

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
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WARM BEADS

Glenna Holloway

Title Possibilities:
Warm Beads
Never Far From Water
Panther In the Glove
I'd Rather Die of This

WARM BEADS

1. OCTOBER BEFORE SLEEP
2. TROMPE L'OEIL
3. THE BEST THING MY FATHER DID WAS LIE ... Pub. Western Humanities Review, Spring, 1984
4. VILLANELLE IN VIRIDESCENT GRAYS ... Pub. ORBIS (England) 1984
5. VERNAL EQUINOX
6. DECEMBER DINNER, MANHATTAN ISLAND... John Masefield Award (unpublished)
9. WARM BEADS
10. URBAN TAPESTRY... Pub. National Federation of State Poetry Society Awards Anthology, 1981
11. YOU ALMOST MADE ME SORRY... Pub. Cornerstone, May, 1986
12. "LIKE A PANTHER IN THE GLOVE" ...Pub. Poetry Society of Texas, 1982
13. WATERCOLOR WEEKENDS ...Pub. Buffalo Spree Magazine, Buffalo NY Press, Spring, 1984
14. THE INTERLOPERS ...Pub. Poetry Society of America Diamond Anthology, 1971
15. YOU ASK IF I'VE FORGOTTEN HIM... Pub. SEED-IN-HAND Poetry Series, 1982
16. OLD WIVES THE TALES COME FROM FROM ...Pub. NFSPS Anthol. 1981
17. LAST UNCLE ...Pub. NFSPS Anthology, 1982
18. LONG NIGHT HOMESIDE ...Pub. NFSPS Anthology, 1982
19. YOU SHOULD KNOW SHOULD I SAY YES
21. COMMUTER TRAIN RIDERS ...Pub. Manhattan Poetry Review, Jan, 1986
22. DIARY: BLACKBIRDS IN THE WHITE OAK ...Pub. Connecticut River Review, 1981
23. BEFORE A POET KNOWS WHAT SHE IS ... Pub. NFSPS Anthol, 1980
24. HERALDRY

VERNAL EQUINOX

I don't want to know it's spring--
days as long as nights.

You and I began almost fifteen months ago.
You wore your old hunting boots
hauled from the trunk when your car stalled
in the blizzard and you walked the rest of the way.
Your ears had turned to American Beauties
just out of the florist's refrigerator.
The real ones never came.
Under my long dress I wore fleece sweat pants.
The church's vintage furnace picked that day
to sigh its last. Only three guests arrived.
We said our vows in the preacher's study,
his glasses so fogged he could barely read his lines.
Some people said it was a long achey winter.
But we loved it away and started on our second.

Now I could tell them the sharpest pang is green.
The coldest hurting is warm moist earth
crumbling and parting for still more green.

You said I'd make you a winner.
But all I did was make you a pair of boot socks
make the bed
make soup and deep dish pie
then turn to answer that strange knock at the door
and tomorrow's knob came off in my hand.

VERNAL EQUINOX

I don't want to know it's spring--
day as long as night.

Just $1\frac{1}{2}$ months ago you and I began.
You wore your old hunting boots
hauled out of the trunk when your car stalled
in the blizzard and you walked the rest of the way.
Your ears had turned to American Beauties
just out of the florist's refrigerator.
The real ones never arrived.
Under my long dress I had on fleece sweat pants.
The church's vintage furnace picked that day
to sigh its last. Only 3 guests came.
We said our vows in the preacher's study,
his glasses so fogged he couldn't read the lines.
Some people said it was a long achey winter.
But we loved it away and started on our second.

Now I could tell them the sharpest pain is green.
The coldest hurting is warm moist earth
crumbling and parting for still more green.

You said I'd make you a winner.
But all I did was make you a pair of boot socks
make the bed
make some soup and deep dish pie
then turn to answer that strange knock at the door
and the knob came off in my hand.

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.

"LIKE A PANTHER IN THE GLOVE" --Emily Dickinson
(For Emily M.)

"She was so thoughtful"--
"So sweet and caring"--
her friends recite in psalter tones.
The ritual room of shaking heads,
soft sibilance and carnation overkill
thick enough to replace her bier
light my anger like a torch.

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 she 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.

OLD PLOWMEN

The big oil painting was eloquent with humanity
in bib overalls and ladder-back chairs
with the color worn off. Country store barrels
foiled the four practiced sitters
like family ghosts in the background.

