorn.

He looked at me so pleadingly,
this young boy so alone.
The facts I learned had churned my heart
out of its comfort zone.

My plans aligned to make him mine.
I'd give him love, security,
a family, warmth and shine.
Adoption was the answer.
And in return for hearth and home,
he makes my heart a dancer.

--Glenna Holloway

TO THE IGNIS FATUUS

She lives in swamps where darkness swallows day.
Men say her hair is like the sun's corona,
The color of a waning winter moon:

A beauty strange and wild, a child of night,
Who loves to dance where twilight lurks at noon.
I followed her until she disappeared

Through sedge and brackish pools up to my knees.
I glimpsed her far ahead where ravens jeered,
Then lost her as I dodged a diamondback.

For hours I stalked her in footprintless mire.
With burning wisps she cleaved the devil's black.
She led me faster, luminous and lithe.

Sweat stung my scrapes, exhaustion stole my breath.
Behind me walked another-- with a scythe.
And still I could not let her get away.

I thought of quicksand, silent cottonmouths;
My feet entangled in a vine, I lay
In shadows, lisping ferns above my face.

Who could know my folly? Where I was?
Who would think to look in such a place?
Panic overtook me, but it passed.

I know the stories of the foolish fire.
With luck I freed myself, went home at last.
Before sleep came I vowed to try again.

Come searcher, learn the real will-o-the-wisp:
Sweet alto calls from deep within the fen,
Intoned with promises still undisclosed.

Come slog among mutated mud-grown trees
And wait for wind's unwinding tongue imposed
On wrinkled water ringing cypress stumps.

Where latent evening alters natural time,
Few fronds of morning filter down to humps
Of moss and hummocks pocked with sinking holes.

(cont.)

Your myths and struggling gods, your snarled concerns
Are mimed by strangler figs, green aureoles
Surrounding rotten logs suffused in weeds.

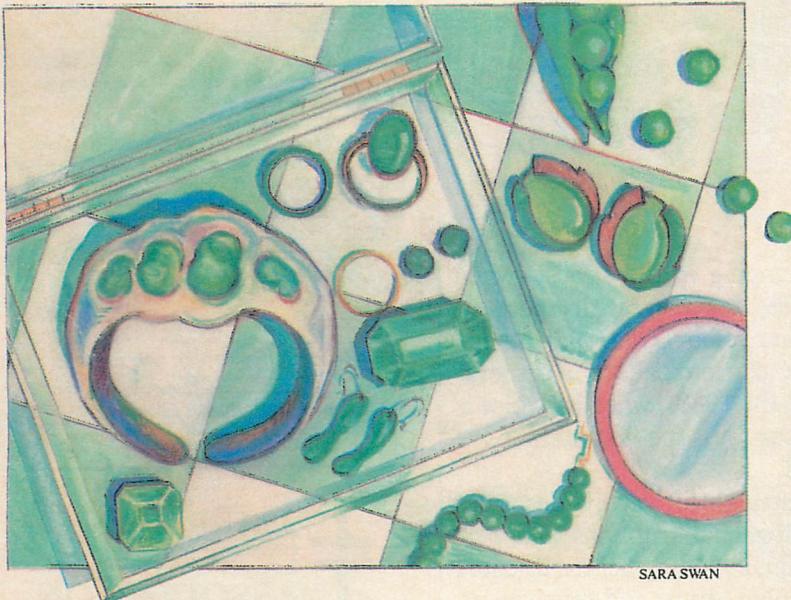
Once more the old illusions take command,
A bog trick, unrelated to your needs.
Stay braced for total dark and call it right:

The ignis fatuus, the apogee
Of all you seek, the great elusive light.
Hold fast to scientific explanation,

Don't dwell on legends, just remember facts
As lambent flares ignite mind's conflagration--
But look! Her eyes fluoresce with blue-white flame;

A dream could live on such cold heat forever.
I must embrace her once, must stake my claim
Before she flees, before I learn her name!

Verse



SARA SWAN

Fortieth Anniversary

You gave me my first ring when I was ten,
an oval dome of bull's-eye malachite.
You'd learned to cut and polish stones so when
you learned my birthday, you could expedite
the present problem in a unique way.
I don't remember anything I got
except that gem accented with a spray
of aqua swirled around a deep-sea spot.

I never thought I'd be so fond of greens:
Demantoid, prase, and peridot's pale limes
still stir up the excitement of my teens—
aromas, songs, the feel of special times.

For graduation you designed me jade—
two exclamation points for new-pierced ears.
Each time I fondle all the things you made,
they unwind pastel images from years
still green as what's inside a June pea pod:
Aventurine and tourmaline so skilled
in workmanship that people stop to nod
and gaze at how my jewel box is filled.

You learned to facet, understand the rough;
today you gave me emeralds in a ring.
But, oh, your gift of self has been enough
To circle life with green fire from a king!

*Glenna Holloway
Naperville, Illinois*

S.R.O.

Stand and wait for
rapid transit;
when it comes—no
place you can sit.

*Virginia Baker
Salt Lake City, Utah*

Horse Sense

A froth of blood
means nothing to a horse.
A horse will munch
ignoring fists and cries,
placidly chew and crunch
one foot on yours.

Your insults and curses,
brimming eyes,
don't much affect
that force.
The nicest horse you know
will flick and knock you down,
or prance and kick
and go on chewing,
cozy at the bin.

Permit me to explain:
This loveliest of animals
has one wee, dinky brain.

*Dodie Messer Meeks
Houston, Texas*

The Competent One

Calm and efficient, capable and quick
She never makes me feel I should be, too—
She cultivated long ago the trick
Of doing all the things she had to do
Without a lot of fuss. I never feel
Reproved, rebuffed, or put the least bit down
If sometimes fumbling—for she never deals
In sarcasm, or frowns a weary frown.
There is a motive underlying this:
A choice she must have made from early on
To overlook whatever seems amiss;
To recognize the good and then be gone.
Her competence is so adorned with grace
She leaves a benediction in each place.

*Doris Kerns Quinn
New York, New York*