

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 pigmy predator haunts the night,
silence feathering swiftly over empty silence,
coming home empty.

lenna Holloway
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville IL 60565

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All my
Senses are
engaged

beautiful!

I'm
breathless!
the imagery
immerses me
Working of
this lonely cactus
You are a SIFTED poet!
Gail V.

Glenna

HOMING IN ON THE HIGH SIGNS

I. On the Way

It happens every year about this time:
Faint signals almost out of range compose
A whisper-lilting melody to prime
My consciousness between these beige plateaus.
New colors hold their glow in twilight's rise
With nimbus rings like cotton newly ginned.
A needling rain begins to bleed the clay;
It leaches gravel, milling it to sand,
Exposees diamonds set in granite's gray,
Strings opal beads all through the hardwood stand.
I wander this kaleidoscope, a child
Whose ever-changing mountainscapes grow wild.

II. Arrival

I wake up wondering what sound I heard,
And was it dreamed or did a blue wing brush
My arm? Did lyrics from an unknown bird
Make harmony with sparrow hawk and thrush?
I think of first dance steps, and first good-byes,
Subliminal, just out of reach of reason.
A place where early loves still magnetize
Me like a compass in the autumn season.
The dogwoods send up flares when summer's done,
Red compliments for laurel, spruce and pine.
The aspen beacons challenge noonday sun
As whitetails flash between their shade and shine.
It's out of my control; I heed the call
To climb these heights of majesty each fall.

.N

Ten-year-old boy: tan face, grass-stained bottom,
trading heavily in risky ventures and strong sun
while girls retreat

*Who judged? I think
it's wise*

 TROMPE L'OEIL

It means deception of the eye,

this unique art form

making the willing

believe nonexistent things.

Your den's north wall appears lined

with shelves of brightly-bound classics,

a bust of Ovid, a Ming censer, brass pots

trailing ivy and lavender inflorescence.

Your clever painter lies and you provide

real scent of lilacs to satisfy the nose

while the hand that tries to grasp

a volume of verse or feel jade's coolness

resents being made a fool.



Yet the eye insists, forcing

another confrontation with flatness.

(cont.)

So must I resolve you

in the brain's right and left privacies,

in the involuntary offshoots

where facts fade.

The artist has blued your eyes

in shades of faithfulness and burnished

your skin with soft premises. Sometimes

my hand finds heat and contoured strength

more than a match for sight's illusions.

Yet I know I'll touch again

that one-dimension sweep, that rigid lack,

try to read by light that isn't there,

face that depthless smile.

And all your old false colors

will shame me for my blindness.

*You write
as Glaubert says?
He not just?*

DECODING 101

It's late. Elongated shadows crosshatch
my back yard. Gray on gray
cryptograms I can't read.

My neighbor's window draws my eye.
Her silhouette hunches over her desk,
lurches abruptly. She rises slowly.
Her hand flies to her face, lingers:
A single bent but legible line
among hieroglyphics in a shaded frame.

I never liked her by day:
Origins, isms, idioms looming large,
differences sharply lit. In this moment
I recognize a lamed and lonely sister.
A deciphered blip on night's graph.

Tomorrow she will have a new neighbor.
Tomorrow I will introduce the self
just met
to her I never knew before.

A PLACE OF GENTLE REPAIR

He came from hills where threadbare limbs were patched
with ice or snow--to sueded cypress knees
and sun and shade-striped quietude soft-thatched
with gray-green living leis on wading trees.
One day he snagged a greedy gull that tried
to steal the fish from off his steel-finned hook.
He nursed her well; the day she flew he cried:
"Go graze your natural hunting grounds and look
for sequined flash between the folds of foam,
bewaring of the barbs of hungry men
who, watching you, have recognized their home."
He trolled sweet warmth to mend himself and then,
far from the bony ridges of his land,
his ragged edges soon were smoothed with sand.

TRUE NORTH

A friend said I'd never really see Alaska unless I was game enough to fly with a bush pilot. He introduced me to one named Grimby. Next thing I knew, I was in the makeshift back seat of a biplane that looked like a leftover from a rummage sale.

I was along for the view. The official passenger was a neatly bearded Mr. Clark, going to join a pipeline survey team near the coast. We settled in our places like pros.

"Tighten your seat belts, we're goin' up fast," said Grimby. "We got us a williwaw, a sudden weird wind off the Aleutians. Full of silt and seal hair and rutting moose musk. One thing about a williwaw, you can take off downwind with just enough power to rise vertical like them fancy VTOL aircraft. A smidgen of runway is plenty-- which is good, seein' it's turned to slop we need to get shed of in a hurry." His next remark was: "Your innards'll catch up with you in a minute." He glanced at Mr. Clark, back at me, then stared at Clark.

