

Poems 08

ASSATEAGUE SILVER  
(Equus caballus, feral)

The moon's image quivers, wrinkles wetly  
like tie-dyed silk as a brindled mare  
crosses the shallow backwater.

She leaves the loose passel of ponies,  
their listless ears and languid tails,  
moves toward a pale hump of beach  
carved by wind, curved like her neck  
and fringed with a mane of sea oats.

She pauses on its crest, poses farthest  
from the new white-blazed leader  
pounding after a wandering filly.  
He warns his others, circles them,  
tightens them into a clump.  
The brindled mare stays motionless, apart.  
Suddenly his senses fill with her.  
He swings his ebony head like a pendulum.

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

The flat surf is sibilant  
with the year's lowest tide. Fluted dunes  
ripple contiguous shine and shape. The mare  
snorts at a scuttling crab, an oblique shadow  
crossing her domain. The dark stallion  
hurries to block her premises. He nickers  
and nips at a moon streak on her hip.

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

## ARRIVAL: THE HAND-CARVED SIDEBOARD FROM FORMOSA

A small statue was all I meant to buy  
as Chinese wood carvers told of Kuan Kung,  
an ancient warrior still revered. Sweet shavings  
curled around my steps, romance colors and breath  
of auspicious beginnings swirled in my head.  
The replica of Kuan Kung's buffet mesmerized me  
like the artisans' shimmering tales.

The eight-foot rough-sawn crate came today,  
rattling like a giant gourd of fertility--  
three hundred twenty-one pounds (minus myth)  
on the bill of lading from the Mikagesan Maru  
out of Keelung. Outside our everyday Chicago door:  
a sudden collage of neighbors, crowbars, splinters  
and groaning nails forced from their pits.  
The ordinary drifted away like incense smoke.

We rummaged layers of cardboard, scalloped  
like Taipei roof tiles, wads of excelsior (or maybe  
the phoenix's nest) and swathes of red tissue.  
A sudden avalanche of dried mung beans  
(source of the rattle, added as desiccant)  
bared a fat in-curved leg. The scent of teak  
lined with camphorwood conjured lotus pools,  
burning joss sticks, folk dancers' flying silks.

A dragon's eye shone within shadow shapes  
slashed with gold. Peering from depths  
of the Ming Dynasty, urged on by its winged cohort,  
it pierced the last wrappings by its own dint.  
Coiled on drawers and doors,  
enormous impatience slipping its bright ties,  
the dragon flexed its magic.

Through a paper fissure on one flank, a trick  
of light on hand-rubbed lacquer: the phoenix wing  
was a battle-ax, and Kuan Kung, pursuing  
his vow to liberate the mainland, adjusted  
his armor and headdress, turned and vanished  
behind the patina of legend. Only bird and beast  
burst free, flaming pearls clutched in claws,  
scales glittering blackly,  
and shook off the last dust of island China.

BLOCKS OF TYPE FOR BRAQUE

I know you, Georges--  
at least I know what  
you wanted me to know.

(You may not want me  
to know you were a  
house painter first.)

Searching underneath  
old brush strokes,  
seizing what others  
disguised, warring  
with the Fauves who  
were warring with  
the Monet clutch--

I know you        in veinous ways,  
In linear ways    sans shadows  
In behind-the-eyes ways

                    where light strikes  
                    mirrors in the secret vaults  
                    of knowing.

Trailing you  
the length  
of a camel's hair,  
we passed at angles  
on the parallax  
of Hogarth's curve  
blown beige and BARE--

PALIMPSEST for specks and shapes,  
some knee-skinning, some bone-cracking  
under the mallet  
                    you flatten  
                    your canvas  
                    with.

ONCE OR TWICE

I  
followed behind  
you close enough  
to gather your dropped  
bottles, glasses, trees, books,  
even a guitar and a violin or two.

I GRAYED  
my colors  
dutifully.

I scraped--  
Collaged--  
Textured--  
Scratched.

I stacked  
the cubes  
angled so

the  
steamroller  
could distill them TO  
ESSENCE.

And often I was  
near enough  
to notice  
Pablo  
stealing  
your best

STUFF.

Dark olive drab,  
khaki, white, black--  
basic paint to crystallize  
thought on planes to geometrics  
reducible to confrontation, shutting Out centuries  
Of chiaroscuro  
And passe pastel  
Of pastorals.

You may've  
called those old approaches  
POSTURING.  
I DID.

Listen, Georges, I,  
fame and purse limited as your palette,  
your dimensions, not including time,  
HAVE  
outlived you-- YOU who no longer  
strive to peel away the negatives of sun,  
the pulse of light-- shedding it like snakeskin  
to dry on untried surface. But still you live--these places  
where I know you.

To Jean Jorgenson, who owned the greatest gift of all...  
70

### MEASURING STICK

*Her instructor*

They told her— kindly, of course—  
To try something else— because  
She had no talent for poetry.  
  
I found her sitting on the ground,  
Silent and slumped like the toadstools around her.  
She wasn't crying. But from the pages  
She ~~showed~~ gave me, I knew  
She knew how to cry.  
  
Her meter was as seldom as a total eclipse.  
No, not free verse— an iambic beat tried to be there.  
They told her the rhyme pattern was  
All wrong. And it was. Like wearing mismated shoes.  
No newly minted phrase, no provocative twist.  
They said she was just not a poet. But  
From her lines I knew this about her—  
She looked at a dandelion and saw resurrection;  
She reached into black holes and felt the fingers of God.

**The Dispossessed**  
(*Equus caballus, feral*)

His long black tail swished like ravelings  
of raw silk. His soft nicker turned  
to snorts, raising miniature dust storms  
around his forelegs. His mares moved too slowly,

heads bowed and bobbing as they neared  
the water. Scummy hot, it was meant for cattle,  
and the dark mustang knew  
he and his kind were not welcome there.

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

He smoked with black flies. Snapping his main,  
muscles shivering, he shook buzzing torment off  
new wounds crisscrossing old scars. Behind  
a creosote bush, a young sorrel watched,

nostrils dilated, knowing about the dried blood  
on the ebony hide he raced out to challenge.  
As last light dropped below dust-deviled plains,  
the sorrel wore a redder shine on one flank.

