

unsigned w/dyse

A - I

THE BOTTOM LINE AT THE A-1 STAR STUDIO

Today we're talent scouting for six words,
Each one elite enough to pose six times
Spot-lit in unremitting bas-relief.
(Well, three get buried in the last scene's core).
What verve they need, what icy windshield nerve!
Why, Dun & Bradstreet ought to list such worth.

See, once we hire 'em, we pay market worth--
Less agency per cent, of course. Some words
Hit big then burn out way too fast; the nerve
Of one renown pronoun is frizzed at times.
All adjectives get raveled to the core.
Sometimes we have to splint 'em for relief.

At Central Casting, understand, relief
And benefits depend on proven worth.
We look for natural pith, a solid core
Of muscled guts when we audition words.
It takes incisive grit and New York Times
Know-how to rabbit punch or tweak a nerve.

Forget soft female endings lacking nerve.
We want raw drama. Comedy relief.
So even if you jiggle with the times,
You're still obliged to make a sentence worth
The cost of space, and TOP all other words.
Such heights expose clichés of hollow core.

Yeah, it's a jungle, baby. Sugar-core
Recitals full of candy corn pall nerve- *cyber-wired*
Ends nineties-wired for gritty ~~mach~~-four words.
If you can't make the cut, go on relief.
We've got to get our modern Webster's worth,
No one can shine with shades of former times.

Who's next? No imitations, please. Prime time's
Decided shock is in, the hardest core
Of all, the unclothed truth has gained in worth
As much as fiction when some well-paid nerve
Grabs center stage. And bored fans want relief
With extra violence voicing-over words.

But hey, you has-been words, at certain times
You're pure relief for overloaded core
And ruckled nerve. At last-- you may have worth.

THE BOTTOM LINE AT THE SESTINA STAR STUDIO

Today we're talent scouting for six words,
Each one elite enough to pose six times
Spot-lit in unremitting bas-relief.
(Well, three get buried in the last scene's core.)
What verve they need, what icy windshield nerve!
Why, Dun & Bradstreet ought to list such worth.

See, once we hire 'em, we pay market worth--
Less agency percent, of course. Some words
Hit big then burn out way too fast; the nerve
Of one renown pronoun is frizzed at times.
All adjectives get raveled to the core.
Sometimes we have to splint 'em for relief.

At Central Casting, understand, relief
And benefits depend on proven worth.
We look for natural pith, a solid core
Of muscled guts when we audition words.
It takes incisive grit and New York Times
Know-how to rabbit punch or tweak a nerve.

Forget soft female endings lacking nerve.
We want raw drama. Comedy relief.
So even if you're rockin' with the times,
You're still obliged to make a sentence worth
The cost of space, and TOP all other words.
Such heights expose cliches of hollow core.

Yeah, it's a jungle, baby. Sugar-core
Recitals full of candy corn pall nerve-
Ends cyber-wired for gritty mach four words.
If you can't make the cut, go on relief.
We've got to get our modern Webster's worth,
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Who's next? No imitations, please. Prime time's
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As much as fiction when some well-paid nerve
Grabs center stage. And bored fans want relief
With extra violence voicing over words.

But hey, you has-been words, at certain times
You're pure relief for overloaded core
And ruckled nerve. At last-- you may have worth.

A BOWL OF BLUE BLOSSOMS

My delphiniums budded, dolphin-shaped sucklings
nursing on light, turning light to pigment,
demanding of me a worthy container,
a competent complement for blue.

Glass-vased cosmos, bland and blueless, watched
as my bowl began-- a fat gray coil of earth,
cold-slimy to my touch, reluctant to accept
my warmth or my will. I insisted a deep reservoir

to prolong blue. Free of my hands, it rearranged
its molecules slowly, making no promises,
shrinking fossil-dry on a shelf. Its dark hollow,
encased in continental crust, lusted for light.

Graduated from the first fire, country coarse
as big bucktoothed zinnias in baskets in my studio,
its rough apprentice-brown drank deeply of unguents.
Native manganese and copper anointed its flaws.

In a final revelation it vibrated like a nova,
orange to white in my kiln, healed and ripened
in hereditary heat on its way to indigo. Settled
down with the world's glazed memories of sky and sea,

it came into its own first flowering today,
paired with now-pollinated sisters of the soil.
Their soft spurs brush its flanks in approval
as they share the blue planet's most perfected blue.

