

# *Apollo Descending and Other Poems*

Albert B. Casuga

## *Apollo Descending*

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(An Ars Poetica)

It is a fiery birthing: after the lonely call  
of the last gull that darts after the last  
glow of sundown; after the sandpiper's  
song peters out to a lost bird's chirp;  
after all the images have crept under  
these breakwater boulders to surface  
perhaps as frenzied dancers casting  
shadows swaying underneath this tent,  
this caravanserai of dreams; after this,  
on a throne of palaver, a fire-bearer  
lights the torches that fence us all in.

Like Apollo's captives, we cup flames  
in our palms and sing polyglot hymns  
to the beauty of words while we shower  
our paths with pellets of fire, as we crown  
the beggar queen with a flaming nosegay.

# Silence

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This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.  
- T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men"

By sundown, they will be gone, like long shadows  
on my porch walls. All the fierce singing done,  
what remains is the quiet murmur of the bourn.  
Its stream will not return, nor will the swallows.

But while they flitted from tree tops to broken  
perches, did they not cry out their bravest songs?  
These are our elm trees, these are our willows,  
we pieced our homes here together, we roosted.

At the bluffs, we find the edge of the woods muted  
now. Soon, even the cackling gulls will dive a final  
swoon, catch the last crayfish lost on boulders left  
bare by ebbing tide that must also leave its shore.

It is troths like these that will not last, nothing  
endures. The silence can only become a whimper.

## ***A Second Time Around***

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Malleable heart, mouth open to the sky and rain,  
my discipline is to learn your one singing note—  
to fish it out of the depths of a fountain like a penny  
someone tossed there long ago, or like the sun  
in hiding.

- Luisa A. Igloria, "Singing Bowl"

Is it your one singing note that I am deaf to,  
one you have always kept unsung, unheard?

How deep must I plunge into the whirlpool  
that your malleable heart has hidden, unmarked

uncharted, like uncollected coins grown old  
in a broken fountain, tokens of desire or whimsy?

Dare I fish it out, this one uncollected penny,  
from what depths it has reached in that well?

When you tossed it away, it was best forgotten  
like some wilted petals in a convent's breviary.

I have coveted that one note, I have haunted  
the barnacled wayside fountain, brackish now,

where you must have thrown it like a shrug  
one winter over your cold uncovered shoulder.

In spring thaw, I could see it again, leaden  
and rusty as the sun hidden by some penumbra,

and I must collect it now, make it sparkle  
once again, rub it on my sleeve, and wrap it

until I could wheedle from its sheen that  
one note you have always kept unsung, unheard.

## ***Two Mornings***

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Waking up on Fifth Line, when the ground fog creeps on moonlit streets like a late lover lost under slept-on sheets, surprises me as still the best time to rise when mornings are really midday scrambles to catch something: bus, tram, train, time, traffic, trash bins trampled over, reeking tramps, ad nauseam. I am still.

On a porch, where houses are still better off with them, I sip my minted tea as serenely as I could, miming the movements of my mind: if I knew then what I know now, if I loved then as fiercely as I could have, if I could turn time around and give it a kick in its arrogant behind, if I could shelve that rushing sunrise and not waken to carpenter bees and highway buzzing...

However languid or rushed my mornings are, does not matter now. Waking up still beats not getting up or not waking up to another still day. I am most still when I can feel my shoulders shrug.

# A Wailing Wall

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*Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant\**

- Tacitus

Either way, distance finds me  
looking up or down this cliff,  
an unlikely sanctuary I escape  
into aching for scarce solitude.

How can one be alone among  
the darting seagulls? Or silent  
with lost memories jarred by  
blasts of breaking waves below?

Here, gods revel in their haven  
of whistling winds and clouds,  
down there fishermen cackle,  
chewing sargasso, guzzling gin,

while their thrown nets fill up  
with flotsam floating around  
moss-gowned boulders staring  
at the sky like dark green eyes.

Is it this vast and empty space  
between that scares me now,  
when I should be murmuring  
secrets to messenger winds?

I would scream unbearable  
pain, holler down bitter anger;  
I must share muffled grief,  
loosen taut shackles of despair.

Either way, I find wailing walls  
in air, water, rocks, and wind;  
like Job I weep for peace, hope  
to gently fall in the cup of palms

waiting to catch my carrion  
now carved out of a shattered  
world of faithlessness and fear,  
unable to hold on to life or love.

On this piece of jutting rock,  
have I not found the little place  
where I could reach His Hand  
quickly were I to fall, either way?

\* Where they create desolation, they call it peace...