"Uh--oughta be a bag in the door pocket," Grimby said to him.

We soon leveled out over a snowfield filled with as many shades of blue as a painter's palette. "It's more beautiful than I thought," I exclaimed aloud.

"You ain't flown in a bitty bird before, eh?"

"No, we were always too high to appreciate the scenery."

"This little ole gal shows you ever'thing. Never had a designer crate, never will. Adam Adcock used to call his ole bush plane a bunch of spare parts flyin' in formation. Mine's old too, but

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

THE HUNGER MOON

Summer is sweet on the tongue,
soft on the shoulders as kachina clouds,
ephemeral as Muwingwa'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 throws his keening
like splinters of cold.

The hawk is a prophet of the hunger moon:
The time of no more corn, when the deer goes
making no tracks to a place no man ever finds.
And the great bear eats bark before he sleeps,
and things that crawl.

None of us will starve nor will 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.

cont.

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 pika into range of beak and talon.
I will face the he-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.

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

THE INTERLOPERS

Beneath inverted black jungle
of water hyacinth roots underweaving my hidden bayou,
my diver's lamp the only hold with my world,
I disturb a concert of stripes: hundreds
of inch-long fishes silver-slanting right or left
as my hand directs. A king size mud cat
like Genghis Khan eyes me from the olive drab floor.
And overhead! My lost boat! Impounded
since last summer— clamped listing in a wet/dry vise,
sun-half of bulbous green vases feigning
innocence with flowers; night-half of fringe
and garland chain, propeller upholstered in velvet.
I rip away the slimy grip and feel
hairy stalactites creep closer, more determined.
than topside kudzu. The gasoline-fed screw might
thresh a yard before losing. A new spring army
of trees wades out to make a stockade.
Roman-helmeted herons patrol
the spreading perimeter above with lances.
Here, the mighty Khan rules, guarded by turtles.
And I, slave to light and lungs
must fight myself free.

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

AFTERNOON AMONG THE ARTIFACTS

If not for the small sign, I'd have passed it
without interrupted interest in the other displays,
without pausing at the thing that changed the world.
It's called The Fat Man.

The name is apt— a bulbous unarmed twin
of Nagasaki's Nemesis
obsoletely catching dust and fingerprints
in a museum on the fringes of Milwaukee.

Hard to think it a bomb or even a weapon,
more like a time capsule maybe filled
with swatches of this century's first third:
a beaded flapper dress, a megaphone,
a rumble seat. A tub for making gin
or soup enough for Depression lines—
all things before my time but no more alien
than this bulging precedent marking the floor
with shadows, forerunner of smaller packages
of streamlined rage. We went from atomic
to hydrogen to nuclear with sinister interstices
filled with equations that don't translate
the same in every language.

I'm curiously detached. This is abstract art,
this huge clumsy egg. It should be seething
with metaphor. It should cry out
with the voice of Isaiah over the wails of hell.

cont.

No stanza break

I'm missing something. I've lost my hearing.

Maybe we stood too close to that first blast.

Maybe it damaged our inner ears and eyes
and all our inside senses, jarred spaces
in our cortex so we can't relate one thing
to another. The circuit arcs over the voids,
sputters, skips. A cerebral non sequitur.

I wander among the airplanes, mostly wings of war,
fifty years of progress in flight. I stop
beneath an ultralight, stare at a lunar lander.

By the time I return to The Fat Man, a kid
has scrawled an obscenity in yellow crayon
on its dark bulk. It won't rub off;
it only smears. Maybe Eliot was too elegant.

Maybe the world ends without bang or whimper,
just one final blurred scatological curse.

The Fat Man is supremely indifferent.

I try to multiply thousands of lives
by millions of next time, by megatons of now.

How far past kill is overkill?

What is now? When is today?

Is it the decade or the afternoon?

Or the last minute?

Baobab means upside down in Swahili, an apt description of the tree's appearance
Glenna Holloway
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville, IL 60565

AN AFRICAN SYNOPSIS: THE BAOBAB TREE

Morning:

A ragged inkblot against the sun
erupts like a geyser into crazed sky.
Zigzag in slow motion
a black quill
returns to tangled branches of calligraphy.
Limned roots that grew bark
and aspired to heaven,
lurch upward to await the twilight embrace
of winged exclamations who won it.