But the mares, still indifferent, thirsty again,  
were all his. While another stallion waited for dawn.

~ Glenna Holloway

**Afternoon Fawn**  
(*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Your mother is nowhere near.  
She would have stomped her hoof,  
a single 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 in inept sculptor  
made your armature of the wrong gage wire.

Your eyes and nose lavish me with curiosity.  
Clearly you would ~~not~~ 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, replanted.

The dilemma grows. I never want  
to find 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, time her ally.

Yet this moment is ours, young and confident.  
I'll never forget this wonder we share.  
With regret, I sharply clap you away.

~ Glenna Holloway

HE ASKED: WHY WASTE YOUR TIME CREATING POEMS?

I write them down, I said, to delve, to wonder,  
to make the loud world be still awhile.  
But create them? More likely they infect me,  
colonize in me, take over. I can sense  
their cells dividing to claim space  
like squatters. It may take weeks to coax  
them to surface, work them out of my system.  
Still, I'm a volunteer host if I feel  
I can furnish a nurturing place  
for certain strains to flourish.

Some poems taunt me; tentative and wary, they  
scuttle off like scorpions, stingers raised.  
I go after them with a torch and a bare hand,  
no creator, not even a trapper,  
just a wanter of them, a willingness to suffer  
their strikes for the power they transmit:  
Spring loaded with chemistry, hidden  
in earthy corners. Potent instruments  
of thrust, animate with ways to disturb  
old apathies. Not meant to finalize  
breath or beat--but maybe to make each tremble--  
if only for a moment.

WHY ASK?

The glare of the paper, the dark characters  
posing linear riddles, each asking why you do it,  
the answer always the same: The sharp prod,  
the germ, attacks leaving no alternatives,

no maybes. All you can do is say yes to it.  
Like a mosquito feeding on your soul,  
it begins as a bite you can't ignore,  
can't quite reach. You feel the injection

pumping through you, firing, misfiring  
one synapse after another. Sometimes  
no sparks stay lit long enough to record.  
You scratch an idle itch on your hand, waiting

for the fallout to settle, divide like cells  
inside you. Waiting for the next poem  
to develop in the heart or the gut--  
inadequate names for places you can't define.

A fingernail relieves a corporeal insistence  
but not this colonizing craving,  
this insatiable claim, overwhelming  
and never satisfied.

Where did it come from? Where is it  
lodged? You're infected, you felt the sting.  
Is it the slow incubating sort  
you'll almost die of?

Known species or hybrid, no matter the strain,  
you can't resist wanting it to grow and spread.  
You want it  
like you want your next breath.

WAS EVER A CHILD NAMED YOU OR ME?

Were there really satin-green bugs with wire-hair  
legs that made current zig-zag down your back  
when you closed them in your palm?

Was there a vine that grew valentine leaves and  
potatoes for doll plates? And chocolate rocks that broke,  
~~just enough~~ looked like sugar inside ~~and~~ compelled <sup>ing</sup> your tongue to test?

Were there minute tunnels in the field where you fished  
for pale humped "camels" that bit and held  
the spit-and-mudball baited stems of fescue? And farther on,  
~~rungles mirror chortness~~  
a pond flocked with yellow-brown paisley that half hid  
~~tiny long~~ tiny swimmers trading tails for legs, and wilding  
wispy smells, each matched in your mind with a color...

When was it over, that swift season of knowing and being  
eye level in the grass?

Or is it a dose of strained fancy  
~~smooth finish~~? *Contemporary finish*  
force-fed beneath the finished surface? *stylized surface*

But wasn't there for sure a certain crouching path  
where you couldn't see ahead and you backed off slow  
tightened by ~~little~~ <sup>tiny</sup> corkscrews of warning in your middle?

Still... somehow you went that way without knowing...

The soft fronds closed behind you and  
the brambles made you shield your eyes ...

Glenna Holloway  
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WAS EVER A CHILD NAMED YOU OR ME?  
Glenna Holloway

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WHEN THE GARDENER GOES HOME

Glenna Holloway

I found him there where everyone

Most remembers him—

Surrounded by humus crumbs ~~and~~, cracked clay pots

And flakes of red geraniums.

~~There was a~~ plant <sup>was</sup> in his hand, roots up. He

He was just sitting on his work bench—

~~the one~~ he built around the old live oak

up through

he left growing ~~in~~ the corner of his homemade nursery.

He was leaning against ~~the~~ massive trunk, it <sup>made a certain bend</sup> ~~the~~ to hold him,  
nestled on his eyes turned ~~up~~ to the sun stripes

between the greenhouse laths.

only by then ~~only now~~ there was a split moon. But all

the potsherds around him still held

the long day's warmth.

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RENASCENCE AND RENASCENCE

Glenn Holloway

There was a million megaton implosion of tense and time:  
When he opened his eyes again he was young, all else  
Was hoary-hued, anointed with ashes.  
An ocean licked his ankle. It started  
Raining history. ~~He recognized~~ scraps of war, pieces of peace,  
Polyglot thunder, ~~minutes of moon~~. Torrents of leopards and  
Steel, China, Nile and Rome. Ice and rods of condensed sun.  
Lightning struck each tree into a cross. A tide of blood  
Stained his soles. It clotted and paled and vines grew.  
But Woden and Thor awoke again, smiling. They twisted  
The crosses into one mutant sign and hurled it against ~~a~~  
~~Part~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~ghost~~ globe. The orb rolled and cauterized itself  
In viscous fire. Souls dervished like desert dust. He knew  
Them all in their collapsed clocks. His eyes were borrowed  
From extinct sires of eagles. His mind kenned all men's  
Knowledge. He could touch music and planets. He walked  
The bottom of the deepest sea, then climbed to the apogee  
~~He could see infinity + Genesis~~  
Of Thule's galaxies. ~~But afterward~~  
~~was born back But always I mending~~  
He returned to the nadir—the carpentry of Calvary—  
Where all centuries ~~must~~ meet,  
~~Shore~~  
Lap, and ~~look~~ anachronisms in a rood horologium  
To rechart the collision course with eternity.