1
Margot
Sally

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Their soft spurs brush its flanks in approval
as they share the blue planet's most perfected blue.

lovely!

Form and inspiration: John Donne's "The Triple Foole"

BUT I RETRACT THE FIRST PART:

It's bothersome enough
To burden paper with this stuff.
No sinner is set free
By packaged thoughts tied up in poetry
That precious few will see.
Attempting to reach people who won't hear
Suggests the role of universal twit.
My self-excoriating jeer
Was interrupted--something like a hit!
My cheek began to sting as if a blow
Had struck, a smart rebuke from Erato.

Alone, I glanced around;
No explanation could be found.
My face was burning red--
Appropriate for twice a fool, I said,
Whose verses rule his head.
I might as well accept my impotence
And write a comic strip for ten-year-olds.
This pose, this height of arrogance,
Is ludicrous. The sorry truth unfolds.
Reproached anew, no slap, more of a jolt--
The muse released a forking lightning bolt!

II

Madame, you've made your point.
I wish you'd simply just anoint
Your poor affiliates
With fragrant potpourri that stimulates
But never aggravates
These tender spots in need of soothing oils.
Come ease this poet's growing pains and turn
Prosaic mantras into foils
For profound love all people can discern.
Erotic or agape, I'd express
The finest feelings humans can possess.

Ah, Erato, I'm not
Satirical, I've truly got
A worthy pitch to play
Upon mankind's appendages of clay.
I'd waken all distract
Savants half-buried under feral oats,
All loiterers on bars of shifty sands.
Let rhymes enhance my pithy notes
And rhythms reason with their wayward bands.
Revive my pen but spare them my mistakes,
And please make sure the higher meaning takes.

THE MERMAIDS HAVE THEIR SAY

Of all the sea's amazing creatures, we
Are most misunderstood and most maligned.
Some scientists have said a manatee
Is what the lonely seamen saw. How blind
Do they think sailors are? The other kind
Of insult calls us figment, legend, lie.
Despite all witness, scholars still deny
That we exist; we're classed with drunken visions.
Intelligence and beauty typify
Our kind. Our form was one of our decisions.

P.S.

The rare dizain can't match our rare design
nor can it fully capture our disdain.
But hey, our dizzy wordplay CAN disown
all human traits-- with ocean-deep derisions.

AFRICAN SYNOPSIS, THE BAOBAB TREE
(Baobab: "upside down tree" in Swahili)

Morning:

An inkblot on the sun
erupts hundreds of finches like a geyser
against crazed sky.
Zigzag in slow motion
a black quill
returns to tangled branches of calligraphy.
Wayward roots that grew bark
and aspired to heaven,
lurch upward to await the twilight embrace
of winged exclamation points who won it.

Afternoon:

Twisted lines on sheets of glare,
an ancient narrative
of heathen heat blanches the horizon.
Bias shade accents last night's lion prints
punctuated by commas of fallen twigs.

Evening:

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

THE AFRICAN QUEEN
(Acinonyx jubatus)

Explosive expletives, light speed
Define this cheetah hunting prey:
Designed to chase, an ancient breed.

Aloof, she seems to pay no heed
To grazing herds. She looks away,
Dark spotted expletive, light speed.

Alerted, healthy bucks stampede;
The cat is looking for a stray
Designed to chase, flaws in the breed.

She's driven by three young to feed.
Tall shoulders, rowing spine convey
The oldest expletives, light speed.

She's made her choice. Intentions freed,
She sprints, the rolling muscle-play
Designed to chase, perfected breed.

She kills a lame calf for her need.
She hunts by sight, she hunts by day,
Dark spotted expletive, light speed.
Designed to chase. Endangered breed.

ADOLESCENT ACUMEN

Grownups have a song about September.
They get goofy when they think of time
marching on and making them remember
how each minute takes them past their prime.

Don't they know each month is like forever?
Halloween to Christmas drags along
worse than seventh grade. We grumble: "Never
will it get here!" That's our song.

Hey, we know it's stupid to expect things.
Stuff won't happen when you want it to.
Bet it's just the same for nerds or rock kings--
no one's got a clue for what to do.

Old Man Time's just sorting out his backpack,
not about to hurry anyhow.
Folks aren't gonna change him with their yak-yak.
Why not make the honkingmost of now?

