

Poems 07

Remember, words are your life boats,
your conveyances. Kindling words,
load-bearing words. Chameleon, ambisexual words.
Build your bridges across the voids with words.
Maintain them with words. Be ready to fight
anything coming between you
and what you're building.

Each word has a root, a stem to lift it, a calyx
of connotation holding petals posing as truth.
And some are the real thing. Words sail every sea,
stream and sewer. Words walk the city
after midnight, hustle through Harlem, swagger
or stumble or hobble down Wall Street.
I thread Brooklyn Bridge cables with them, strung
with shreds of starlight, riverlight, peoplelight.
Words merge with rain and wind
and pluck the superstructure's harp.
Words orbit earth, gather inventive cosmic dust,
settle in cellars, sift into a lost cat's fur
and wait. Words are all a poet can own, but first
they have to be rescued, warmed, persuaded
to be heard, forget the damage done to them.

Does that excite you? Good, but beware
unreined exhuberance. It teeters high
on a narrow rail above emptiness
unable to break your fall.

TO A PASSING ACQUAINTANCE WITH DEATH IN THE DESERT

It was here I met you--
sidewise and slowly on earth's curve
swept bare and beige, slumped under tons of light.
No black hood and scythe-- you're nothing like
poets and painters imagine. Just old, overworked.
You rattled me dry as ghostwood, bubbled my skin,
swelled my tongue. I clamped my teeth
on hard brightness, refused your soft advances.

The desert needs no bones of mine.
Built of its own, the hoarded grains
of millenia's mills, it piles and plunges
its tidal waves over fallen spines of cholla.
Flowering agave rides selected vertebrae
of the planet's arched chine.

The light is molten alloy in a pouring crucible,
casting keys in crevices and fissures
to unlock the fourth dimension's doors.
Wind scours leftover civilization from my eyes;
I can read the coded map of the night-walkers.

Sometimes I smell you in trailing fringes
of breeze sliding the dunes. Deep
in the perigee, sometimes you finger
my neck hairs or vibrate the sidewinder.

Wading an ocean of light, struggling
in its currents, I wait for the nearest moon
to steal its weight. My footprints fill
with mauve in granulated layers of always.
Blossoming cosmos withdraw fuchsia rays
to meditate on seed. The skink surrenders
the last of its warmth to the owl. Ocotillos
comet their color above graven intaglios
like shadows of a spiral galaxy. I'm tethered
to ancient rhythms only my blood remembers.
Here is my space quest, cordless and alone.
Out beyond your waiting.

It was here you learned my name, here
I learned a sand language never spoken.
And when we came gaze to gaze, you and I--
remember-- it was yours that looked away.

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TIDEWISE JESSICA

Jon still wants to marry me. I said no,
put on my clothes, left him to his own element.

Let his brine bitch have him. No more green vertigo
for me, trailing in his bubbles, yawning
in green carbonation, backpacking my breath, sloshed
in an endless cocktail with bizarre garnishes,
tails swimming by. No more struggles
to keep going with plastic frogfeet swizzlers,
legs and arms begging to quit.

And the stinging saline green jealousy.
I could cope with a real woman. A rival voice,
an unpredictable harridan with hazel eyes. Yes,
sometimes his kisses do taste like her.

Some nights I dream him down where she pulls him
on her coral altar, winds him in kelp, writes
his elegy in squid ink. Some nights I feel
her eel-slick hand pulling mine,
hear her humming C-sharp arias my cells remember.

I think of that tale of love and sails
And watch the gulls dive down.
And I know, I know, that girl could be me
At dusk when the water looks brown.

Go home, go home, you can still resist.
Ignore his eyes, his words.
Keep adding up that negative list;
Stop gazing up at the birds.

Helpless romantic is not your style,
Despite your waking sighs.
He'll only hurt a little while;
She'll soothe him with green lies.

Look whose lying. You know you can't leave him.
Shouldn't have let him teach me to dive, shouldn't
have listened to that sea chantey rhythm,
wave patterns, hypnotic as a symphony.

But when I look inside my head like a cave fish
searching for its lost eyes, I feel cold walls
of dead-end grottoes narrowing around me.
No color, no music. No afterward without him.

The bay is a crucible of melted steel. I can see
his mainmast, a gnomon on the lunar dial.
My small rented boat is magnetized. I listen
to the oars against the tholepins as I go out again
with no more choice than the moonstruck sea.

LOST

She was an unscheduled blip
on a green-gridded screen. A pink trillium
nodded at her ankle, already swollen
where she turned it on a fallen branch imbedded
in the woodland floor beneath medallions of lichen.
Her limp worsened, making her an easy target
for burdocks shredding her hose, red-beading
her shins. Her face, belonging in a townhouse,
lips hovering over a Wedgwood cup,
bore the incipient vining of fear.

The sign had said 3/4 of a mile to the falls.
She'd heard they were pretty; why not stop?
A couple she met at the trailhead
assured her it was an easy walk, no climbing.

Lacking comfort of candy bar or cell phone,
she watched the sun leave a livid future
above the canopy of whispering. Shedding pines
needled her steps. Her bitten cheek
blossomed like an old embarrassment.

All the trees seemed to be clones
of the one where she had seen a bright bird
beckon like the urge to atone for something.
She was sure she made a wrong turn there.

The forest widened with choices, compressed
with sameness. Conspiracies of wind and leaves
persuaded her she was approaching the falls.
The same wind canceled her calls for help.

She was a non sequitur in a bad joke.
She gave a short laugh, her inner eye watching
from some clue, mind racing back
to her car parked on paving near the interstate.
The white mycelium of panic threaded through
her like unseen fungus beneath her feet.