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ON ENCOUNTERING

Glenn Holloway

I always have to brace to look in his eyes;  
I'm never quite ready.

They look too much back, they hurt,  
They wrestle mine to the ground.

What do you say to eyes that  
Watched Pompeii <sup>crash</sup> go under the boiling mud,  
Saw the Roman Empire flattened to pages of paper tongue,  
Witnessed the fall of bombs, axes, ~~spears~~, swords, heads, dynasties  
And the infamy of Golgotha?

What do you say to eyes that still  
Hold tears for you?

## SEASCOPE

I

My world stopped half a country short of shore;  
my days were walled by steel and concrete-scape  
perimetered within a steepled range  
of metamorphic rock. Each night before  
my sleep curved me in ancient shell-like shape,  
I gazed at mauve foothills and peaks that change  
with seasons' rituals. Despite their strange  
magnetic strength that grasped me knee to nape,  
they bow to vagrant streams, succumb to green;  
their shoulders freeze beneath a borrowed cape.  
Deceived each fall with goldly glinting ore,  
they stand betrayed, decrowned and pale between  
still sovereign heavens and the ocean's scene  
where reign is absolute and evermore.

II

Reluctantly I questioned my devotion  
to scarps and summit knobs that abdicate  
their thrones to vagaries of fire and rain  
or crumble in an avalanche's devotion.  
A summer sea had tried to alienate  
my lofty love, persuade me to remain.  
I pulled away, pretentious in disdain.

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SERPENT SEED

by Glenна Holloway

It's the only moment you can kill it:

Envy isn't green excepting that first

tender tendril fresh-clawed from fertile

dirt, uncurling, clutching sun & catching

red. Too late: The shoot leaps into flame,

a ravening tentacle spreads, throttles itself

impotent, thickens, toughens in the final fire.

Dullidrossuremainss, cold-rolled into a fist. The

~~flame~~ oblique rays of tomorrow's rising uncoil Medusa's

hair.

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BYSTANDER: THE OTHER COLOMBO

I

The astrolabe lay on the window sill.  
Bartholomew stood staring at the dawn  
With seaman's eyes from a garret oriel.  
Below, the street awakened, tunny-mongers,  
Garlic stalls and honey-hawkers stirred.

To dare his brother's theories required  
A firm resolve. But Cristoforo primed  
Him once again with promises and prods:  
"Try Henry now," he urged. "Persuade the king  
Of England with my charts. And speak of gold.

"If he refuses, go to Charles of France.  
All monarchs and their experts can't be blind  
To proffered bounty. Use your smoothest tongue  
While I continue plying Isabella.  
Their favor should be like a torch to hers."

Bartholomew still dreaded Cris's temper,  
A riptide flaying caulk out of his hull,  
St. Elmo's fire igniting in each pupil.  
He hurried off at Cristoforo's bidding  
But failed to gain investors for the voyage.

Perhaps his lack of faith diluted verve.  
He was amazed the Spanish crowns gave in  
To hoist the royal aegis over sails  
Of three good caravels, provisioned, blessed  
And sent to reach Cathay in half the time.

II

Bart saw them for himself, the palm-cooled isles,  
The estuaries claimed. And having gained  
Them, how Cris coveted his driving dream  
To push ahead for that his stubbornness  
Still swore was near-- the glory-goods of China.

His words became a sword, to dub or slay,  
He helped himself to natives like fish caught  
In nets, or timber cut for ship repair.  
He gathered sample people to display  
In Castile's courts as one more future resource.

Where booted feet erased the bare-soled prints  
Of centuries, one brother's voice proclaimed  
That all was now possessed by lighter hands  
Whose grasp would mutate races, cultures, gods--  
And repaint continental palimpsests.

Bartholomew was not surprised to see  
The ship arrive, the writ for their arrest.  
The New World colony had failed. The sight  
of Cris in chains disturbed him, yet his prayer  
Was only to go home, make peace with God

And die.

### HOMING IN ON MOUNTAIN BEACONS

It happens every year about this time:  
Faint signals almost out of range compose  
A whisper-lilting melody to prime  
My consciousness between these beige plateaus.  
I walk the valley, watching Venus rise  
And squint at far-off hills against the wind.  
I sit in moonlight, gazing as it vies  
With nimbus rings like cotton newly ginned.  
The morning brings slow rain that bleeds the clay;  
It dabbles in the mud and dimples sand.  
It stipples down the highway's weary gray  
And opals whitewash on the melon stand.  
I wander this kaleidoscope, a child  
In search of rock and wood designs grown wild.

## MORE THAN MIRROR IMAGES

At school I saw a girl fall on her knee.  
 It bled. She cried. And then my knee pained me.  
 I looked to see what made mine start to sting.  
 It's been a year since I pitched off my swing  
 And landed in a heap, embarrassed, hurt.  
 My knee was sprained and scraped and full of dirt  
 Like hers. I sobbed and rocked it in the yard,  
 But it's all smooth now, isn't even scarred.

This girl was new, I didn't know her name;  
 She came from far away, we're not the same.  
 She kind of stayed apart-- I guess it's true--  
 If you look different, no one plays with you.  
 I couldn't understand what made me cry  
 As I stood watching her and wondering why  
 I felt it when the nurse began to swab  
 And pressed her fingers on the tender knob  
 And asked if she could stand and bear her weight.

But then I thought-- the reason I relate  
 To her is just because God made us all--  
 Our legs, our arms, our bones-- and when we fall  
 And break the skin the blood is always red.  
 And all our parts designed by Him, the head  
 The eyes, the feet, the inside things we share  
 Are all alike. And if it aches somewhere  
 Somebody else has felt it just like you.  
 And then I thought about what I could do.

My hands are celebrations of God's skill,  
 My heart was put together by His will.  
 And like all other people made by Him  
 (I glanced around at Katya, Juan and Kim),  
 We're something wonderful in spite of quirks,  
 An engineering miracle that works!