Afternoon:

Berserk lines on vellum glare
spell an ancient theme
of heathen heat blanching the horizon.
Daily elephants edit details;
warped shade smudges lion printing.

Evening:

Reunited on the moon's page,
birds and boughs compose
cryptic verses of silence
rising above
the voices of the veldt howling hunger.

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

URBAN TAPESTRY

My oar dollops the water, ravels the reflection:

Bridges above me—giant warps over river,

lanes, tracks, the yarns of my childhood.

Creeks were my flosses, keeping my linings
from fraying, keeping me close

to the ways of catfish and beavers.

My origins were up there in a garden-patch bungalow

once atop that burrowing segment of superway...

Now the new tunnel, breechloaded with cars,

blasts a volley of steel across the bow

of my small boat; the half-hoop of iron bridge

steadies the warning appliqued against carbon sky.

An oil barge passes me, rocks me under the new span,

into its shadow and roar, and I think

of the old hilly thunder prowling the pinestand,

unmuffled by rows of stacked people-bins

thwarting its rounds, teasing the lightning.

The barge slides the river like a disease-bearing snail

spinning its slimy wake near the bend

where my slow fever swears the bones of my old home lie.

Torn memories underweave the weft of the city

and I have run out of thread leading to freedom.

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

THE POTTER OF THE RED HILLS

My hands are ancient:

Older than the painter's, that stick-man
who lost his best dimension in a cave,
older than the lightning god's gift.

Older than the hands of the wood worker
and the stone carver who made man a hunter.

Man was born a gatherer. He was born thirsty.

Mud leaks slower than woven leaves and grass.

My hands molded wet dirt; sun dried it.

Unlasting as a meal.

It wasn't an accident: Don't believe
tales about forgetful old women
leaving clay cups in newly mastered embers,
finding precious substance in cold ashes.

Too thick or thin, too wet, too coarse—
exploded, fractured—ceramics
miscarried often but had no careless birth.

It was my hands made man a storer,
preserver, trader, foundations for peace.

My fingers fashioned beads strung on willow
to mark a woman mine.

cont.

My palms made the first wheel,
made two with center holes for a stick—
a plaything, a lost exclamation point
in time defined by rock.

You new ones blessed with knowing hands,
never forget the source: Clay must be searched for,
seasoned with digger's sweat, praise words
and promise words, collateral for the loan
placed and covered inside Earth's wound.
Creation breathes in her marrow,
the raw dough of eternity
waiting to be baked like bread.

Entrusted with mounds of her living self
willing to your touch, remember,
remember all the hands that formed before
each time you make another miracle
and yield it to the fire.

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

PILGRIMAGE TO BLUE

A ripe moon mounts agate steeples
like an ageless mystic hailing the appointed time
for celebrants of some ancient rite
my cells seem to remember
here in the high blue watching places.

A summer-shedding coyote flings herself leanly
into the chase of shadows silent as a star shooting.
Rampant tollways vanish
in the ash patterns of a potter's cold fire;
custom-made cacophony is buried
under the humps of hogans listening to Venus rising.

In the morning I will inhale turquoise horizons
unscaled by stacked containers
shoved together by corporate cliff-dwellers;
I will move slowly through wood and granite halls
enclosing nothing but swatches of light,
posing for the centuries, staging endless similes
under the direction of wind and water. I will touch
forgotten textures, ocotillo, malachite, horse hide, turn
and stare back at pronghorns as I leave.

Undiluted azure anoints me now, my mouth tastes of royal.
And the crimped mass of springs and wires within me
loosens like a resurrection plant in rain.

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

A VASE OF PINK PLUM BLOSSOMS

The dull clay coil in my potter's hands
obeyed my fingers, my will,
but only casually.

The relinquished form lusted after light,
rearranged its gray molecules in sun,
reveled in its experience with fire.

Still an apprentice,
it drank deeply of earth's unguents
flowed over its flaws, then healed
and ripened in the last lap of hereditary heat.
Today it came into its own
first flowering
alloyed with pollinated sisters of the soil.

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

ROSES IN THE WOODS

It was where my map ended, a hunter's speculation:
The place was half swamp, full of deadness, never owned.
Kudzu borrowed skeletons of pine and berry bush,
snapped off canes for its stalking
of the swatches of good ground fleeing ahead.

An out-of-season quail broke cover, crazing silence;
fallen branches split underfoot. Sudden pointed pain
entered my ankle. Green-brown claws surrounded me.
Beyond, telltale magenta spurted up
like open arteries between birch bones.