In the upper left, Thadeus Ock idled his thick sole
against the obligatory pot-bellied stove
so I could smell the scorch. "Hunh, that's just as likely
if you spell sole with a 'u','' Clayburn Gilmer chided
from the foreground, sniffing. And Thad replied, "Naw,
I'll make it to heaven, all right. Doin' nothin',
stayin' outa mischief, that's how."

A sensitive brush caught sly turns of lip,
leprechaun eyes, impudent toothpick, poised Barlow knife.
"What about sins of omission, Thad?" Doc Benson drawled.
(He wasn't a real doctor but folks gave him the last word
on ague, constipation and male maladies till they forgot
he was just a farmer too. For one thing, everything of his
still worked at the time; for another,
he recommended "a modicum of sour-mash bourbon"
for a multitude of misfortunes.)

Thad and Jerry Holman addressed sinning by default
with square-boned shrugs. Jerry, haloed
in Kaywoodie smoke, added, "Reckon that's better
than actin' like a Pharisee makin' a big to-do."
A tobacco juice exclamation point seconded the comment.

The composition was sufficiently humble with grays
and blues; a muted palette of ochers and umbers
suspected the subjects of things
their own left hands hardly knew-- filled silos
for an injured neighbor, prize calf to a new widow,
kidney to a cousin, ready hammer and lumber
for the storm-damaged church belltower.

The artist's knowing stroke unstilled life
and sound. The faces defied canvas and time
that tried to reduce them all to sameness,
contain them in dark stained wood with mitered corners.

The gavel banged on my attention from the front
of the hall. The bidding was over. Afterward as I paid
the price, the auctioneer came over, wondering aloud
why I outbid the collectors. Had I known the artist?

"No. I watched him once. Bothered him probably."
I walked toward the picture I'd already entered
through the door he painted decades ago.
"I always wondered what happened to this work.
That man on the left-- the one peeling the apple--
he was my grandfather. The apple was for me."

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 that grew valentine leaves
and mini-potatoes for doll plates?
And easy-to-break chocolate rocks with insides
like sugar compelling your tongue to the test?
Were there 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, a waiting pond 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
all there is
eye level in the grass?

Or is it a dose of strained fancy
force-fed beneath the sanded surface?
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 tilted and swayed—
somehow you went that way without knowing.
The soft fronds closed behind you
and the brambles made you shield your eyes.

CHICAGO

Yeah, you've heard of it--
3 million strong, the Loop, the Cubs,
boating on the lake, Sears Tower, the Chagall Wall.

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall,"
the poet said. I know what he meant--
even if it's invisible. Here on the southwest side
most of them are too visible--
warped with the weight of graffiti,
bullying up to the next one to rub off dirt
and slough off a few more bricks or concrete chunks.
That's the one thing that never stays where it falls--
bricks and pieces of masonry are good for breaking
windows and heads. It's a simple equation--
deprivation makes some people mean.
Whatever gets smashed is a stand-in
for the wall they can't beat to rubble.
City fathers keep talking about how new jobs
and renewed pride are gonna tear down the stockade
of poverty, crime and neglect,
just like they got rid of the old stockyards.
But poorness is more than lack
of tollgate fees to get through the barriers.
It begins with the ancient walls of the womb
and discovers the greatest heights
in partitions of the heart.

CALLIGRAPHY BY NIGHT

Three migrating cranes
Brushed their winged strokes across
The waxing moon's empty page.

In silvered silence
We read their cryptic beauty
Like an ancient haiku scroll.

(no stanza break)

Each time, a small boy's heart outsoared the wings:
Such birthday gifts the world had never seen.
And when that day was done, the tall kitesmiths
Came over, guards and gawkers gone, the craft
Safe in its shed: "You brought us luck," they said.
And I told them: "I'm ten years old today.
So what if I can't run? I'm gonna fly!"

And fly I did, the early U.S. Mail;
I stunted, tested, instructed, designed,
The only pilot who saw the first page.
Some things in my ninth decade I forget,
But nothing of the day that I turned ten.
And nothing of the men who built my world,
Then hurled it miles above my hobbled one.

Kind friends, I'll rest now. Bless you for this night.