I volunteered to carry all her books  
 To class, and gave back smiles for timid looks.  
 And then I said, "I know just how you feel,  
 But you will be surprised how fast you heal.  
 I'll show you how to roll a pillow up  
 To rest your knee, and cut a paper cup  
 To keep the bandage pressure off the sore.  
 Hey look, you'll soon be running like before!"

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JEREMIAD FOR A CRUEL QUEEN

Unnumbered songs and sonnets lie at Nature's clay-hard feet--  
The sentimental drippings from the maudlin tongues of those  
Who try to catch her essence in a pentametric bleat,  
Who do not recognize a whore because she wears a rose.

Her ritual rhymes of season seem to charm the fool esthete;  
I see a certain sameness to her sins I would expose.  
She trysts with Satan at the poles or on some wild arete  
Then takes back everything she gives, each favor she bestows.

There was a time I mouthed her songs, believed her cliche-sweet  
In days when April softly feathered hidden wrath's repose--  
The resting time before the harlot showed her vast deceit  
Concealed in lulling breezes and the rivers' lyric flows.

Her languid sighing promise makes her treachery complete.  
As all her panders purify her soul with Sunday prose,  
She kills a sleeping village spreading out her molten sheet  
To lie and birth a bastard peak where no man ever goes.

Benignly fertile silt and sod belie her ancient heat  
While many miles below, the devil's cauldron seethes and glows.  
Unfathomed plates and fissures and a sunken gulch compete  
In stealthy silent movement of opposing jagged rows

Until one day some unsuspecting residential street  
Is swallowed writhing, spewing brick and glass and bloody snows.  
And next the waiting sea is seized in manic fists to beat  
The fallen shores and hopeless hearths defenseless to her blows.

Don't trust the warming sunrise rays she hangs out in retreat,  
Or feel at peace because a wanton woman changes clothes.  
I've watched her fiery ensign burn up miles of prairie wheat;  
I've seen the crops I planted hosting hordes of worms and crows.

She saw my need for rain; one day she came to my defeat  
With flood. The land and I cry out, but still the water grows.  
She leaves her slimy signature, her bona fide receipt  
For missing homes along the trails of sorrowing she sows.

She drives the revolution, letting rival pressures meet  
To funnel down for bridge and barn as though they were her foes.  
She makes a pyre of pines to light her masses of conceit  
Then sprinkles forest bone and ash with every blight she knows.

I've smelled her perfumed breath and heard the mockingbirds repeat  
The legends of her lilded fields, her famous fabled pose.  
Oh yes, I've marveled at rebirth, her flaunted favorite feat,  
And drunk her moontime magic full of myth and false agos.

She parodies my sadness with her tears of slashing sleet,  
Yet I, long bitter, tremble still in autumn's passion throes.  
Despite her endless treason, once again I will entreat  
Her mercy, all the while recalling cattle that she froze.

She, the brute, the beautiful, capriciously will greet  
Each future generation with great wonders and great woes  
Until we storm her secret doors and steal the keys to cheat  
This reigning house's charnel clutch, this queen we must depose!

## CRUCIBLE

He used to wonder how many nights in the '50s  
he stood on a certain lip of Shades Mountain  
staring in the red-rimmed bowl of Birmingham.  
Now, when his thumb and finger press his eyes

closed, he sees harsh crimson flare up  
like an old Bessemer converter spewing  
across the dark. He smells the hot rush  
in his head, feels the burn smack his skin.

He thinks about how work molds a man,  
pours him out of a boiling river of iron,  
an offering to old Vulcan, posing in steel  
on Red Mountain, guarding the ore seam.

Matching mettle, deep in his Welsh breed,  
rises above the slag, turns him, magnetized,  
toward the final furnace, believing he can ignite  
the sky, no longer envious of the statue's torch.

He hits the channel popping, sparking,  
blinding heaven-white, spraying fire  
hell could be proud of, knowing his worth  
better than when he was young and molten.

And after forty years, he can look at the rusty god  
and laugh as he flexes the ingots in his arms.

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THE ALWAYS CHILD

He handed her four pieces of the cup.  
He bent over the trash basket, his tears  
tapping the sack where she put the shards.  
Her tears seldom spilled now, her breaks  
well-glued. "It's all right," she said.  
"You have another smiley-face mug."

His silence turned to moaning. She wiped  
his glasses on her skirt.  
Droplets hung from his chin stubble.  
"Come on," she said. "Time to get you shaved."

She put her knee across his lap. He squirmed  
to the razor's whine. When she let him up  
he hurled himself onto a beanbag dog,  
fingers twisting the frayed yarn. He began  
licking the fuzz where the eyes used to be.

"Don't do that, Danny." Her voice  
had no inflection. She had learned  
changes of tone could veer into a scream.  
She waited for him to settle into a rocking motion.

As she mopped the kitchen, the telephone shrilled,  
shattering her concentration on wet linoleum.  
A man asked her to participate in a survey.  
"Do you have dependent children living at home?"  
"One boy," she answered.  
"Age?"  
"Forty-three," she said, closing her eyes.  
The man laughed. "But seriously, ma'am, we--"  
"Yes," she said. "It's serious."  
She hung up quietly and looked at the clock.

"It's time for your shot, Danny." She arranged  
her face to convey encouragement.  
A growl, almost a gargle, began in his throat.  
He shook his head, backed up, kicked the wall.

She was filling the syringe, emptying her mind.  
"You know if you don't have it, you'll hurt  
and we'll have to go to the doctor again."

Danny could say "doctor" and "clinic" plainly.  
His word for "Mother" was a grunt.  
She approached with the needle. His long fingers  
flew to his head. Before she could stop him  
he handed her a fistful of curly gray hair.

When he was quiet she gave him smiley-face cookies.  
He shared them with her and the beanbag dog.

--Glenna Holloway

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THE FORGIVEN

Two seedling spruces,  
long-ago escapees  
from my bean patch hoe,  
now shade my old age

--Glenna Holloway

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THE LADIES NEXT DOOR

It took April and May, mother  
and daughter, my new neighbors,  
to mold useless scraps  
of time into a week, a month:  
Worth circling in red  
in my almanac. Like Sunday.  
Or a holiday or a full moon.  
Before these two friends  
happened to me, my calendar  
was a monotonous lottery  
with no winning numbers  
and spring had no name.