1500 A.D., ANOTHER ATLANTIC CROSSING

The dream-- or was it weariness and wine
 Inventing scenes of gargoyle fantasy?
 Convulsing heart, an ague in the brain.
 Cathedral bells and stabs of fiery tongues,
 Vignettes of naked natives, cursing Spaniards.
 Canary Island trees kowtowing west
 Like supplicating crones, trunks forming arches,
 Hair flung down foretelling the ground--
 That vision loomed so many times before,
 Asleep, awake, a simmer in the soul.

Half-thoughts in swirling idiom, a stew
 Of Latin, Portuguese, Castilian steeped
 In seaman's argot. He wondered where he was--
 Back in a yawning cradle, child again,
 Or ill across a horse ignobly sprawled?
 The Admiral, rising, bumped his head; the dusk
 Revealed his place. His hands reflexed, he heard
 The linking metal, felt its weight and wept.

The caravel was under way across
 A bias-running tide. The bulkheads groaned
 Disrhythmically; he languished on his bunk
 To drain the tankard pressed between his palms,
 His hard-won palm-lined shores lost from his grasp.

The captain of the ship released his bonds
 Which he, Colón, the colonizer, true
 To God and Sovereigns, loftily relocked.
 Let Isabella witness this injustice;
 Chains would be his scepter, calumny his crown!

By day, his silence broken only by
 His iron expletives against the rails,
 He watched the tropic birds dive whitely hungry,
 Longed to hold a quadrant to the sun.

The caravel embraced the blue winds-- his.
His route, his reckoning, unknown before
 He shaped the course. Now every idle sail
 In Christendom would fill with jealous greed
 Of westward-bearing amateurs who sought
 The East, the scoffers and the scholars who
 Believed but had no spine for unmapped risks.

The monarchs would restore his station soon.
They must. His words would open, clear their eyes.
He would return; his mission was Cathay
And still Cathay: This salt of Genoa,
This commoner who lived by wool and wits
And charts to touch Cipangu's fringes, claim
Them for Castile, was Destiny's own son
Ordained by God. He would not founder now
So close her gold reflected in each stream.
Next voyage, her silk and spice, her lace-carved tusks
And more would ride his holds low in the sea.

By night he made the stars his rosary,
Lamenting long to heaven's porchlights, pride
Still preened, comparing all his griefs to Job's:
And did I govern badly? Providence
Almighty was my guide. What choice had I
But execution of insurgents who
Defied the law? The gall of Bobadilla
Seizing private papers! And my house!

The captain was uneasy in these waters;
He sought and took his prisoner's advice:
"Northeast to catch the stronger westerlies.
This time of year Madeira is the landfall--"
The only words Colón spoke on his journey
Of degradation back to Spanish judgement.

The Admiral of the Ocean Sea could walk
The quarterdeck between arrested sleep.
He thought about how knowledge changed a man.
While proving others wrong, teredo worms
Of error/doubt could enervate his own
Accepted stock. But one thing never changed:
The Evil One beset all chosen men
Proportionate to greatness. Take the jinns,
Those cursed spawns of Islam loose on earth
To foul supplies and water, cause a plague
Or agitate the settlers' discontent.
Or pour malevolence in ears at court...

Misfortune falls on triumph like a fever.
Nor yet is either over, guiding angels...
I rally at this wrongful bitter dose!

--Glenna Holloway

stanza break

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A forgettable man named Bobadilla came to the New World colony of España almost 500 years ago to replace Cristobal Colón, Governor and Admiral of the Ocean Sea, who was shipped back to Spain in irons.

1500 A.D., ANOTHER ATLANTIC CROSSING

The dream-- or was it weariness and wine
Inventing scenes of gargoyle fantasy?
Convulsing heart, an ague in the brain.
Cathedral bells and stabs of fiery tongues
But nothing holy. Nothing sure or whole.
Vignettes of naked natives, cursing Spaniards.
Canary Island trees kowtowing west
Like supplicating crones, trunks forming arches,
Hair flung down foretokening the ground--
That vision loomed so many times before,
Asleep, awake, a simmer in the soul.

Half-thoughts in swirling idiom, a stew
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The caravel was under way across
A bias running tide. The bulkheads groaned
Disrhythmically; he languished on his bunk
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His hard-won palm-lined shores lost from his grasp.