(no stanza break)

Each time, a small boy's heart outsoared the wings:
Such birthday gifts the world had never seen.
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VILLANELLE IN VIRIDESCENT GRAYS

The line between neap tide and sky
Has disappeared like rubbed pastels,
The canvas primed for terns to fly.

They sketch their graphic pattern high
Across mixed hues; it parallels
The line between neap tide and sky.

Light's changing moods intensify
The foreground textures, sheen and shells,
The canvas primed for terns to fly.

The pier shades truth while colors lie;
Imagination's stroke compels
The line between neap tide and sky.

Winged calls begin to prophesy
The storm this palette's blend foretells,
The canvas primed for terns to fly.

They pose on pilings, preening dry
Before their stippled rising swells
The line between neap tide and sky
The canvas primed for terns to fly.

WARM BEADS

I'm late to the coronation.
The strand of elliptical cut jade
you gave me to go with my favorite dress
wasn't in my jewel box.
I searched away the time,
knew I had to leave. The shiny wall
of my shower reflected watercolor greens
around my neck as I hurried to bathe.
You'd added more beads and put them on me
while I was dragging dream feet
down another charcoal corridor
with too many doors and none of them mine.
The new beads, lavender, peach, white,
blooming between the familiar leaf shades,
glowed against my skin all those hours.

"Jade isn't always green," you said
of the first string presented in a case,
"but it's always cold--
unless the wearer loves."

I feel the heat stored in each bead
before entering where you wait.

LAST UNCLE

In my dandelion days
I had five tall men
who swooped me to their shoulders,
swung me, made me squeal deliciously.

In my frantic floribunda days
they began leaving. And I let them,
without ever learning
about the Cavalry's last hours,
without learning what it's like to milk a cow
or taste sweet cream and fresh-churned butter,
without watching the wet hands
at the potter's wheel, but reaching out my own
each year for the prize-winning pots.

Once in my tearose days
it served me to serve with the cognac
what I had heard without listening--
how one had flown the early U. S. mail,
had twice met Lindy, had crashed in a swamp
but saved every piece of his cargo.
A dry-box tidbit with only a faint aroma
of rich ragout. Because I was always
singing in the choir, collecting carnival glass,
photographing children in the garden.

And now in my pastel hollyhock days
there is one.
My faded luggage is crammed with empty
pages as this jet eats space from east to west.
And I wonder if he'll feel like talking.

LONG NIGHT HOMESIDE

I should learn to speak Japanese.

There may be something more to say.

You smoke too much in Kyoto
under the blue tile roof of your father.
Why did I leave? Why did you stay?

Out of cigarettes and choices.

Bored and huddled again on the prickly davenport
with my stewardess indigestion,
moon caught in the bared oak at my winter window.

Look. Two tiny stars, more alike than different,
impaled on California twigs
going unerringly to the heart of the matter..

Like haiku. Like shokwa. Needing no embellishment.
Impelled into jet-lag sleep on a wingless plane,
prodding grounded dreams while a jilted sun
hits bottom beyond the eastern arch, jarring
our paper fortunes near the gold pavillion,
jolting my moon free.

And at my periodic waking, the escapee
sheds no light on the fate
of lost pierced stars.

DIARY: BLACKBIRDS IN THE WHITE OAK

Morning:

They group together like an inkspill
on bleached winter sun.
Soon the roosting accents all depart
splashing vellum clouds with exclamations
of leftover night.
Zigzag in slow motion
a dark quill returns to twisted lines
of calligraphy. Knotty fingers
writing my horizon, aspiring to heaven,
lurch upward to await the twilight embrace
of winged coauthors who spent the day there.

Evening:

Reunited on the whole moon's page,
birds and boughs compose
eloquent verses of silence
rising above voices
in my kitchen spelling hurry and hunger.

Midnight:

Searching for a window in the dark volume,
low inside light finds a few sure strokes
underscoring my days like flying grackles
and limning oak postscripting the sky,
making indelible the lines I'll remember.

HERALDRY

The old clans remember beseeching
couchant northerlies to rise and face them,
willing a frontal assault from the wolf-wind
to keep their hungry scent from the king's deer.

They had to be fast. There was a death
penalty for venison eaters, a slower one
for those past aiming true
at browsing briskets. Daily more elders
went slack like draperies piled in corners
where only bellies were rampant.

Across escutcheons of hunters
the wind pried in bar-sinister crevices
of castle and hovel. It spiraled
round the borders of dark forest,
carving its bearings with dirks of ice
and sometimes on its own bias
offering a doe on morning's white field.