She told herself repeatedly
there had to be a river close by
where she would pick up the path. People
who loved her waited only 90 minutes away.
Roots, rocks, decaying logs, hidden gullies
waited for dark.

THE ENLIGHTENED ONE

Despite his name, Fujiyama
hides behind a larger mountain
of September sky.

Visions, haunting as haiku--
mine to see only on silk
in misty colors of scrolls.

Two weeks I lingered,
hanging small pleas on cedars,
waiting for the clouds to move.

I seek audience
with its majesty. Struggling
up Mt. Fuji's lower flanks
with a guide,
I touched it like lost truth--
unidentifiable.

I held it hugely,
intimate as ignorance.
Shinto wind urged me
back to Kamakura's view,
back to the Hakone hills.

Below, red ferries
stroke the murky lake that holds
no reflections of Fuji.

My paper fortunes
grow impotent, the mountain
unmoved by my petitions.

Like an ancient shogun
coveting his privacy, he sits
enshrined in incense smoke.

Contemplating old crucibles
beneath his throne,
pondering a show of power,
he screens the whole
conclusion from earthly eyes.

I long for light to shed
its perfection on the crest.
Now I must leave without
a glimpse of what I came for.
Sayonara, Fuji-san.

THE IRIS LOVERS

Our letters, your calls, became frequent
as the season warmed. My stationery
changed from white to blue to lavender
as spring advanced. Your last note
was as purple as a sophomore's sonnet.

The year of our divorce rolled by
on red reels of anger. The second year passed
in disjointed segments, unexpected gaps
without color. By the third, we began noticing
May and June were still filled with iris--
their fragrance, their gently indelible
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Funny thing about iris-- you can plunge
your nose in the flowers and swear the scent
doesn't come from there. Yet overnight
a single blossom perfumes a room and you know
its presence before you turn on the light.

I dress to meet you for dinner in a town
I've never seen. No need for descriptions
of what we'll wear, we've changed little.
Or maybe a lot. Already we've made recognitions--
the source of sweetness, the essence of shades.
There's a good chance for us now in the light.
We've been in each other's dark a long time.

--Glenna Holloway

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ON A WALKING/TALKING AFTERNOON

Some people called you prickly, even cold.
My friends all thought you kept my reins
too short and exercised too tight a hold.
For years I thought the same--and said as much--
but never once made plans to leave the fold.

My best friend ran away, broke all the rules.
In summer envy, I defied my mold,
sought wider options, less restricted space.
I yelled for freedom, wanted to be bold.
I'm sure I ventured further than you wished,
but you'd taught me to tell the brass from gold.

You knew my friend would reap a bitter crop;
it turned out even worse than you foretold.
It's hard admitting your way was the best;
those corny adages you always doled
like vegetables and bus fare-- even now
they make me groan. Yet friends I've polled
now say they'd rather have a firmer hand
than one too slack. The mothers who cajoled,
they said, got flattering deceit returned
while you got sass. If you were quick to scold
you also were the first to offer praise.

So Mother, here's a tribute-- nothing scrolled
or lacey, just belated words of thanks
I've tried to put together as we strolled.
Although we're different, I'll wear your cachet--
still evident when both of us are old.

--Glenna Holloway

LEARNING YOUR OWN

After ages of squinting into the white realm
of clouds, suspecting music just under the surface
if only you could get close enough to hear it,
you suddenly see the birds:
Grace notes from the highest scale,
perched on the treble staff.
Maybe they were there in the beginning,
dreaming their wings; maybe they arrived
this moment on the first faint edge of harmony.

They free fall, arc and gyre,
then pose as finials on spires of light.
They soar again on vowels of exultation, vibrato
of tenors and sopranos holding at the top
of their range, mindless of time or breath.

They orbit the sun and return, dipped in azure
and indigo, trailing fire from tertials and tails,
circling at eye-level until you recognize them,
sing them-- your own human joy:
Saved in small increments, amassed over years.
Now anthems flown from their long-dim cage.

--Glenna Holloway

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COUNTERPOINT: THE LOST CORDS

The therapists all gave her up: "No hope,
why waste your time? She'll never speak a word,
she's closed her mind. The case will break your heart."
Like high-pitched bees trapped in an envelope,
an idea whined inside my head. I heard
concertos in my sleep; they could impart
a healing strength, if not to her, to me
if this approach should fail. My reasoning
was simple: Savagery had caused her state--
let human heights expressed harmonically--
the smoothing, prodding shades and seasoning
of music throb down walls and activate
her frozen cords and self-imprisoned tongue.
Re-tune her soul to beauty, played and sung.

The reels unrolled their offerings in her room.
Soft-spun sonatas, choirs and symphonies
recorded on her brain as sure as wax.
Rachmaninoff-- her eyes began to bloom--
Dvorak, Brahms, Tschaikowsky's melodies
seeped in and out the conscious parallax
of time and tone, entwined inseparables.
Romanced, wing-shod, string-plucked-- who could resist?
One day I stopped the sound-feast. She must ask
for more. She must end the silence. Miracles
began. She'd felt some chord resolved with Liszt--
Les Preludes-- wanted it again. Her task
was plain. She had to name or hum the thing.
And music won. She found the notes to sing.

--Glenna holloway

1987 Glonelries

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DECEMBER DINNER, MANHATTAN ISLAND

Embossed and tasseled menus offer sole,
Fresh-caught, sauteed with lemon, chives and dill,
For fifteen dollars. I'm not hard to sell.
My mind flies back to offshore Maine: A shrill
Breeze blows; two fishermen are braced until
A wave plows by. One checks the last end-knot
In seven-hundred pounds of ice-caked net.