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And charts to touch Cipangu's fringes, claim
Them for Castile, was Destiny's own son
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So close her gold reflected in each stream,
So near he breathed her lotus-perfumed twilights.
Next voyage, her gilded idols, lace-carved tusks
And more would ride his holds low in the sea.

By night he made the stars his rosary,
Lamenting long to heaven's porchlights, pride
Still preened, comparing all his griefs to Job's.
Or softly humming sailors' lusty songs,
Rattling his shackles like a tambourine.

His thoughts ran constant as the sand in glass,
Pouring out the hours, turned, repeated.
And had he governed badly? Providence
Almighty was his guide. He had no choice
But execution of insurgents who
Defied his law. The gall of Bobadilla
Seizing private papers! And his house!

The captain was uneasy in these waters;
He sought and took his prisoner's advice:
Northeast to catch the stronger westerlies.
This time of year Madeira was the landfall--
The only words Colón spoke on his journey
Of humiliation back to Spanish judgement.

The Admiral of the Ocean Sea could walk
The quarterdeck between arrested sleep.
At leisure, he reviewed the zodiac,
Philosophy and legend. Knowledge changed
A man. A man could also alter knowledge.
While proving others wrong, teredo worms
Of error/doubt could enervate his own
Accepted stock. But one thing never changed:
The Evil One beset all chosen men
Proportionate to greatness. Take the jinns,
Those cursed spawns of Islam loose on earth
To foul supplies and water, cause a plague,
A rash or make a wind go slack and stinking.
Or agitate the settlers' discontent.
Or pour malevolence in ears at court....

Misfortune falls on triumph like a fever.
Nor yet is either over, Espanola...
Be cheered by this most terrible amount!

APPALACHIAN AUNTS

I used to visit them in summer on that razor ridge,
that dark arching brow over pooled clouds below.
Sometimes I could hear the coal mine whistle
riding an eerie chill on half-moon fog.

Both of Daddy's sisters had cedar cabins up there.
They fed me "the best milk-fried corn 'n greens
ever t'smile all the way down your swaller pipe,"
as Aunt Amy described it. She and Aunt Lissie taught me
how to make fudge, throw pots on a kick wheel, glaze
them red with iron oxides, make perfume from bergamot.
Watching them care for Uncle Rowan taught me patience.
I liked their calling me "more sis-like than niecely".

Aunt Lissie had a wall of state fair awards for quilts.
Last thing she made me was a quilt of her blue ribbons.
She worked by coal oil lamps till her cat knocked one
over, set fire to her sewing basket, charred the floor.
For years she argued against electricity: "You get all
them lights up here and then you cain't see the stars.
I been watchin' Venus rise over Beckley's Knot in spring
since I was high as the churn. Ain't nothin' like
mountain nights for watchin' stars." She'd name them,
then point at Sirius with two warped fingers,
one tough as her brogans from never wearing a thimble.

Aunt Lissie played the church organ and Aunt Amy led
the choir. They used to sing to me when I was fumey,
orchestrating with spoons and combs, slapping thighs.
I grew tall as Aunt Lissie, taller than her sweet cane
and Aunt Amy's big plate-faced sunflowers. Uncle Rowan,
growing shorter, creaking in a willow rocker
with his jelly glass of shine and a screw-top jar
of black sputum, bet me I'd never come back after college.
But I went to his funeral, and a month later to Amy's.
"Too big a dose o' flu and not enough o' her," said Lissie.

Sometimes Aunt Liss spent a week or two with me away from
switchbacks, Joe-Pye weed, coon dogs belling in the gap.
I asked her to stay but she'd look out at star-starved
city night and point to herself: "Ole Dog Star don't move."

Her tall pointed gravestone tilts toward Sirius now,
Amy and Rowan nearby. At the cemetery on the summit,
I recall all the lavish gifts they gave away.

I don't know how much is them, how much is mountain magnetism,
but I keep returning. I stay for the stars, sudden as popcorn
in a black iron skillet, more vivid than anywhere else.
And I know the ones in their crowns are even brighter.

AUGUSTEMBER

Last night was murky; wild moonflowers
opened wider to make their own light.
Fish silvering to the surface
raveled the moon's face in the river.
We try to hold on to summer,
our fingertips coppery, slippery
as the powder from a monarch's wing
we touched for a moment.