Yes, child, the crest you ordered
is elegant on mauve paper-- splendid spread
of gilded antlers and poised hooves, regality
balanced by a lean and bare-fanged entity--
panther, perhaps-- all embossed with more truth
than you were designed for.

COMMUTER TRAIN RIDERS

Let all the habitual passengers know
in the dark of their heads
that the 8:15 will pile jackknifed and jagged
in a ditch tomorrow. Leave Gabriel feathers
on their doorsills so they're sure.
Some will ride it anyway, unable to crack
their molds, ratcheted to their private reels,
racked on indelible rails in sweat-fitted hides.

Knowing now, knowing nothing else,
they rattle their loose change, dash
from center to corner,
make deep fingernail tracks
on the sides of their thoughts. They dip
into the old bins to rummage for things
they once put somewhere. One reads
a certain book, one cleans the attic,
fondling trophies. One prowls sleep with pills.

They do what they can with their morning faces,
staring at the huge WHY that palls their reflections.
Slowly, though not enough to be late,
they go out and board the 8:15.

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Knowing now, knowing nothing else,
they rattle their loose change, dash
from center to corner, make deep fingernail tracks
on the sides of their thoughts.
Finally they dip into the old storage bins
to rummage for things they once put somewhere.
One reads a certain book, one cleans the attic,
fondles trophies. One prowls sleep with pills.

They do what they can with their morning faces,
staring at the huge WHY that palls their reflections.
Slowly, though not enough to be late,
they go out and board the 8:15.

FANTASY IN F SHARP

You didn't expect him here

with the silk hangings and life-size classic sculpture.

He made no entrance, he suddenly was
onstage, easy as moonlight, fitting with fountains
and topiary as if here had always been his background.
But when he moved and smiled, you knew,
you knew he was a trumpet man.

Son of a thin ragged line inhaling used smoke
mixed with applause to blow from balloon cheeks—
and son of the hard-molded case followers,
those rolled-up bus riders down the stretched streaking nights,
closing their painted eyes and seeing brass hanging over them
begging to be snatched and hidden for a night or two of peace,
watching it turn to an armored snake in their jealous hands,
hearing it tongue out tarnished laughter on three ribs,
belling out morning and a hangover
in some town they mispronounced.

You didn't see this loose-angled one pick it up,
the instrument came like quick cell division
from his lip. And the sound began:
Uncoiling slow, coming for you, crawling
into your head, changing the texture of your bare arms.

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You know that sound, mama? Nothing as simple
as ever-popular heartbreak, or phantom train whistles,
nothing as definite as a tenor sobbing Eili, Eili,
or wild animals moaning up the moon. His eyes ignite
and lightning arcs from his hair,
striking the conductor zapping it into your gravity center.

The sound, mama, leaching tones out
of the marble statues, out of your wine glass, rearranging
molecules, making them glow like neon fog, fulminating
red and purple, alive like magnified ocean drops.

How much is music, key lowered now half-a-step,
gone minor again, flowing that little groove
where pain runs convex to the surface?

How much is the glint of cut-crystal hung from mirrored arches,
moving slowly with audience breathing,
striking flints in his pale eyes?

He is a prophet—forecasting ruin, forecasting rain,
predicting your heartbeat, willing it, playing
your spine like a keyboard, electrifying your long red
guitar strings. He compresses a grain of hot salt
in every pore, starts small internal combustions,
all pistons at odds, then one enormous turbine
synched with him, generating enough current
to throb down the marble columns, revving
the riderless carriage outside the fourth dimension,
holding a seance with Gabriel and Gershwin, DeBussy and Berrigan.

His grin is sudden, mocking. He flats his fifths

and goes south on a short bridge, tootles to the carved unicorn,
blows out the chafing dishes along with illusions
so for a jigger of time you can stand it,
draw your breath on the afterbeat, see that he is
a real live trumpet man, not a sorcerer,
not a fakir pulling the cobra out of your basket.

He is a child-- blowing bubbles of incredible light,
each expanding on its own spectrum, merging
with bobbing sixteenth notes.

He is Imperial Rome-- an announcement of gladiators,
Caesar chariots, a boast of soldiers, an ancient fury.