--Glenna Holloway

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JANNA

Her neighbors sit murmuring, leaning together:  
"Jan was so sweet--" "so caring--" "so good--"  
clucking, repeating, letting their voices catch.  
All around the ritual room of shaking heads,  
sometime-friends recite her in psalter tones.  
Their sibilance swarms over her bier  
like bees, invades my head, stings  
my most hidden places, swells my rage.

At least no mawkish mass will fill a space  
like this once my lips are cosmetically closed.  
They could never muster enough charity  
to honey their tongues with me. What right  
have they to my name in their warm mouths!  
What right to hers!

Dear Janna,  
maybe even you weren't always wonderful.  
Or maybe you lived on low amperage,  
never knowing how it is  
to run on your own hot crossed circuits,  
splicing with scorched fingers  
your own frayed smoking wires. Maybe you  
never smelled the char, heard the crackle.

Or maybe you did it all and knew it well  
under insulation of infinite grace.

I bite down on my silence, taste it. Silence,  
you once said, is where learning begins.

In silence to come, to keep,  
I will make myself your monument.

--Glenna Holloway

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HYPE SNIPE

The sponsor claims his product's best  
Then throws a nation-wide contest,  
Supremely confident you'll buy  
And write for him a winsome lie.

Your highest praise you must compress  
To twenty-five fine words, or less.  
It could be quite a worthwhile game  
If TV hucksters did the same.

--Glenna Holloway

## THE IGNIS FATUUS

## I

Men marvel at her hair, corona bright,  
the color of a waning winter moon,  
for she is strange and wild, a child of night  
who loves the swamps where twilight lurks at noon.  
I followed her until she disappeared  
through sedge and slimy pools of brackish black;  
she always raced ahead where ravens jeered,  
past dying pines and past the diamondback.  
She led me faster, luminous and lithe,  
through devil's darkness cleft with wisps of fire.  
Behind me came another-- with a scythe--  
but still I stalked her in footprintless mire.  
Men say her eyes fluoresce with blue-green flame.  
I must embrace her once, must learn her name!

## II

Come searcher, learn the real will-o-the-wisp.  
Come slog among mutated mud-grown trees  
and wait for wind's unwinding snake-tongue lisp  
to wrinkle stagnant water near your knees.  
Here, latent night seduces natural time  
though fronds of sun still penetrate tall ferns  
while strangler figs and chokeweed greenly mime  
your myths and struggling gods, your snarled concerns.  
Again illusion spreads elusive light--  
a solar trick, not worth your risk to see.  
Stay braced for total dark and call it right:  
the ignis fatuus, lure's apogee.  
Hold fast to scientific explanation  
as lambent flares ignite mind's conflagration.

Jon & Jessica

You once supposed such love is stronger  
than that I feel for you. Not true.  
The parallels are many but they quickly end  
in divers ways. No pun applies.

And don't forget  
I saw your face the day you felt  
a closing grip not mine around your waist.  
You let her dance you back below  
despite the chill, you let her hum her lyrics  
in your ear, lead you to the blenny's bubble nest.

Next day you married me.  
Was it I who won you-- or the sea?

Come, Jessica, my love,  
let me show you what unforgettable means.  
Let me teach you how to read the score,  
hear the instruments, the ones unseen...

We'll play our own among these measures all  
unheard before. And if we choose to pool  
both science and harmonics we might please  
these denizens who live by Neptune's rule,  
might work our way with music through their school,  
might be allowed to learn their language keys--  
and we could share their knowledge of the seas!  
as thus they

FOR JESSICA'S FIRST DIVE

Your bubbling wake is ciphered melody;  
ch globule rising to a treble staff

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THE GULLS OF WINTER

Some fly from cliffs where needy limbs are patched  
With ice and snow-- to sueded cypress knees  
Where shadowed quietude is laced and thatched  
With sun-bleached moss festooned from wading trees.  
No longer do they plumb the darker seas,  
For now, the birds have claimed a Southern home.  
They troll tidepools or hover on a breeze,  
Awaiting shellfish rolling in on foam.  
Some probe the estuary's monochrome  
Or dive where sequin-flashing smelt appear  
In schools above the jetty's catacomb;  
Some hang around to steal bait off the weir.  
White wings pursue all boats, while gulls in flocks  
Of dark-eyed patience spend their days on docks.

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NOT A GOOD DAY FOR FISHING  
Larus marinas

The surf is on edge this morning. And you,  
a lone black-backed gull, hang over me  
and my needy creel like an old decision  
I want to move out from under.

Another angler arrives. I hear  
his reel's expectant soprano. You,  
anciently wise-eyed, watch his lure  
splash rumpled sheen beyond foam fringe.

You follow it against a headwind.  
Treading air, your beak, gullet  
and practiced patience wait  
for a strike on barbed steel.

The man hasn't seen your act before--  
just a big gull splitting  
September's hot glare a few feet up  
where our eyes can't stay.

Now it's you who are hooked.  
He winds you in, flapping  
like his mackerel, your pinched treble  
sounding snared on a broken music staff.

Once more  
I fish my tackle box for the wire cutters.

--Glenna Holloway

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AUDITORIUM

Wrapped in ocean, its total song, its circles  
and circles of sound astound me. Atavistic verbs  
of eons reverberate dark within, darting light  
around me. Water amplifies this allness,  
resonates through shells and shoals  
and floral-feathered animals abounding.

My dives are plotted, photographed for study.  
My lyrics are for me, counterpoint to the sound  
of swaying noon-sunned kelp. Ribbon staffs  
are wound with a wake of blistered silver  
whole notes. Some play in nets of algae, some escape  
the tune to join an endless monotone of green.

Descending the scale where my lamp has found  
warm colors in blue cold, rhythms pound with mine,  
sibilance changes to a minor key. Here, sounds  
are older, louder, rumbling in polyp mounds,  
millenia of forms once bent on feeding, breeding,  
sea drum voices echoing, bouncing blackly.