The day drains into dark, an eerie glow
On bitter spindrift near Three Dory Ridge.
The pair make ready for the longest tow.
The hungry net flares out to form a bridge
With mud-slime ninety fathoms deep, to nidge
Through ancient green dimensions. Spools unwind,
The dragger boat aims high into the wind.

Dan begs the cable not to twist. "All down!"
He cries, his teeth bared in the salty cold.
The trawl will prowl the bottom until dawn.
Five hours on a northerly course, a bold
Approach near the ridge's curse. Jarl can hold
The dragger true if anybody can;
One eye is cocked on weather, one on Dan.

They keep their senses honed on winter, knowing
No one else is out, slipping into troughs
More calm than either side, and always going
For the fissures between storms. Jarl coughs,
A brine-hack, one of fishing's ons-and-offs.
When seas are warm and docile, all the boats
Come plying, trailed by waves of white wing-beats.

The price of fish sinks like a weighted trap.
Now grays will bring a buck a pound or more.
But then it drops to thirty cents like tripe.
If these two drag luck's lap enough before
She rolls away and orders them to shore,
They'll own their boat. Moon dirties comber caps
As numb lips hover over coffee cups.

(cont.)

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The latest catch stinks illing-sweet, no matter
How hard the blowing scours the culling pens.
Afoot in mucus, ice and offal-spatter
On a writhing deck, Dan guts fish, and pins
The rattling tarps, working out his back pains.
A sprawling hillock angle-slaps the bow;
He almost slips. He wipes his spray-stung brow.

Their thoughts are never easy in the bag
They tow. They're after flounder, giant hake,
Gray sole and other flatfish if they're big.
Is this place right? The time? They watch their wake,
And wonder. Far below did something break?
A different dip and shudder in the pull,
Uneven drag. They don't believe it's full.

They man the winches, play the cable, reel
The snarled mouth of the mesh maw up. They set
Their own jaws, wrestling with the plates of steel
To free them. Spirits start to rise with net;
It isn't ripped! They see enough to whet
Their hopes again. The back half holds its fill!
Enough good ones, maybe they still won't fail.

The struggling sack is pierced with bony fins,
A single gasping monster hoisted high
To dangle and then burst into the bins
As Jarl yanks on the knot. With sharp know-how
Dan wades the mound, outlandish alien who,
With crystal in his hair and beard, assorts
The flapping gourmet silver from the quartz.

The North Atlantic picks round their craft,
Hurls foam invective. Jarl shoves in the throttle,
Eyeing shifty winds. Dan shouts from aft,
"Mostly grays! We pay off the Aristotle
Tomorrow!" Pre-dawn brings a bluish mottle,
Bias-lighted clouds. Spume climbs the hull.
But grins crack tension as Dan works the haul.

The biggest part of being best is knowing
When to leave and live for next-time risks.
Now in the wheelhouse they begin renewing
Silent pride in their boat, their skill. Whisks
Of rain accent aloneness. Panel discs
Of light ignite their eyes. I long to rub
Their poor shocked hands and draw them a hot tub.

(cont.)

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My husband doesn't know, nor does my brother,
How much I miss them now, how much I pray.
I should have known there couldn't be another
Place for me. My most is in Boothbay.
My plans swirl by in mounting disarray.
Our New York waiter pours our fancy wine;
I watch his hands instead of drinking mine.

He spoons the ritual lemon butter on
My sole as my companion nods and smiles
And I would give up everything I own
To put behind me all the stubborn miles
Between the spot where ocean reconciles
Ambition, love and discontent. I hear
Another diner say the price is dear--

I long to say he only pays a fraction
As he complains that sole should cost much less.
Beneath my skin I feel the rising friction,
And tell the man I'm with: "I can't say yes.
I'm sorry, but more time won't help. I guess
The job is not for me. That sounds insane
I'm sure. Good night. I'm going home to Maine."

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PILGRIMAGE TO BLUE
Glenna Holloway

The ripe moon mounts a steepled tower
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 itself leanly
into the chase of shadows,
silent as a star shooting.
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'll inhale turquoise horizons
unscaled by tall containers stacked together
by corporate cliff dwellers. I'll move slowly
through granite halls posing for the centuries,
staging endless similes under the direction
of wind and water, enclosing nothing
but samples of light. I'll search for the shine
and sharp of obsidian and ocotillo, touch sand,
pinyon, and a sweating pinto. Leaving, I'll stop,
turn around and stare at pronghorns
just as they wheel back to stare wide-eyed at me.

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

Published 1989 in a small anthology called POETS OF NOW

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FIRST PERSON PLURAL

It's getting crowded up there
in the old English dark where they multiply
like cell division-- quasi-friends, strangers,
shirt-tail kin, ragged French non sequiturs
and Latin innuendoes bumping into each other
in tunnels too Scot tight to pass a synapse.

Too many "I's" in the back of my head--
not focused or matched, not possessed
of clear sight or even hindsight.

Most of them this manifest I
short circuits en route to articulation,
each rooted in fertile ego firmly attached
to home base, each claiming eminent domain
till sometimes I'm not sure which one I am.

Lend me a psychic beam and I'll show you
how they hide in gray folds and fissures
like contraband, waiting to slip over
unguarded borders or load an unfired thought
on the grinning gullible I to put across.

Sometimes they surface, several at once,
playing poker with my cool. And there's one
always looking way off over the communal rim
of my glasses or my goblet, and skysmithing
around with shiny elevated ideas
the rest of us have never seen spark.