Tonight a loon on the lake
hails the approaching equinox
with two chilled notes
spilled in space, trembling,
blue ice peaks piercing my warmth.

And suddenly I'm older.

THE BEEKEEPER SPEAKS OF LOVE
(after Howard Nemerov)

Each year another season's worth of stings
Makes changes in the blood, and maybe cures
Arthritis. But the tyranny of spring's
Resurgent hunger grows. Each year the cores
Produce new sweetness, fuel for endemic freeze.
Enough to prime a whisper, an indifferent pulse.
Perhaps inside my swarming dark the bees
Invest me with their will and it compels
My life, my declaration: You are mine.
The venom humming in my veins-- salvation.
Your angry barbs' deposits turn benign
Beneath this worker's stores of resignation.
And though my vow incurs a painful price,
Immunity is nature's own device.

"...two solitary strollers did not for a moment think
on coincidence, that unswum stream lingering at a man's
elbow with every crowd in every town."

--The Picasso Summer, Ray Bradbury

THE BEHOLDER'S EYE

For thirty-five years he starred Felicia
on imagination's stage, heroine of levitating scenes,
eye level against an unreeling highway, flitting
across a newspaper, a diorama under the shower spray.
Producer, director, still wanting to co-star.

He never questioned that she still looked twenty, never
updated the script. After each rerun he felt
somehow closer to the pastel denouement of boy gets girl.

Vacationing in the mountains, his wife antiquing
in the shops, he Sunday afternooned at a small art museum.
Pausing to revile cubist crudities, his eyes tripped
over a signature. The love of his life had married
some guy with that drearily banal name.
This one was the show's featured artist.
His collection of nudes defaced the north wall.

With a sneer the visitor moved closer to what he pronounced
framed absurdities. The lines and brush strokes annoyed him,
crashing colors tightened his jaws. A mounted newsclip
likened the artist's style to Picasso's, applauded
the painter's postmodern interpretations of his wife.
The review included a black and white photo of the couple.

The visitor shook his head, almost muttered aloud:
Ugly old woman, no wonder he painted her that way.
Worst kind of escapism. Distortion--alteration--
pretense of alternative glory.

The artist, early for the wine and cheese reception,
sidled up to the frown in front of his work.
"Tell me what you think of it," he said.

Candidly, formally, the visitor did. The pair conversed
briefly as other guests drifted by. To keep it polite,
the two men enacted the card swapping ritual. Outside,
the visitor saw he'd been talking to the painter himself,
shrugged and flicked the card in a bin. Inside, the artist
stared at the small printed rectangle in his hand.
Can't be but one oddball name like that, he thought.
No wonder Feli didn't marry him.

THE BEST THING MY FATHER DID WAS LIE

Where do you dig for truth? Out on the parallax,
in the center or the middle? There's a difference.
One is this fence I'm on. The pickets
are cut and dried, alternating black and white,
scratching fact sore but not much truth.
People climb up here out of context
to reach boughs of that old tree, maybe Eden's tree
but the whole crop's wormy to the core.

My father said
conqueror worms were the ONLY truth. He polished
his lies like jewels, wore one in each eye,
a ruby mounted in his tongue. His skull rattled
with others stored for special events and Sundays.
He cut new facets in those that went out of style
and none wore dim before he did.

We inlaid his coffin with his favorites. He willed
the rest to me, never to go with fence-climbing,
fruit-picking clothes. I keep them up here
because I don't know what to do with them. Worms
have started on the box but the gems
are still gorgeous and whole. I considered
sitting here until all were devoured
but it won't happen. A few worms tried to bite
the big ruby, damaged themselves and died.
Only harder stones can make waste of these.
Or some marvelous ray. Until unequivocal then,
the jewels will glitter, each its own irrelevance,
and I am tired of watching. All the real stuff
is down there in either-sided sludge.
Quasi-I must jump off right or left and grope.
If only some almost holy wind would push.

--Glenna Holloway

CHALLENGE FOR A SCIENTIST

In a time men call the beginning
there was unbridled light, too pure,
too intense for any but God's eyes.
A time of mass and matter,
warring and waiting-- His playthings--
molded and willed and flung
from dawn to forever.

When you crack creation's codes,
when you tell us in detail
how Earth and life happened, when
you prove at last it was no accident,

teach us the WHY.
Locate the lost language of holiness,
discover synonyms for praise. Give us
new words, wrested from granite,
born burning, tempered on glaciers,
cut and polished with diamonds.