I synthesize the shapes of music: A frowning moray  
snapping its hunger on finny iridescence.  
A carapace browned with parasitic plush  
skittering through the theme.  
The sound of parrot fish gnawing the reef,  
bright mills grinding coral into miles of sand.

Two flounders hollow out the bottom range, a gamut  
filled with unseen appetites. Downed by day,  
they lie in wait to hound small denizens of night.  
And as it nears, the timbre grows rounder, fuller,  
like the coursing salt inside me. I must return  
to high ground, respond to other tempos,

my frail obbligato drowned in rising volume.  
Tomorrow, uncrowned, minus Triton's trumpet fanfare,  
research will reign on film.  
Blending with the realm, I'll make close harmony--  
an unrenowned arpeggio  
to the blue planet's most ancient sound.

Form: bull's-eye, target rhyme: sound

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COMPOUNDING THE MIDAS TOUCH

Small boy, grass-stained  
on the bottom, trading heavily  
in sunburn and torn denim, speculating  
on topsoil or puddles iridescent oil,  
squandering and saving:

He banks nothing, but keeps on earning  
long-term interest at rising rates.  
His dividends accumulate in the black  
of mud's sweetness, windfalls  
clinging like cockleburs, perquisites  
accruing with polliwog legs.  
His red Irish setter, incandescent  
as carnelian, returns his investments  
untaxed, dropped at his feet on command.

The boy grows with the insistence  
of mosquitoes, rubbing off residuals  
of new ventures in passing. His futures  
are rosy with scraped knees, he turns  
a small profit in earthworms and perch  
  
before coming home to supper  
hoarding summer under his fingernails.

--Glenna Holloway

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THE RULER CONTEMPLATES HER FAVORITE HOME

Her magma cooled and centuries of seed  
Arrived in birds, by tides and tropic gales.  
Some sprouted, slowly changed the island's hue.  
Rain washed the crater slopes, began to feed  
Small pools as trickling run-off turned to swales.  
Varieties of natant larvae grew.  
The germinated coconuts spread shade  
For ferns. Sun warmed the geminating glade.

At last a human population came,  
Attracted by the verdure of the shore.  
They found no snakes, the native geese were tame.  
Despite fire-streams, good fishing, fruits, and more  
Insured their stay. They gave the place a name.  
--But Pele loved her Eden best before.

--Glenna Holloway

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D-7

AUTHOR'S IMPRINT

I know her by name,  
by style and stance.  
But I've never seen her,  
not even a picture. Her poems  
come from hearing centuries,  
hearing minutes, hearing now.

I know her by pure touch,  
her words making contact  
in surface ways,  
a one-finger caress. Her lines  
plunge deep in veinous ways:  
corkscrews and neon probes.

I know her in right brain ways  
where no progress ventured  
for years. I feel her push,  
a force not prepared for.  
Rooted yet pliant.  
Any argument I mount, finding  
nothing to break, recoils,  
ineffectual, on itself.

Her artistry defines her:  
sometimes a blue ache, a peony,  
an ice peak on my spinal graph.  
And after such intimacy, holding  
my delicate premises in her hands,  
how can either of us say  
we've never met?

--Glenna Holloway

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WRITER'S WORKSHOP  
for L. S.

Summer in Aspen: the namesaked trees  
investing pale fluff in any opening--  
stairwell, window, unguarded yawn--  
hired hands blowing it into bags.

James Dickey telling you and me to read  
Dryden and Pope and to empty our heads  
of metaphor. Slipping into elegant French  
rolling down from his heights as easy  
as aspen fuzz, easy on his tongue  
as old Southern whiskey, he presided  
over our premises, our poetic promises.  
But he didn't believe in beautiful.

Evenings the local jazz was good,  
and our Jewish roommate's cheeseless lasagna  
at midnight. Afterward, at the dark  
bedroom window, the mountain pressed closer,  
posing, pleading for lyrics we all scorned.

That last angry day you said all our work  
had been aborted and dissected to death.  
Dickey said the poems were never conceived,  
called them false pregnancies.  
I said they'd been artificially inseminated  
in glass outside the warm womb--  
laboratory entities. What did anyone expect  
from altitude so dry and dreamless, swirling  
with the white invective of seeds denied?

After all this time on level safe terrain,  
each night beneath my lids  
the mountain waits.

--Glenna Holloway

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BEST OF SHOW, SEASONAL MURAL

For months the river spreads a wash of gray  
While spackling wrinkled margins winter-dull.  
But soon the palette changes, interplay  
Of light and hue converges to annul  
The drabness, adds chartreuses flocked with creams.  
Hawks wind the winds, faint sunslants silhouette  
Returning geese, late lightning rips the seams  
In blue reserves to pay off March's debt.  
New artists work in shades of lullabies  
And flower-stippled air. The spectrum's brush  
Paints summer flashed with cubist fireflies.  
As panels take on autumn's early blush  
Each view holds lost impressions of Monet.  
The next stroke primes a redding dogwood spray.

--Glenna Holloway

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#### RESTORATION

We left a life where threadbare limbs were patched  
With ice. We came where flowers and fringed trees  
Adorn the sunlit vistas. Some are thatched  
With giant ferns, and water doesn't freeze.  
The ocean seemed to counsel us, its foam  
Dispersed like unresolved designs of men.  
Perfumed persuasions made us call this home  
As warmth embraced us, helped us mend again.  
We learned to swim in light-probed wells of green,  
To dive where sequin-flashing gifts appear  
Against a painted coral altar screen;  
We learned to smoke and sell the fish we spear.  
Far from the bitter welting of our land,  
Our raveled shores were gently hemmed with sand.

--Glenna Holloway

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SPACE QUEST  
(To the American Desert)

Come traveler,  
you never mastered all your native places  
before you put on weighted shoes, invented  
new ways to breathe, left prints in dead dust.  
Begin at this outpost on the cusp of blue.

Read the coded map of night walkers,  
the graven intaglio of sidewinders, shadows  
of a spiral galaxy. Sandshine sheds light enough  
to let you cross time's outback,  
the fourth dimension's lower level.

Walk on granulated layers of always. Ocotillos  
comet their color across noon, a century plant  
rises like Venus, riding the planet's arched chine.  
Climb to the apogee sculpted of itself,  
the milled spines from millenia's seas.