Not at all fair, because now
I can't say I haven't got a clue.

--Glenna Holloway

HIGH PLAINS HURRICANE
(Equus caballus, feral)

The thirsty herd's gone farther west,
No trace of hoof prints anywhere.

He's 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 the illusions-- and for a jigger of time you can stand it, fill your lungs on the afterbeat, see that he's nothing but a live trumpet man, not a sorcerer, not a fakir pulling the cobra out of your basket.

He is a child-- blowing bubbles of light, expanding the 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 into your throat, turns you on a spit and hamstrings you with blades of ice. He hustles the horn, wrestles it, his mistresss and mentor, a panpipe saved by his kiss.

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He slams a fist into your throat, turns you on a spit and hamstrings you with blades of ice. He hustles the horn, wrestles it, his mistresss and mentor, a panpipe saved by his kiss.

He's 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.

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HIGH PLAINS HURRICANE
(Equus caballus, feral)

The thirsty herd's gone farther west,
No trace of hoof prints anywhere.
That wily stallion must've guessed
There ain't no living space to spare
When ranchers rile up and declare
Range mustangs are the cowman's bane.
Folks mutter with each summer scare
About the horse called Hurricane.

Ole Hurricane's the devil's pest,
Long scars dissecting heavy hair,
His legends ranking with the best.
I've watched him curb a straying mare
And beat out rivals with his stare.
He stripped my crops then flipped his mane;
I don't know why the hell I care
About the horse called Hurricane.

Ten cowboys rode out on a quest
To make his hated band beware
Of grazing land. Three ropers messed
With Hurricane and made him bare
His teeth. They heard his whickered dare
As he got loose with wit and strain
While seven men set up a snare
About the horse called Hurricane.

I watched them work and sweat and swear
But it was bound to be in vain.
They couldn't know I looped a prayer
About the horse called Hurricane.

GLENNA HOLLOWAY
913 E. Bailey Road
Naperville, IL 60565

THE CATALYST
On Reading Howard Nemerov

After his breaking rainbows, feeling
stings like his beekeeper, the burn
of peripheral glare and Frostian dry ice,

after ages of your own, staring blind
into the white whelm of clouds
suspected of quantum wisdom just under
the surface if only you could penetrate,

you suddenly see the birds.

They arc and gyre and pose
as finials on pylons of light.

Like Nureyev's ghost holding at the top
of his leap and Nemerov's verses levitating
above blue swallows, they soar on vowels
of exclamation, orbit the sun
and bring it back to you,
trailing fire from tertials and tails,

turning at eye level until recognized--
your own inner sight
freed from the long-dimmed cage.

--Glenna Holloway

BEQUEST FROM AN ARTIST WHO DIED IN SPRING

Pale trees march up the shadow side of morning.
Somewhere doves are mourning
in shades of leftover winter like the pigments
I blend. I can't remember cinnabar or amber.
The wind casts about for a storm to smear
the umber sky. There is a void in my canvas,
old friend. It glares
through missing colors looking for meaning.

My palette lacks your softened medium
and ripe touch. I move my easel nearer the window
and mix more viridian as you once told me. "Green
is empathy," you said, "leaf, light, laughter."

The scene outside is no longer
what is happening under my brush or behind my eyes.
I paint with light never captured before,
an intensity of knowing. From the old focal point,
the old hue, a new value emerges.

Mentor and source, you will always be missed.
But empty space is vital to design, (ours and His)
how well you knew. And something in its center
will goad me to work; the slow collage of time
will guide my hand around it
and tame each stroke with faith.

COUNTENANCES

We never believed
what was in Dorian Gray's attic,
never believed such a bargain
could be struck. Deep
in the dark gardens of our minds,
we nurture the notion that faces
are designed and ordained to reveal
the wearers. Zealously
we cultivate rooted persuasions
that eyes are port holes
of the soul. We're ready to swear
looks like yours would mutate if you lied.

There would be striations
on your forehead if you were unkind.
Bigotry would reverse the sweet upturn
of your lip. Some molding stigma
would overtake each flawless feature
if you were faithless. And surely
a creeping mycelium would surface
to betray any other secret evil.

Ah, love, we grow dilemma into blossom.
We hoe as weeds the sprouting truths
inside the fertile rows of custom order--

while we with our own eyes
keep the slipping domino
on someone else's face.

LEAVING OUR BOAT FAR ABOVE

All day we cruised this ripe Bahama blue.
The engine cut, our dolphin escort bids
our bow-waves farewell, turns and arcs on cue.

They have no need of compass, charts and grids.
They disappear in froth like playful kids.

We dive with morning, slowly we go down
through gilded glare, a curtain-rise of krill.
Festoons of light define us yellow-brown.

La Mer, the mother of us all, life's mill--
we recognize our need for fin and gill.

Beneath the sea our bubbles play their part
in this collage now sudden silver-slashed
with black-masked angels practicing their dart

and pivot, coded greetings sequin-flashed.
My senses can't retain the treasures cached.

Increasing time each day the sea is home
to wetback aliens, small and monochrome,
entranced within our turquoise catacomb.

APPRENTICE ARTIST

Ages ago, images ago,
rich with awards for painting iris,
I was content
with replication: Brushstroking
floral vitals at their peak,
shape and sheen of the premises,
exactitude of shade
and light's promises. The whole canvas
conspiracy of dimensions in space.

Late midlife, accustomed to acclaim,
I suddenly see unguessed galaxies
in purpling standards,
in the coupling gold of bees
and bearded petals, the exposure
of lavender junctures. Nodes
of knotty secrets ripen beyond
the reach of sable hair.