To be spoken by men in whispers.

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

CONTROLLER

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

DRAGONBOAT RIDE

Unpracticed,
I knew better than to board a strange beast
in a strange land. Like a wild stallion
wanting only to be rid of me, the wading creature
recoiled when unleashed, the red prow reared,
bucked, and spouted after the river.

Flaming comb and hackles trailing fragments of sun,
my unbroken mount ignored my clumsy oars,
aimed its head toward rumpled sheen and beyond
to a trough of froth and roar
where its cries of freedom from myth
mingled with battle-thunder of rocks and water.
Shaking with conviction, dipping its beard
in spume once tasted, never forgotten,
it filled itself with all the magic it was heir to.

Shivering its song into my numb arms, swaying me
with how it knew the path around the boulders,
it claimed me fully, no longer a rueful barnacle
on a foreign monster. I, a pale spike
on its back, a faulty muscle of its wings,
listed in harmony into the next bend
where the river unclenched, waving
at the watching world, content to chase
whatever the secret current chased,
waking the surface with our gilded tail.

DYLAN

You willed us words, some smoking with green fire,
Your poems wrought of Welsh farm muck and sun;
Some rolled like rivers off your tongue when read
Aloud, some reveled in the windfall light.

Yet we crave more than verge of ripeness fruit
In bias shine, attached to snapping twigs.
Obliquely hinted secrets got us hoping
Gravity was conquered by your voice.

You rang the chimes enough to make us want
Them more, gave us the grassy boy beneath
The apple boughs, advised the father, dying.
But somewhere in between the whelping phrases,

The sung-to chains, the breath you made us hold,
Your lines succumbed to convolution's spell,
A mantra flashing with those brilliant beams,
But disembodied, pasted on, not of, the whole.

Your cadence hurried blood and led us on,
Your tongue attracted/stranded lovers, opened
Locks to weary puzzles hung in shadows.
Drunk on the tang, the sea-blown sound of words,

You laid aside your compass, let them lead.
Sometimes they beached you tenoring their lies,
Or pulled you past the tide to empty depths.
Beneath the waves, the two-legged bait was you.

And yet for all your flaws, you keep us coming
Back. You snag us with those hidden nets,
You dare us troll again where we can't see,
To plunge with sharper hooks and salted eyes.

Ah Dylan, from your ocean's weedy shoals,
Surrealistic colors play on flutes
Dispersing alien notes no scale contains.
Perhaps no one can ask for more than that.

FOR JESSICA'S FIRST DIVE

Our bubbling wake is ciphered melody;
each globule rising to a treble staff
of long-branched elkhorn spreading like a tree.
Gray-green conveys whole notes, a sonic graph
for ears attuned to each breath's epitaph.
White coral altars bless the tithes of sun
as poems flow from reeftop Helicon.

Tonight we'll celebrate your deep baptism at the Great Auk Inn.
Local color, legends, folks with sea water in their veins.
And the Baleful Bay Bards & Balladeers--best performers
any shore can boast.

All my deepest love, Jon

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY, EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

HJ
Ibis

A wave of life pumps up from brackish bogs.
Ten ibis bank, a flash of reddish beaks
and trailing legs with flapping white between.
They wheel and flicker in subtropic light.

The shadow of my plane skims undulating
Mangrove hammocks split with braided blue.
A wing strut intersects my view of stilts
And nesting flintheads. Herons soar beside
Me on the left. One cocks his head as if
To ask my business in his air space now.
These other species owned the sky eons
Before my jealous kind got off the ground.

A pelican peels off and plunges toward
The rings a fish made in a flooded marsh.
The day is saffron-hued, the sun is low,
Re-gilding gumbo limbo trees and tufts
Of cabbage palms, a fitting metaphor
For half-a-century of peaceful reign
As queen among the nation's parks. Her crown
of cocoplums and orchids wildly tilted,
She weaves her secret serpentine preserve
For native subjects, furred or scaled or shelled.
Her far-flung avian collection glides
From all directions, squawking, squabbling home.
The west anoints her moats with molten gold.
Anhingas celebrate with whole-gulped gar.