Follow Hogarth's curve sunsetward to the perigee,  
before blossoming cosmos withdraw fuchsia rays,  
and the skink surrenders hoarded warmth to the owl.  
Let the weightless part of you lead  
through orbiting night, tethered to rhythms

your blood remembers. Stay till the life star docks,  
loading silence with the tonnage of light.  
And if you come wanting enough,  
wanting it all, you may exchange all your learning  
for the seminal sands of what is.

--Glenna Holloway

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### SPACE QUEST

Come traveler,  
you never mastered all your native places,  
or grasped this strangeness beneath your sun  
before you put on weighted shoes, invented ways  
to package air, left footprints in distant dust.  
Begin at this outpost blown bare and beige.

Let sandshine reflect light enough for you  
to cross the fourth dimension's lower level.  
The desert. Deserted. Time's outback,  
the solar hour glass. Read the coded map  
of night walkers and the graven intaglio  
of sidewinders, shadows of a spiral galaxy.

Walk on granulated layers of always where  
ocotillos comet their color across noon. Find  
a century plant rising like Venus, riding  
a vertebra of the planet's arched chine. Climb  
to the apogee sculpted of itself with no spine  
but cactus and milled bone from millenia's seas.

Follow Hogarth's curve sunsetward  
to the perigee valley, clinging  
to possibility's rim. Come wade this ocean  
of light before the dead moon steals its crest,  
before blossoming cosmos withdraw fuchsia rays,  
and the skink surrenders hoarded warmth to the owl.

Let the weightless part of you  
lead through orbiting night, keeping tethered  
to rhythms your blood remembers. Come, stay  
until the life star docks, loading silence  
with tonnage of light. Come wanting enough,  
wanting it all, ready to exchange learning  
for the seminal sands of truth.

--Glenna Holloway

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PENCIL SKETCHES IN HAIKU

Under spring rain clouds  
three mares move slowly, heads down  
Fat with the future

Morning whickerings  
One mare paces tight circles  
The first foal appears

Two more hit the straw  
Unpracticed legs make a stand  
Life begins to flow

Streamlined with summer  
the dams frolic beside their young  
in the sunlit field

never noticing  
the sullen sire at the fence  
dark watching his own

--Glenna Holloway

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LAST STANZA

Blank volumes of snow and moon  
Fill the canyon floor.

I search for poems  
In white that gathers all sound

Rolling down the slopes  
Between doe tracks and pine trunks.

A creaking lantern  
halos my unbelonging,

Its aura translates  
Drag marks underlined with red:

Deer blood writes the theme.  
A distant cougar cry rhymes.

--Glenna Holloway

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JEREMIAD FOR A BAD QUEEN

Unnumbered songs and sonnets lie at Nature's feet--  
The sentimental drippings from the maudlin tongues of those  
Who try to catch her essence in a pentametric bleat,  
Who do not recognize a whore because she wears a rose.

Her ritual rhymes of season seem to charm the fool esthete;  
I see a certain sameness to her sins I would expose.  
She trysts with Satan at the poles or on some wild arete  
Then takes back everything she gives, each favor she bestows.

There was a time I mouthed her psalms, believed her cliche-sweet  
In days when April softly feathered hidden wrath's repose--  
The resting time before the harlot showed her vast deceit  
Concealed in baby breezes and nascent freshet flows.

Her languid sighing promise makes her treachery complete.  
As all her panders purify her soul with Sunday prose,  
She kills a sleeping village spreading out her molten sheet  
To lie and birth a bastard peak where no man ever goes.

Benign black clay and sod belie her ancient heat  
While many miles below, a devil's cauldron seethes and glows.  
Unfathomed plates and fissures and a sunken gulch compete  
In stealthy silent movement of opposing jagged rows

Until one day some distant unsuspecting street  
Is swallowed writhing, spewing brick and glass and bloodied snows.  
And next the sea is seized in manic fists to beat  
The fallen shores and hopeless hearths defenseless to her blows.

Don't trust the warming sunrise she hangs out in retreat,  
Or feel at peace because a wanton woman changes clothes.  
I've watched her fiery ensign burn the prairie wheat,  
I've seen the crops I planted hosting hordes of worms and crows.

She saw my need for rain; she came to my defeat  
With flood. The land and I cry out, but still the water grows.  
Her slimy signature is the bona fide receipt  
For homes that litter all the paths of sorrowing she sows.

She drives the revolution when rival pressures meet  
To funnel down for bridge and barn as though they were her foes.  
She makes a pyre of pines to light her masses of conceit  
Then sprinkles forest bone and ash with every blight she knows.

I've smelled her perfumed breath, and heard the birds repeat  
The legends of her lilded fields, her famous fabled pose.  
Oh yes, I've marveled at rebirth, her flaunted favorite feat,  
And drunk her moontime magic full of myth and false agos.

She bears my sadness well with her tears of slashing sleet,  
Yet I, long bitter, tremble still in autumn's passion throes.  
Despite her timeless treason, I once again entreat  
Her mercy, all the while recalling cattle that she froze.

She, the brute, the beautiful, capriciously will greet  
Each future generation with great wonders and great woes  
Until we storm her secret doors and steal the keys to cheat  
This reigning house's charnel clutch, this queen we must depose.

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SUPERSTITION STANLEY AND THE LOST DUTCHMAN MINE

Elongated scrawn with a mat of tawny hair and burro eyes,  
camouflaged for chaparral or rocky canyon, wise  
as any coyote, he had the look of ocotillo in a drought.  
Named for the mountains where the gold still lies,  
he dug the prize for other men  
deep in the Red Cloud, Old Yuma, Oro Blanco.  
He glory-holed with the best nugget-busters in the West,  
bed-rolled with dust-baggers gone rich to Reno long ago.