There are planets and fetal faces
in blue-veined white,
moons, lungs, bones beneath
syrup of pink, dust of maroon.

Pale scent of yellow
fades from my sleeve. Armies
and godsmiths, false prophets
and poets, beauty and sin abide
in furling dampness as tropic pigment
fails. And falls.

But the patient stem,
the central stalk of knowing,
slightly twisted now like wire,
supports a forming: bulbous and female,
upright and male, soul and marrow
coveted within sculptured endings.

The captured subject seethes
on an inner palette, ruckles, stretches,
then surpasses all invented armature,
clawing its way to the surface
of my newfound clay.

Glenna Holloway
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AUGUSTEMBER

Last night was murky; wild moonflowers
opened wider to make their own light.
Tonight, fish silvering to the surface,
ravel starshine in the cold black river.
I try to invent another month, name it,
hold on to summer with coppery fingertips,
slippery like powder from a monarch's wings.
A loon on the lake hails the passing
with two chilled notes spilled in space.
All the way home
their treble plays my spine, imprinting
blue ice peaks on my still warm graph.

--Glenna Holloway

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THREE GENERATIONS AFTER

In the distance
crows rise
like oily smoke
claiming the air space

Behind curtains
she watches them
dirtying the new day
more coming
beyond counting

The first wave scrabbles
on her roof, a commotion
like combat boots
on winter clay roads

The ceiling amplifies
claws
beaks
coarse calls
Their ranking member
screeches a command

She reflexes to the dark
of the kitchen to hide
two great grandsons
in cupboards
under leftover night

She wonders if
they have genetic memory
Her own chromosomes cock
like a .45

She waits
suspended
as renewed cells remember

She waits
for the generic fist
on her door

THE ACTIVISTS

She heard how you shouted for her rights,
kneading your hands and her case like a paid mourner
as long as she was out of sight in a dark belly.

Now you've got no space for another mouthy girl
with no songs you can clap to, a speech impediment
and no market value. She can't even borrow
a typewriter to clack out her poems
you wouldn't read anyway coming from a zero address.

But you send her messages: To stay in school,
stay off the street, off drugs and sex,
get exercise and eat from healthy basic food groups.

You pass her looking at clouds or your new shoes.
All you see is what goes on and on--
another walking womb that won't be empty long.

Her bones remember nothing of all that surplus milk
and butter and heart-bleeding that appeared
in the media but nowhere near her. All she got
was bowls of thin soup and a condom machine
for staying in ninth grade on the west side.
Already you're clearing your throat
and getting in position to leapfrog her to her unborn,
and wring out your fetal rights speeches again.

Tonight she tried to vacate her slot in the cycle
with the large economy size bottle of aspirin.
A neighbor who knows I'm a nurse brought her in.
When I get her cleaned up, look close.
She's here. She's now. I dare you.

--Glenna Holloway

SLENNNA HOLLOWAY
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TABLE SETTING

Mother, your only daughter has prepared
All your favorites-- wild rice and duck,
Rose wine, centerpiece of mauve asters
For our small silences to orbit.

Fermentation bubbles spot the linen,
Condensation creeps down glass.
I pinch my words for doneness.
It takes time to make a meal.

How long do mother/daughter banquets last?
It's been years since I left, a lone moth
Escaping the cakes in your closet.
And still we feed at these movable feasts.

Why do you keep saving the torn giftwrap?
Slipping it under my eyelids at bedtime,
Crumpling it under my tires on the tollway,
Fanning the mustiness of it as I shower.

Please. Just eat the good things I've made.
I've sheathed my razor edges, vowed
Not to attack your hands.
My voice will not rise tonight.

You sit staring, oily opalescence skimming
The entree, the trail of our sentences.
I smile and touch the flowers: "You once
Made me a velveteen dress that color."

You say you don't remember that at all,
And purple only reminds you of pain.
You ignore a second helping
Of my dated tidbits, then sniff

The current kettle, declining the ladle
Designed for your grip.
After the table is cleared, leftovers
Saved for another venue, you finger

The fastener on your purse, pick
At the foil-wrapped roll under tissues
And offer me a broken lozenge
Coated with the lint of love.

TIDEWISE JESSICA

Jon still wants to marry me. I said no,
put on my clothes, left him to his own element.

Let his brine bitch have him. No more green vertigo
for me, trailing in his bubbles, yawning
in green carbonation, backpacking my breath, sloshed
in an endless cocktail with bizarre garnishes,
tails swimming by. No more struggles
to keep going with plastic frogfeet swizzlers,
legs and arms begging to quit.

And the stinging saline green jealousy.
I could cope with a real woman. A rival voice,
an unpredictable harridan with hazel eyes. Yes,
sometimes his kisses do taste like her.

Some nights I dream him down where she pulls him
on her coral altar, winds him in kelp, writes
his elegy in squid ink. Some nights I feel
her eel-slick hand pulling mine,
hear her humming C-sharp arias my cells remember.

I think of that tale of love and sails
And watch the gulls dive down.
And I know, I know, that girl could be me
At dusk when the water looks brown.

Go home, go home, you can still resist.
Ignore his eyes, his words.
Keep adding up that negative list;
Stop gazing up at the birds.

Helpless romantic is not your style,
Despite your waking sighs.
He'll only hurt a little while;
She'll soothe him with green lies.

Look whose lying. You know you can't leave him.
Shouldn't have let him teach me to dive, shouldn't
have listened to that sea chantey rhythm,
wave patterns, hypnotic as a symphony.

But when I look inside my head like a cave fish
searching for its lost eyes, I feel cold walls
of dead-end grottoes narrowing around me.
No color, no music. No afterward without him.