He is Africa-- black hunter-cry, leopard stalking,
impala bleeding, eyes looking out of water, eyes burning,
curling edges of night, smoke rising, winding winged scales,
sucking back into the bell, recycling.

He slams a fist in your throat, turns you
on a spit and hamstrings you
with blades of ice.

He hustles the horn, wrestles it, shares it,
his mistress and mentor,
a panpipe saved by his kiss.

Feel the sound, mama? He's concentrating on all
your edges now, honing sharp sharper--
quivering on a sill to somewhere, retiring

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to a glistening waver pulsing between
turquoise and green, hanging on like dying gills.
He's a trumpet man, mama, more lives than a cat,
more wind than a Texas twister.

It's all the magic horn, mama, that golden fetish,
possessed and possessing, that haloed concubine
caressed and polished, surrounded with plush. And you,
bleached, smacked, sewing a dress out of mill ends,
earning your master's degree in martyrdom,
that eternal alloy suspended between you
even in bed, that icon he hocked once
to buy you an emergency doctor in Dayton.
And you sold your mother's ring
to get it back.

And the man, mama, with the hard harsh mouth,
dead weight in the bus seat, little slivers of life
telescoped into battered cases and collapsible stands.
Trumpet man. Pitched all shades and angles like shadows,
worse for women than drifters. Gone too high too often,
a pile of singed feathers dripping wax on the downers,
always patching to fly one more set too near the sun.

Was there a man at all?
Or just a flared gold phallus that seduced you
and crammed you in the gears of a music box on wheels,
hurled you across the bad-weather map
into broken-john hotels with lint bedspreads,

Fantasy in F Sharp

5.

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and the boozy corners of never-quite-level halls
full of lurching bodies and bad acoustics?
Trumpet man. Inseparable composite of flesh and reed—
cold despite force your touching,
hot pipe to all we know of paradise for his.

Tears emptied, he mounts the god syndrome
like mercury, surpasses sound, no longer protoplasm
and metal but some new alchemy entering
the last panging tunnel you sealed and secured.

Driving deeper, blowing down your barricades
like Joshua, playing what no mortal ever played.

Peeling off new notes like bright blisters,
exorcising the orchestra, resolving each chord
with light, nebulizing fire.

White consumes you, turns you immaculate,
unhurting anymore.

The trumpet fluoresces with his phosphorous eyes,
confetti light orbits his head
until his image blazes beyond seeing.

You open your eyes as the waiter pours champagne,
hear something shut like a latch, focus absently
on an alabaster herald you hadn't noticed before.

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and goes south on a short bridge, tootles to the carved unicorn,
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so for a jigger of time you can stand it,
draw your breath on the afterbeat, see that he is
a real live trumpet man, not a sorcerer,
not a fakir pulling the cobra out of your basket.

He is a child—blowing bubbles of incredible light,
each expanding on its own spectrum, merging
with bobbing sixteenth notes. The trumpet his mistress
and mentor, an open-flowered soul in his young hands,
a reformed panpipe healed by his kiss.

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Caesar chariots, a boast of soldiers, an ancient fury.

He is Africa—black hunter-cry, leopard stalking,
impala bleeding, eyes looking out of water, eyes burning
and curling edges of night, smoke rising, winding winged scales,
sucking back into the bell, recycling.

He slams a fist in your throat, turns you
on a spit and hamstrings you
with blades of ice.

He hustles the horn, wrestles it, shares it
with Satan and seraphs, wrenches it away,
triumphant master-slave.

Feel the sound, mama? He's concentrating on all
your edges now, honing, tuning sharp sharper—
quivering on a sill to somewhere, retiring

WATERCOLOR WEEKENDS

My brother found this secret place,
his "spirit home" he calls it,
"where the clouds lie down"
high in Kentucky's covert hills,
a glacial goudge that filled
with clearest quartz remaining liquid
when it cooled, releasing fossils live—
sometimes rainbows jumping rainbows.

Staring at pooled sky
I can believe the monster ice,
passing through so tall and jagged,
reached up and snagged a patch of azure,
a shred of fluff, pulled it for miles
like a kite then spread it under glass
to keep, the blue so intense it seeped
and stained the grass the first warm May.

Now by night the captive's sky-kin come
calling on this mezzanine of land and lake
till time to board the right wind aloft
or rapid transit sunshafts.