I was a child when Harry Truman came
To dedicate this cageless zoo, this home
For otter, alligator, panther, deer
And snake behind live bars of strangler figs,
Tall sawgrass, crab-leg roots. Reclusive bears
Find solace in cool mud; a million birds
Are incubated here to fledge, return,
Repeat the cycle endlessly, reprieved
From feather/leather merchants, faddish diets.
The loggerheads can lay their eggs without
Spade-weilding robbers following their tracks.

The rookeries grow stoic at day's end,
Somewhere a bobcat stretches on its moss.
No need for speeches, fireworks, champagne toasts,
The ancient glades recede in privacy:
The best, most golden gift man can insure.

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY, EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK

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IN DEFENSE OF MY POETRY

How can I make him understand?
I'm a child of reef and reed,
a water sign. My muse is La Mer
who comes unbidden, rolling
from unknown depths to regale
my shores. Sometimes I find
the metaphorical nacre she left
behind for me to make a poem.

I claim scant artistry. Only a way
of seeing. Not even knowing when
or where it will happen. Or how.
The rest is work. Like sifting sand
and washing shells.

He read my last poem and frowned.
You never write about anything
but the sea or ships, he said.
Don't mountains appeal to you?
And what about love?

I've been remiss, it's true.
I mulled over mountains once--
listing eastward, keels immersed
in rippling green far below.
Some had white-capped crests
like mighty waves of geologic time.

I studied a man once, and still--
eyes blue-deep as summer undertow,
caresses soft as low tide surf.

His kiss is a freshening promise
of trade winds speeding us home.
And our love is all the anchorage
this dreamer needs of port.

I will write him a romantic idyl
in rhyming ictus, a lighthouse
to shine through his coastal squalls.
It will begin as a sonnet.
It may soon become a sonata.

IN MEMORY OF

Scoffing at newness, my mother
returned each pretty dress, each cosmetic
and convenience I gave her. Once, she kept
a TV, a tiny black & white peep hole
that fueled her scorn of the world's doings.

Her kitchen was a dynasty of dull knives,
hand can openers, rusty wire egg beaters.
With warped fingers, she sliced rutabagas,
beets, carrots, an assertion
that arthritic labor made the meals meaningful.
Untainted by motorized blades or sweepers,
she afternooned with a straw broom
and washed clothes in the sink of martyrdom.
After years of frowns, her lip curl perfected,
I stopped giving her things to enhance life.
One day--I stopped giving her anything.

Oh Mother, why couldn't you have given me
something
I could miss...

INSIDE PASSAGE, GLACIER BAY
Remembering Plath, Sexton, Berryman, Crane

The ship's orchestra finishes with a forte flourish
like the midnight buffet's overkill of king crab
and baked Alaska. Down below tightly closed couples,
polished dance floors, funereal scent of carnations,

the engine massages my soles, strums my belly,
a discordant guitar. The screw munches
loose ice, spitting pieces against the hull
like fragments of my life, a hollow random tattoo.

Old images line my crevices. Other guests are primed
with promises of scenic splendor with gourmet breakfast.
Now the first corridor is full of trailing sentences,
serial goodnights. I wait for the last door to close.

The empty elevator delivers me to the top deck,
the penultimate chill. The sea
is Irish whiskey smooth on the rocks. The air
cleans my lungs like silk pulled through a gun barrel.

Across the bowscape, the moon trails a ramp wide enough
to climb if I wanted to be higher. At land's end,
an old worn glacier kneels to lap reflections.
The tall young one catches every dangling shine, volleys

the bright bias from peak to pylon to friezes of poems
in blue calligraphy. Hoarded indigo scalded with silver
can no longer resist duress of trapped fire. The facade
cracks and falls. Slow geysers muffle the shock wave.

No mattering difference comes of it. Liquid silver plates
the wreckage wallowing to the surface, blue-fluxed,
light-brazed. The glacier exposes another vein of blue,
another poem. The ship barely dips, moves on in afterquiet

while bakers far below make bread. I feel myself kneaded
on their boards, abruptly set aside to rise. I ease
back, careful not to slip. Older by decades, I experiment
with breath, pick up my coat, hunker in its warmth.

A great bald eagle crosses the moon-flood, sounding
like wet sheets on a windy clothesline, circling
to look again at what is passing under his jurisdiction.
Like him, I rise, silvered and possible.