The bay is a crucible of melted steel. I can see
his mainmast, a gnomon on the lunar dial.
My small rented boat is magnetized. I listen
to the oars against the tholepins as I go out again
with no more choice than the moonstruck sea.

DORSIMBRA TO A ROCKY MOUNTAIN GOAT
(Oreamnos americanus)

We search the springtime; she would have a kid,
A curly miniature with dainty face
And hoof sure as a stylus on a grid
Imposed on jutted granite, leaping space.

Climbing last October's high winter overture,
We discovered her, an aloof alpine queen--
Posing, perfecting her regal robe, distantly
Appraising the male that bested his rivals.

We coveted her memory by each fire
Until we found her once again. Too late.
A poacher's bullet plunged her past his reach.
We search the springtime. She would have a kid.

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MASTER'S DEGREE

Black Leopard, I've released you.

With rich pigments and consummate skill
I've freed you from my camera,
from the dead-ends of zoos and the dark
of legends. Beneath my jungle brush
your sulfurous stare transfixes me.

Draining my ebony palette, you leap
across my canvas. Out of context
you stalk the stretching shadows
in my studio, looking for a confrontation.
I try to warn the presiding tomcat
of your coming. Too attached
to this background, I'm stilled life,
voiceless and impotent,
unable to command the mix of my media.

Proxy Tom bounds atop an empty pedestal,
looks down at you then locks his gaze on me.
Flexing his blackness around form and motion,
he arches, preens, poses. From a corner crouch
your tail-tip undulates. The point is made
by both of you. It is the artist confronted.

I break from the fixative, the varnished style,
push away the paint and hurriedly pommel
a mound of sculptor's clay. You emerge
swift and sure, matrix of predatory muscle,
master of stealth and jungle night.

Ah Leopard, at last you're fully free--
but mine!

NIGHTKILL
(Felis leo)

It was not for hunger. His motives
old as allegiance to his own blood,
the strange cat followed the pride
for days. Five lithe females, four cubs,
no signs of a male benefactor.

He was part of kopje shadows and grass
extravagant with his scent. He chuffed
his presence on cooling twilight,
rolled his grunts downhill,
banked hoarse calls off termite mounds.

Beneath veldt thunder in moonless hours
black as his mane, impatience arrowed him
straight to the hidden young. He snapped
the neck of each sleeping cub,
leaving each where its mother left it.

While he waited for the females
to return from their hunt, discover
their loss and feel their triggered heat
for him-- his own ancient bane,
always tracking death, closed in.

Jaws strong enough to break his bones,
all missed their chance, most disappeared
in layered dark. Against the last lightning,
he stood over the matriarch's throat,
a new red rictus above her torn out laughter

as the lionesses arrived
to welcome their new king.

ENCOUNTER WITH CANIS LUPUS
Northern Montana, 1994

His kind are few but he's no loner.
The stance, the stare
confirm him. Pack leader.

He feels no need to summon the others.
My rabbit gun stays shouldered.
Startled into perfect stillness,
neck hairs alert,
communion is a thrumming wire,
predator to predator.

So much is coiled in his laser eyes--
lessons in alpha honesty--
millenniums of wolf wisdom
filling the dark doors of his pupils.

Pale ocher eyes admit everything--
the taste of warm blood,
ritual hierarchy in moonrise, defense
of his rank, his the sole right to breed,
secrets of the dominant female.

His eyes do not blink.
In a swift curve of light
I enter for a moment
the pure heat of their certainty,
and forgive all their knowing.

AFTERNOON FAWN
(Odocoileus virginianus)

Your mother is nowhere near.
She would have stomped her hoof,
a single muffled drumbeat
before her rump flashed a white flare.
And you'd merge with the vanishing point
in the musky collage of leadwort and tanoak.

You're already spotless,
minus your first ground-hugging pattern,
budding your first tines, twin spikes
punching up through sueded taupe,
legs splayed as if an inept sculptor
made your armature of the wrong gauge wire.

Your eyes and nose lavish me with curiosity.
Clearly you would let me touch you.
But you must learn certain lessons
about my kind. The county has counted
more deer than the forest can feed.
Thickets of decisions for your kind
have been planted, dug up and replanted.

The dilemma grows. I would hate
finding you starved, beauty savaged
by woodland recyclers. Hungry children
denied your meat. Yet, man the meddler,
however noble his aim,
seldom solves the whole, the interlocking
rings he doesn't see or know. Nature
is well-rehearsed and time is her ally.

But this moment is ours, young confidant,
this wonder we share. I'll never forget.

With regret, I sharply clap you away.

MAJOR RHAPSODY IN F SHARP MINOR

You didn't expect him here
with 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 backdrop.
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 rubber cheeks.
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. 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,
gone minor again, flowing that little groove
where pain runs convex to the surface? How much
is the glint of crystal hung from mirrored arches,
moving faintly with audience breath,
striking flints in his pale eyes?

(cont.)
Major Rhapsody

Feel the sound, mama? He's concentrating
on all your edges now, honing sharp sharper,
quivering on a sill to somewhere, retiring
to a glistening waver pulsing between turquoise
and green, hanging on like dying gills.
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-- chapped, smacked,
earning your master's degree in martyrdom,
sewing clothes out of mill ends,
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 in 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 motels with lint bedspreads
and the boozy corners of never-quite-level halls
full of lurching bodies and bad acoustics?
Trumpet man. Composite of flesh and reed--
the brass cold spite to your touch,
hot pipe to all we know of paradise to his.

Tears emptied, he mounts the god syndrome
like mercury, surpassing 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,
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.