It was no man's land, anti-personnel entanglements,
tightrope-walking boughs over redoubts of wood spikes,
caltrops on hidden runners conspiring
with limbs to make trip-nooses. Finally
I curved my fingers around battle-dyed satin,
hunched open-mouthed amid exploding life like a parasite.
All blooming centered in a six foot sweep;
upright tufts of petals hid their stamens
till they dropped. Untame, but never wild.

cont.

I prodded languorous green mimics
for a rusty plow, chimney bricks, foundation parts—
things that outlast dooryard ramblers.

But leaf-locked shapes were only broken stumps
and tangled layers of forgotten summers.

No house ever stood.

I returned to the flowers like a dream walker.
My probing stick struck an almost buried boulder.
Vines quivered, veins darkened. The rose defended
like a many-headed Medusa until, cursing,
I hacked it with my hunting knife.

Thorn-crude carving on the stone read: Jonas Johnson,
Orphan & Bachelor, 1790-1812. His only wishes were
a grave where he fell & justice for this land he loved.

I don't know why my seasoned eyes were wet and flaming
or why each rose flamed out and fell—
red-blown shrapnel for an instant,
then soft panoply for the breached woven shield.

I go back now and then, but not for quail—
to plant roses
there where the mapmakers quit.

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

HOPI HOMECOMING

The drought is worse than I thought.

The crops are congregations
of desiccated crones
leaning on each other
rattling last wishes.

The racing shadow in the dry washes
and high basalt roadcuts
is my bus from Chicago.

I can participate in its cubist image
by holding my papers up to the window
though no one else would notice
the shade of difference I make.

Out there the bus is being
its true self, compressing
its length, recoiling
from desert and heat, rising
taller to look back for its lake.

Blue Corn would smile at the analogy—
that smile that begins at the left
of her mouth and leaves a luminous aura
there after the rest of her face
has forgotten it. Odds are
she'll be at the bus stop

cont.

with the want ads and the appaloosa
instead of the pickup.

Hell, a horse'll feel good
between my legs after steel chairs
and seminar stools. The horse and I
will be in synch before we pass
First Mesa. But how well will I
interface with my Badger Clan?

I'm like this bus— speeding
a new highway still sticky—
a joint-effort vehicle of alloy
containing other lives besides.

Which one am I? What of the spirit I,
the smoky abstraction the sun reveals?

Blue Corn, my love, you write happy
from your mother's Bear Clan.

You too are no longer programmed
by Kachinas. When you dance I know
your head is clear beneath the mask.

Most of you belongs to me
but the foot, the drum, are your own.

Can you make any part of me whole?

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

A DIFFERENT ROAD TO SUN-UP

My mother would have muttered a certain chant all day.

All the omens were there: Sickly sun
plunged wide shafts into the ground, sucking it dry,
giving no warmth, only taking, leaving a swath
of cold-parched earthworms and rock/clay crumbs.

The first wind pried shutters, crashed my lamps,
spilling all the oil far from my green firewood.

Alto afterwind was discordant whispers,
slaps of chill, wavy scent of damp animals.

Half of me gathered wolfsbane, racing decaying light;
the other half swallowed a drugstore ball of sleep
then centered together under the blanket
woven and dyed with my mother's mystic patterns.

Awakened by blackness darker than sleep, heavier
than night, I tried to surface, swim up through it
like a cave fish looking inside its head
for its lost eyes. Night pushed up
from all the world's old graves, smelling
of all the world's old sins. A wolf night,
diseased and howling. A night to grow everything old.

I lit a trembling candle. Morpheus had fled,
leaving me an empty bottle, floating me in vertigo.
But Pluto was there to breathe out my frail flame.

cont.

The charred moon smoked, reversed itself,
revealing a death's head just as she always said,
withholding its down-shine, dripping
ice sweat— wolf sweat— grave sweat—
Black was nebulized violence and violation. Black
stained walls and air, seeped into books to lie/in wait forever.
Trackless black where the wolf walked,
bearded reeking black, silhouette of hills not there,
of beasts clanning moonward, necks fletched like arrows.

I said my mother's name, her part of me
clutched the stems of aconite, flung them over the bed;
she rose in me like ether. I groped beneath fear
for the incantations drummed into my childhood,
stumbled and skidded over roots my father planted;
some trailing tendril snagged and held.

Weed essence opened the flue; friction made a spark.
Still sneezing, I relit the candle,
snatched up the wolfsbane for a funeral pyre
crowned with a hand-hewn table. Leftover night
was stilt-legged shadows on a hearthlit stage,
the usual cast with known names. I am
no part of her or here. Tomorrow,
I announced to the snickering flames,
I will move back among my kind.