INSIDE PASSAGE, GLACIER BAY
To Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton

The ship's orchestra, the midnight buffet,
couples strolling--a melange of overkill chic
and funereal scent of carnations.
Down here the engine massages my soles
through thick carpet. The screw munches fragments
of glaciers, spitting them against the hull
like pieces of my life, a hollow random tattoo.

Crevises of pain prime my thoughts. The guests
are primed with promises of scenic splendor
with gourmet breakfast. The corridor is full
of trailing sentences, last goodnights.
I wait for the final door to close.

The empty elevator delivers me to the top deck,
the ultimate chill. The sea is Irish whiskey smooth
on the rocks. Polished air wipes my lungs
like silk pulled through a gun barrel.

Over the bowscape, the moon trails a wide ramp
strong enough to climb if I wanted to be higher.
At land's end, an old worn glacier kneels
to lap reflections. The tall young one catches
every dangling shine, volleys the bright bias
from peak to pylon to walls of Picasso murals,
bas-reliefs, friezes of poems in blue calligraphy.
Its hoard of blue is scalded with silver. Its face
can no longer resist duress of captive fire.
The facade crazes and falls. The ocean roars in shock.
Slow-motion geysers muffle crashing entablature.

No mattering difference comes of it all.
Liquid silver heals over the wreckage wallowing
to the surface, blue-fluxed, light-braced.
The glacier's forehead exposes another vein of blue
and poems. The ship sways, dips, moves on afterquiet.

Slowly my eyes adjust. Unseen instruments guide
sleeping passengers through the fiord. Far below,
bakers are making bread. I feel kneaded
on their boards and set aside in a bowl to lighten.

A great bald eagle crosses the moon-flood, sounding
like wet sheets on a windy clothesline, circling
to look again at what is floating on his jurisdiction.
Like him, I rise to silvered and possible now.

*I pickup my coat &
hunker in its warmth,*

missing a line
but could be
used



INSIDE PASSAGE, GLACIER BAY
To Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and Hart Crane

I leave the midnight sound of the ship's orchestra,
tightly closed couples, funereal scent of carnations.

Down here the engine massages my soles
through thick carpet, strums my belly,
a discordant guitar. The screw munches
loose ice, spitting fragments against the hull
like pieces of my life, a hollow random tattoo.

Old images line my crevices, prime each step.
Other guests are primed with promises
of scenic splendor with gourmet breakfast.
The first corridor is full of trailing sentences,
serial goodnights. I wait for the last door to close.

The empty elevator delivers me to the top deck,
the penultimate chill. The sea
is Irish whiskey smooth on the rocks. The air
cleans my lungs like silk pulled through a gun barrel.

Across the bowscape, the moon trails a ramp wide enough
to climb if I wanted to be higher. At land's end,
an old worn glacier kneels to lap up reflections.
The tall young one catches every dangling shine, volleys
the bright bias from peak to pylon to walls of murals
and friezes of poems in blue calligraphy. Its hoard
of blue is scalded with silver; its face can no longer
resist duress of trapped fire. The facade crazes and falls.
The ocean roars in shock. Slow geysers muffle the crash.

Liquid silver heals over the wreckage
wallowing to the surface, blue-fluxed, light-braced.
The glacier's forehead exposes another vein of blue,
another poem. The ship barely dips, moves on
in afterquiet while bakers far below make bread.
I feel myself being kneaded on their boards.
Abruptly I'm set aside in a bowl to rise.

I ease back, careful not to slip. Older by a decade,
I experiment with breath, pick up my coat, hunker
in its warmth. A great bald eagle crosses the moon-flood,
sounding like wet sheets on a windy clothesline, circling
to look again at what is passing under his jurisdiction.

Like him, I rise, silvered and possible.

INSIDE PASSAGE, GLACIER BAY
To Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton

The ship's orchestra, the midnight buffet,
couples strolling-- part of the melange
of overkill chic and funereal scent of carnations.
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through thick carpet. The screw munches fragments
of glaciers, spitting them against the hull
like pieces of my life, a hollow random tattoo.

Crevices of pain prime my thoughts. The guests
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with breakfast. The corridor is full
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I wait for the final door to close.

The empty elevator rises lightly, delivering me
to the top deck, the ultimate chill. The sea
is Irish whiskey smooth on the rocks. Polished air
wipes my lungs like silk pulled through a gun barrel.

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strong enough to climb if I wanted to be higher.
At land's end, an old worn glacier kneels
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Like him, I rise to silvered and possible now.