TIGER, TIGER
(Felis tigris)

In forest night or jungle bas-relief
Of cross-hatched trails and trees designed to hide
His prowling stripes, he's only good for brief
Ignitions, not a steady burning. Pride
Or hunger kindle flare-ups. Ember-eyed,
The hunter oversees his solitude
In perfect cat contentment, justified
In beauty, his allotted interlude.

Between his birth and death lies little grief
Except a belly now and then denied.
He soaks his heat out on a river reef
Of quartz awash with monsoon's muddy tide.
He contemplates his sambar kill astride
A log and hones his claws; his marks exude
Wood spice. He sniffs and licks, rolls on his side
In beauty, his allotted interlude.

Chin whiskers haughty as a Bengal chief,
He leaps a stream, a wet sunrise allied
With lightning more than fire, a dazzling sheaf
of regal shoulder muscle flexed and plied.
His deer is hidden where his last meal died;
He rasps his tongue across his favorite food.
He stokes his furnace, stretches, wanders wide
In beauty, his allotted interlude.

He seeks cool covert water. Herons chide
His lazy stare; a shelduck guards her brood.
He flickers past; his days and nights divide
In beauty his allotted interlude.

"--she thinks I'm a bit of class," and "I know the way to get around her, man. She's a bit gone on me."
TWO GALLANTS-- James Joyce's DUBLINERS

DUO UPDATED

The pair of sports from Dublin days of yore
stepped on a time machine. Their vessel's yare,
its secret route, has brought them to our year.

Deposited downtown when they arrive,
they see enticing places they might rove.
A woman with a mike begins to rave.

A mob of feminists is on the street.
The men start by, one with his studied strut.
The women cut them off and back them straight

against a wall. "It's you we're here for, chaps,
two specimens from former days, two cheaps
who need someone to tenderize their chops.

"You two can stand before us with your tale;
we'll listen, sympathetic, as you tell
of making that poor servant girl your tool."

These women don't resemble those they've known;
they snatch the fellows' clothes until they've none
between them and the winter's sunless noon.

Each stands unclad, self-conscious as a clone.
Each wonders if his underwear was clean,
and neither understands the role of clown.

As one, the women laugh a chilblain laugh.
The men, amid jeers, try to be aloof.
This isn't worth their coming back to life.

Attempts to flee, to protest, come to nil.
A distant tower clock begins to knell.
A blue-jeaned mama points a fuchsia nail.

"You, Corley, made a simple maid believe
that you were more than greedy hands and love
of gin. And that you'd earned your right to live.

(cont.)

"You try to hide one party to the crime,
you sorry sleaze, not worth a cracker crumb.
Your kind would steal a little kid's ice cream.

"And Lenehan-- abetting is a sign
of sloth. Impatient for the final scene,
you profited from someone else's sin.

"Now entertain us with your charm and wit.
Oh, gee, it's started raining-- you'll get wet.
Just have yourselves a shower while we wait

"For you to taste the errors of your ways,
the gall of all your perpetrated woes--
before we send you back-- we hope, more wise.

"As drivers curse, you'll snarl the traffic lane;
you'll dance its length, each like a crazy loon,
as you repeat in unison this line:

It's dangerous to victimize a female.
We think you'll see the light within a mile--
of things you'll have eternity to mull."

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SNOW HORSE

In the dark of the trees--a blurred image,
speed of light and shadow streaking between
roadside pines on the parallax of my eye.

I stopped my car, got out running.
The woods held only an armature of branches
hung with frost-blackened kudzu
collecting the first winterfall.

But I heard the muffled whicker,
the impatient hoof she couldn't still,
the wispy sounds of covert presence: It was
Ariel, the white horse of my childhood--
gaited for hillside, bottomland and stream,
faster than a canter, smoother than a gallop,
arcing me through downpours of pollen,
blizzards of cottonwood fuzz.

My tan legs pressing her flanks,
her whiteness steaming in leaf-lit morning,
peach groves shimmering on the horizon,
I can still see the ignis fatuus in her eye,
the arch of her fringed neck in bias sunshafts.

Summers ago I dismounted and fell asleep
halfway up a steep grade. Thunder woke me.
Brambles made me shield my eyes. I called
and called. The white mare was gone. For awhile
I tried to track her in the cold clay, forgetting
her hoofbeats never struck the ground.

--Glenna Holloway

MIDWEST POETRY
REVIEW

G. HOLLOWAY
913 E. BAILEY
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ASSATEAGUE WILD
(Equus caballus, feral)

The moon quivers in shallow backwater,
wrinkled and shimmering like tie-dyed silk
by the crossing of a brindled mare.
She leaves the loose passel of ponies
with indifferent ears and languid tails,
moves toward a hump of beach carved by wind,
fringed with a mane of sea oats.
She pauses on its crest, poses farthest
from the new white-blazed leader
pounding after his wayward conquests.
He circles them tightly; the brindled mare
stays motionless, apart.
Suddenly his nostrils fill with her.
He swings his ebony head like a pendulum.

Watching from a hummock of salt-marsh grass,
the old deposed stallion backs his wounds
deeper into the night. The victor prances
forward, muscles undulating moonlight,
the flame on his forehead igniting flares
in his eyes. The mare turns away.

The flat surf is almost soundless
with the year's lowest tide. The dunes
ripple with shine and shape. The mare
snorts at a scuttling crab, an oblique shadow.
The stallion hurries to block her retreat.
He nickers, nips at a moon streak on her hip.

Claiming his right to her promises, throwing
his ardent cry to the bright blister in the sky
oozing light, he declares himself best
of his remnant kind-- covetous
of their last domain, their only home--
barrier island sand biased with silver.