But often, like my brother's guest,
they loll against cedars and firs,
they settle down in tent and lean-to,
even firepit, and hang around for days.

14

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.

(While I'm Trying To Write A French Rondeau)

YOU ASK IF I'VE FORGOTTEN HIM

I think of him when lightning splits
The pines astride this ridge then hits
The thicket wall still rolling fire.
Brush flares, rain hisses, makes a spire
Of smoke, a claim. It rarely quits
With that, but smolders in the pits
Of sticks and limbs till all my wits
Are stoked, so after I retire

I think of him.

In warming times each year this blitz
Re-scars my woods. I search for bits
Of green around charred wounds, then liar-
Like, hail life as something to desire.
All winter when my likeness fits,

I think of him.

WARM BEADS

I'm late to the coronation.
The strand of elliptical cut jade
you gave me to go with my favorite dress
wasn't in my jewel box.
I searched away the time,
knew I had to leave. The shiny wall
of my shower reflected watercolor greens
around my neck as I hurried to bathe.
You'd added more beads and put them on me
while I was dragging dream feet
down another charcoal corridor
with too many doors and none of them mine.
The new beads, lavender, peach, white,
blooming between the familiar leaf shades,
glowed against my skin all those hours.

"Jade isn't always green," you said
of the first string presented in a case,
"but it's always cold--
unless the wearer loves."

I feel the heat stored in each bead
before entering where you wait.

HERALDRY

The old clans remember beseeching
couchant northerlies to rise and face them,
willing a frontal assault from the wolf-wind
to keep their hungry scent from the king's deer.

They had to be fast. There was a death
penalty for venison eaters, a slower one
for those past aiming true
at browsing briskets. Daily more elders
went slack like draperies piled in corners
where only bellies were rampant.

Across escutcheons of hunters
the wind pried in bar-sinister crevices
of castle and hovel. It spiraled
round the borders of dark forest,
carving its bearings with dirks of ice
and sometimes on its own bias
offering a doe on morning's white field.

Yes, child, the crest you ordered
is elegant on mauve paper-- splendid spread
of gilded antlers and poised hooves, regality
balanced by a lean and bare-fanged entity--
panther, perhaps-- all embossed with more truth
than you were designed for.

SAPPHICS FOR FLOWER AND HUE

Glenna Holloway

Love of purple consciously colors living,
Willed to me by grandfather's genes and painter's
Palette rich with cobalt and reds he blended.

Wandering many
Prairies, marshes-- violet territory
Hoarding secret colonies schooled in beauty,
I present my emptiness wide for filling.

Patiently searching,
Buried pirate contraband couldn't tempt me
More than scrabbling under the layered deadness,
Finding all the earliest troves of purple.

Violets triggered
All my other sensuous childhood questing:
Easter eggs established the taste of purple,
Certain kinds with marshmallow, grapish-tinted.

Textural sense is
Shapes of polished amethyst, feeling purple.
Purple's sound is minor-key nocturnes, trombones.
Even more than violets, summer midnight

Serves up its fragrance.
Shaded all my days in its aura makes me
Cool to other essences, other floral
Offers. Many lavenders, so appealing,

Fail the comparing
Eye and fail in lastingness, substance-- spirit
Most of all. Humility, too, is lacking.
Children learn the violet's secret language;
Grown-ups forget it.

(cont.)

Holloway
913 E. Bailey Rd.
Naperville, IL 60565

Sapphics, etc.

2.

Johnny-jump-ups, Arrowleaf, Beckwith, Birdfoot
Share the basic honesty always centered
Posing golden compliments, spots of happy.

African hybrids
Show the same invincible traits less humbly,
Blameless cousins following scripture's bidding:
Never hide your radiance under bushels.

Purple addiction
Peaks in spring personified, leaving later
Needs to potted relatives. Thanks to breeders'
Skills my cravings find a reward each season.

People may judge this
Weakness silly, having no symptoms like it:
"Why be so obsessed with a hue? It's nice, but--"
Thralls don't have an alternate taste or fancy.

Nothing can change me.
Let me value violets more than roses,
Peaches, salmon, cinnamon, jade and silver--
Rich and restful helpings of soul's ease, love winks--
Simple perfection.

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 that grew valentine leaves
and mini-potatoes for doll plates?
And easy-to-break chocolate rocks with insides
like sugar compelling your tongue to the test?
Were there 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, a waiting pond 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
all there is
eye level in the grass?