Glenna Holloway (c) 1983
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville, IL 60565

THE BOTTOM LINE AT THE UPTOWN SESTINA STAR STUDIO

Glenna Holloway

We're talent scouting for six words
Elite enough to pose six times
Exposed in loose-end bas-relief,
And again in the last scene's core.
What verve they'll need, what windshield nerve!
Dun & Bradstreet should list such worth!

Once hired, we pay by market worth
Less agency percent. Some words
Hit big then burn out fast. The nerve
Of one pronoun is raw at times.
Adjectives get frayed to the core.
We may provide pills for relief.

Here at Central Casting, relief
Only comes with proven net worth.
We look for pith, a solid core
Of guts when we audition words.
It takes muscle and wit these times,
Know-how to punch or tweak a nerve.

cont.

New stanza

Soft female endings lacking nerve
Must rely on comic relief.
Even if they bounce with the times,
They still must serve a sentence worth
Its space, and top all other words.
Heights wilt cliches with hollow core.

It's a jungle, baby. Sweet-core
Vowels and sucrose-drip pall nerve
Ends eighties-wired for mach four words.
You just won't do! Go on relief.
We've got to get our Webster's worth,
Can't shine with shades of former times.

Next? No imitations, please. Times
Rage. Shock is in, even hard-core
Truth can steal center stage, now worth
As much as fiction when peeled nerve
Plays the lead. Bored fans find relief
In violence voicing over words.

You has-been words, at certain times
You're pure relief for jaded core
And bungled nerve. You may have worth.

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

BAND PRACTICE

(Getting Ready For Elections, 1984)

Tap your fingers to static, watch the leaders:

hot-eyed, misty-eyed,
smoke-eyed, star-eyed
in huge halls swaying
to something-for-everyone lyrics
anyone could have written in flats,
snagging any handy pumphandle
for yea-yea choruses. Folk-rock op-
portunity racking up the people
always clapping for a new rhythm,
clasping anything that changes key,
even chants by professional virgins
singing pander songs.

Listen, punk-rocked, lullabye-rocked, rooked citizen-player,

whoever leads the magic combo,
sheep shuffler, shibboleth-dancer,
tunes coiled deep in the horns won't change.

Watch the big sound break decibels,
shatter decimals and eyeballs
while your hearing trickles
down the slot where echos go,
hung-beat in your brain, afterbeat
in your bones, and clap, damn you,

cont.

but come on hard with your hulking
homemade drum and your own sure tempo!

THE IGNIS FATUUS: LIFE STORIES

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20. DRIED ARRANGEMENT
21. BIRTHDAY AT THE STATE FAIR NFSPO, PRIZE POEMS, 1979
23. YOU ASK IF I'VE FORGOTTEN HIM...Seed-in-Hand Series, Snow, 1982
24. ROLE REVERSAL
25. DIARY: BLACKBIRDS IN THE WHITE OAK...Connecticut River Review, 1980
26. A DIFFERENT ROAD TO SUN-UP
28. SONNET FOR HIS NAMESAKE Lincoln Log, 1982
29. TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN. . . . Modern Lyrics, Poetry Society of Texas,'80
31. BUTTERFLIES AND OTHER NOBLE THOUGHTS ...Pennsylvania P. S. Prize Anthology, 1978

AN AFRICAN SYNOPSIS: THE BAOBAB TREE

Morning:

A ragged inkblot against the sun
erupts like a geyser into crazed sky.
Zigzag in slow motion
a black quill
returns to tangled branches of calligraphy.
Limned roots that grew bark
and aspired to heaven
lurch upward to await the twilight embrace
of winged exclamations who won it.

Afternoon:

Berserk lines on vellum glare
spell an ancient theme
of heathen heat blanching the horizon.
Daily elephants edit details;
warped shade smudges lion printing.

Evening:

Reunited on the moon's page
birds and boughs compose
cryptic verses of silence
rising above
the voices of the veldt howling hunger.

BUTTERFLIES AND OTHER NOBLE THOUGHTS

What about those that wobble wet and wingless
on the torn flap of the chrysalis?
Born too early or late, too much, not enough—
forgetting the formula for how to change,
still too wormly for heights.
Some do soar via bird beak and maw;
most fall unknown in the ragweeds
to be savaged by ants before flying as dust
in the jaws of prominent winds.
Do their glistening granules return
to incubate again in more fertile capsules
or must they wander wasted
forever looking for their missing colors
and a womb?