THE DISPOSSESSED
(Equus caballus, feral)

His brown tail swishes like ravelings
of raw silk. His soft nicker builds
to a snort disturbing the dust. His herd
moves too slowly, heads bowed and bobbing
as he drives them to scummy hot water
placed there for cattle thirst.
The white spotted mustang knows its source,
knows he and his kind are not welcome.

Nervous as a sweat bee, he menaces the mares
with his teeth, tries to hurry them, nipping,
darting after his latest conquest
wandering wide and listless past the trough.

He smokes with flies.
Snapping his mane, muscles shivering,
he shakes their torment off new wounds
crisscrossing old scars.

Apart, a young rival sorrel watches
behind a creosote bush. nostrils flaring,
he knows about the dried blood
on the white spots he races out to challenge.

Before last light drops below
the dust-deviled plains,
the sorrel wears a redder shine on one flank.
But the mares, still indifferent, thirsty again,
are all his.

While another stallion waits until sunrise.

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ASSATEAGUE WILD
(Equus caballus, feral)

The moon quivers in shallow backwater,
wrinkled and shimmering like tie-dyed silk
by the crossing of a brindled mare.
She leaves the loose passel of ponies
with indifferent ears and languid tails,
moves toward a hump of beach carved by wind,
fringed with a mane of sea oats.
She pauses on its crest, poses farthest
from the new white-blazed leader
pounding after his wayward conquests.
He circles them tightly; the brindled mare
stays motionless, apart.
Suddenly his nostrils fill with her.
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oozing light, he declares himself best
of his remnant kind-- covetous
of their last domain, their only home--
barrier island sand biased with silver.

"Of good and evil much they argu'd then...
Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie."
--John Milton, Paradise Lost, ii, 562-65

I, IGNOTUM PER IGNOTIUS

Diabolus is passe and outgrown.
My kingdom is secure, my self unknown.

Partial truth my favorite emissary, and pious pulpits
hung with symbolized silk, I have no need of atheists,
false prophets and their babbling. I was born
of mutant atoms and the mental womb in labor
through the centuries of science and civilizing.
Progress is my strength. Prosperity for some at any length.

I had a hundred native sires all overthrown
like Odin, Ares, Thor, and bumbling Mulciber--
best known as Mammon. Not even Milton knew the rest
(just think of how his epics would have bulged had I
emerged back then to tantalize and plague his pen
with my conception's hieroglyphs): They merged, they all
became one traveling salesman-god who never thought
his wedding rape of Mortal Mind would bear a thing
but vitriol and violence, a misbegotten ogre heir
without a crown. My father went his way assured
of amnesty from Belial, imagining his throne infallible.

I made my mother find and slay my sire, the clumsy satrap,
strutting with his naked sword and swilling blood each day--
no match for her, her battering ram of reason and religion.
No matter some convulsive cults still bow before
his sometimes-ghosts-- the throngs perform their rituals
for ME! The masses pay ME homage, human sacrifice, the scale
so grand the Devil almost died of envy-- easy victim of my kiss
of practicality. He hadn't dreamed of any foe outside the host
of Heaven. Thus robbed of might he writhes in toxic torpor.
The hordes, enlightened now, deny him all existence, bury him
in mythic dust as fires of Pandemonium are doused.

This gem-encrusted joke! Globe guardians, pew sitters,
squatters on the earth, the brave custodians of humanism shout
and grant ME noble names. They watch ME rise, a monolithic
paragon, an arrow aimed at heaven, pointing iridescently,
precisely at the target. Oh, the farce! The righteous rationale,
the Gnostic good, the Savior syndrome! Satan merely quoted
scripture to his ends. I rewrite it, burn the words in liturgy
then purge the pray-ers, sear their souls with dedicated flames.

(cont.)

The people want machines, solutions, rights,
and mighty citadels in Draco's heights.

I give them miracles, small victories and clever nostrums
tailor-made for death whose bastions in earth's privy
I will storm. I'll let them find out life, let them make it,
let them keep it longer. Yet they won't discover
what they have. I'll lend them power, feed them with it
while I wear the wreaths of simple service, wash myself
in love then pass the drippings to the humble drove.

The pose is priceless. Now that Satan sleeps who can suspect?
I show the holy signs, the visions and the end-time parables.
In God's own name, the millions worship ME!
So who will notice how the road is paved
with slowly sinking monuments? Who'll guess the compass point
is skewed, and clocks are secondary idols, mine alone,
whose hands enthrall, whose workings I align?

Yes, I have challenged God-- Who lets man rule his destiny.
And man...is such a fool...

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3.

CHESAPEAKE GULLS
(Larus, assorted)

Some fly from cliffs where rocks and limbs are patched
With ice and snow-- to sueded cypress knees
Where shade-striped quietude is laced and thatched
With sun-bleached moss festooned from wading trees.
For weeks gulls ply deep sea, its folding foam
Uncertain as the earthbound ways of men.
But once the birds have claimed a bayside home,
They troll tidepools and settle down again.
Some plumb the estuaries' tepid sheen
Or dive where sequin-flashing smelt appear
In silver schools against the depths of green.
Some hang around to steal fish from the weir.
White wings pursue all boats. And gulls in flocks
Of dark-eyed patience spend their days on docks.

After John Donne's "The Triple Foole"

I DIDN'T MEAN IT WHEN I WROTE:

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.

Cinterpe - Lyric Poetry

Chis - history

Crato - Love poetry

Tenpsichore - dance & choral song

Polyhymnia - sacred song

Mnnesia - astronomy

Calliope - epic poetry