Or is it a dose of strained fancy
force-fed beneath the sanded surface?
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 tilted and swayed—
somehow you went that way without knowing.
The soft fronds closed behind you
and the brambles made you shield your eyes.

OLD PLOWMEN

The big oil painting was eloquent with humanity
in bib overalls and ladder-back chairs
with the color worn off. Country store barrels
foiled the four practiced sitters
like family ghosts in the background.

In the upper left, Thadeus Ock idled his thick sole
against the obligatory pot-bellied stove
so I could smell the scorch. "Hunh, that's just as likely
if you spell sole with a 'u'," Clayburn Gilmer chided
from the foreground, sniffing. And Thad replied, "Naw,
I'll make it to heaven, all right. Doin' nothin',
stayin' outa mischief, that's how."

A sensitive brush caught sly turns of lip,
leprechaun eyes, impudent toothpick, poised Barlow knife.
"What about sins of omission, Thad?" Doc Benson drawled.
(He wasn't a real doctor but folks gave him the last word
on ague, constipation and male maladies till they forgot
he was just a farmer too. For one thing, everything of his
still worked at the time; for another,
he recommended "a modicum of sour-mash bourbon"
for a multitude of misfortunes.)

Thad and Jerry Holman addressed sinning by default
with square-boned shrugs. Jerry, haloed
in Kaywoodie smoke, added, "Reckon that's better
than actin' like a Pharisee makin' a big to-do."
A tobacco juice exclamation point seconded the comment.

The composition was sufficiently humble with grays
and blues; a muted palette of ochers and umbers
suspected the subjects of things
their own left hands hardly knew-- filled silos
for an injured neighbor, prize calf to a new widow,
kidney to a cousin, ready hammer and lumber
for the storm-damaged church belltower.

The artist's knowing stroke unstilled life
and sound. The faces defied canvas and time
that tried to reduce them all to sameness,
contain them in dark stained wood with mitered corners.

The gavel banged on my attention from the front
of the hall. The bidding was over. Afterward as I paid
the price, the auctioneer came over, wondering aloud
why I outbid the collectors. Had I known the artist?

"No. I watched him once. Bothered him probably."
I walked toward the picture I'd already entered
through the door he painted decades ago.
"I always wondered what happened to this work.
That man on the left-- the one peeling the apple--
he was my grandfather. The apple was for me."

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.

YOU ALMOST MADE ME SORRY

Don't think I believe
you've changed.
For awhile I was impressed
with your strange skill,
your spring-loaded will
to survive, the way you flourish
despite the odds.
You seem so disadvantaged,
the archetype underdog,
under bush and porch,
under log and boot and tire.
Deprived of wing or claw
or even fin, forced to move
on basest bone design,
made to dine deformed,
unarmed, on ghastly meals
seasoned with your own rage—
I was near ready to forgive,
to reason you a victim
of legend's libel till I recalled
you're party to an ancient contract
and credit for success
is nowise yours.
For a moment last night uncoiled
beside the lily bed, your eyes
betrayed you; a freak Freudian slip
of your slit tongue and an unnatural
warmth belied your touch.
You're still very much his emissary.

CHICAGO

Yeah, you've heard of it--
3 million strong, the Loop, the Cubs,
boating on the lake, Sears Tower, the Chagall Wall.
"Something there is that doesn't love a wall,"
the poet said. I know what he meant--
even if it's invisible. Here on the southwest side
most of them are too visible--
warped with the weight of graffiti,
bullying up to the next one to rub off dirt
and slough off a few more bricks or concrete chunks.
That's the one thing that never stays where it falls--
bricks and pieces of masonry are good for breaking
windows and heads. It's a simple equation--
deprivation makes some people mean.
Whatever gets smashed is a stand-in
for the wall they can't beat to rubble.
City fathers keep talking about how new jobs
and renewed pride are gonna tear down the stockade
of poverty, crime and neglect,
just like they got rid of the old stockyards.
But poorness is more than lack
of tollgate fees to get through the barriers.
It begins with the ancient walls of the womb
and discovers the greatest heights
in partitions of the heart.

CALLIGRAPHY BY NIGHT

Three migrating cranes
Brushed their winged strokes across
The waxing moon's empty page.

In silvered silence
We read their cryptic beauty
Like an ancient haiku scroll.