His rhyme was covert, bias, unpredictable; his reason  
was disrhythmic as his horse that threw a shoe and Stan.  
Awhile he was a cowboy till he broke the hip all over.  
Next he probed the Atacosa Mountains on his own,  
got claim-jumped, moved to the Apache, gambled every game  
in Globe, bellied every Bisbee bar. He was born, he said,  
in a hollow saguaro, his ma a fox, his pa a Utah badger.  
Each time he'd disappear for a year or so, the yarns  
began again. Sprung up like California poppies after  
the spring rain, they clung to him like cholla spines  
to sheepskin chaps. Whispers claimed he found the Dutchman  
near the Gila River. Someone said they saw him panning  
in the Salt and swore he grinned then vanished  
in a dust devil, leaving a mile-long trail of rust.

Some vowed the Superstitions hosted secret tribes in caves  
above the mine. Lost Dutchman was the kiva hall for all  
kachinas, and Stan a spirit-scout assigned to mislead  
searchers, bandy them about in piney mazes, raise  
their hair with crying winds and crazed sidewinders.  
No recipe for legend ever lacked a cook;  
a charro even took it back to Mexico.

Stan surfaced last in Morenci, leftover from the past  
like a head-frame towering the weeds of a town  
turned ghost. He lingered on the edge  
of people's knowing like narrow-gauge rails  
going to a closed-down shaft. Sometimes he tipped  
a waitress chunks of wulfenite or malachite  
with full bull's-eyes, and sometimes royal azurite.  
"Western treasure," he would say. "I like it better than  
that yellow stuff; this here's a hunk of sky and lake."

He tried to be a cowboy one more time, but pain  
was in his bone and, some said, fever in his brain,  
the metallic kind no love of God's outdoors could cure.  
If he ever heard the tales he didn't care. He sold  
his mining tools to buy an old wool coat. Late and soon  
he'd lean against the wall of the Busted Gut Saloon,  
still as a chilled chuckwalla, just as sudden gone.  
He lost his gun on a Jack-high flush. That night he died  
at Emmy Bresha's boarding house, same as any flesh  
and blood man. Some people sort of grieved. But no one  
ever believed he never hid a nugget--  
and one last semi-precious stone was all Stan had.

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STAR SALESMAN

I'm native to this territory, trained,  
Politically correct, at ease on stage  
With pagers, flow charts, wine lists, limousines.

I sprawl across the king-size hotel bed,  
Designer alter ego hanging pressed  
For morning's cue. My Gucci shoes are shined  
For each rehearsed approach to win a role  
For sweet success tomorrow. Or next week.

A dozen times each month I play this lead  
(And nothing but heroically blank verse  
Suffices to recount the full extent):  
Instead of hotdogs, I have haute cuisine.  
Despite the talent and the smooth production,  
The customers aren't clapping for our number.  
However bourbon-coated and benign  
They make it sound, their script says NO, a word  
Of lead and ice that lodges in soft parts  
Beneath my belt, attacking gourmet spoils.

I duly note the comic undertones  
That permeate this neo-classic farce.  
I make the entrance and escort the client  
To lunch, silk lining iridescent wit,  
Pants creased with confidence. Bright anecdotes  
Emerge from pockets, practiced protocol  
And uptown jokes, a little charge card magic--

And when the scene plays out, the wound-up mime  
Propels the props to yesterday's airport  
Where soon the custom-made attire, almost  
Adept enough to give its own performance,  
Goes slack, inanimate, back in the plane.

My seat-mate gripes about approaching winter;  
I wonder how I'll buy some warmer clothes  
Before the ice man cometh, credit gone.  
At last, unfolded in home's terminal,  
I wait in line in Ma Bell's crowded alley,  
And dredge my slept-in depths for change enough  
To call-- report the bust to amateur  
Directors of these high-camp, one-act flops--

And maybe learn I don't still head the cast.

--Glenna Holloway

Holloway  
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BACK FROM THE WAR

A splintering of rain  
against stones and sidewalks  
turns them deeper gray.  
I've grown color blind  
but I think they were always gray.

My watch is broken. It must be late.  
My window gapes at a corner streetlamp  
scalding the concrete, a moony blister  
around the pole. I think there are  
sometimes people just beyond the light.  
Grayest of all, they leave, never close  
enough for me to ask the time  
or the color of my hair.

--G. R. Holloway

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ADVANCING WINTER

November stings, unlike July sweat bees,  
With icy needles peppering my nose.  
It sends its early warning through my knees,  
Distressed and stiff, confined to heavy clothes.  
Please dont assume I'm getting out of sorts  
Or not preserving well with passing years.  
I still can hold my own in tennis shorts,  
Returning summer's serves or changing gears  
With speed to spare right through October days.  
But when raw wind impales me on its points  
And pewter sky infects me with malaise  
I hover by the hearth to rub my joints.  
Invading like a parasite, the cold  
Claims bones that otherwise don't know they're old.

--Glenna Holloway

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THE MUSICIANS

Of all the music Mother played,  
one piece alone made me abandon  
friends or wading pools to sit  
cross-legged on the floor behind  
her bench. My eyes and mouth half-closed,  
the adoration flowing through  
my cells, I longed to feel my hands  
surround such melody, to feel  
it rise between my fingers bearing  
tones of mine, my own imprint  
on harmonies that seemed designed  
to fit my hollows deep inside.  
And with each ending chord resolved  
exactly as I wished at six,  
and still the same at nine and ten,  
I begged: "Teach me to play it now!"

But she refused. She gave me more  
ten-finger exercises, scales  
and bulging etudes full of sharps.

The dangled goal was far beyond  
my talent and my fumbling grasp.  
Remembered beauty was my curse;  
Beethoven was my Nemesis.  
Mechanics and my soul were not  
in tune. For fifteen years I struggled  
to play Moonlight Sonata on  
the sly, a simplified arrangement.  
I think she guessed the pain it caused;  
I never asked to hear her play  
my favorite anymore, "It's trite,"  
I said, "Passe and saccharine."

She let me gain maturity.  
When I was thirty-one she taped  
Sonata #2. The moonlight  
anodyne poured on my wounds.  
A note accompanied the gift.  
She thanked me, told me I had made  
A better pianist of her:  
"Technique is nothing without passion.  
You probed depths I had not guessed.  
My dear-- a knowing listener  
Is equal to the player."

--Glenna Holloway