

Days of Reckoning



Poems by Rosemarie Crisafi

Days of Reckoning

Poems by Rosemarie Crisafi

© 2006, Rosemarie Crisafi

All rights reserved.

Cover Photo by Jill Burhans, Used with Permission.

Readers are granted the right to make copies of this collection of poems or any one poem under the following circumstances:

1. If you are creating a single physical copy for yourself.
2. If the copies are used for an educational workshop or school.

Copying this collection or any part of this collection in circumstances other than the two listed above require the written consent of Rosemarie Crisafi.

a production of
Lily Press

Lily: A Monthly Online Literary Review

<http://lilylitreview.com>



Table of Contents

Days of Reckoning	4
Eternity	6
Elysium	7
City Breeze	8
Mulberry	9
To Millbrook Mountain	10
Every Night Ends	11
Lambkill	12
Hieroglyphics	13
Scenes from the Sanctuary at San Remo	14
Geese in November	16
The Broadcast	17
Apollo Returns	18
Space Opus	19
Hologram	20
About the Author/ Acknowledgements	21





Days of Reckoning

In the disorder of leaves
smoke rises,
stroking your hair.

A west wind hisses,
snagging fox tail
and red pine cluster.

We drink cider in mugs
filled from subterranean streams.
The descent into hell
was flight, not a search
for beauty.

I never scaled
the talking tower.

I never looked
inside the beauty box.

Curling up, we wait,
maples' winged seeds
pressed in your Bible.
In this hurricane
season, sun and satellite act as one.

Night falls
without a trumpet blast
from heaven. We look for signs.
Since equinox,
we have been as pointed
as a crescent, smoothed briefly
by Indian Summer.

A new moon gleams
on the other side---
a crow's view of the Pantheon.
Midnight washes away
grit accumulated
from days of wood burning.

The calendar calculates.
Numerals ignite on a Catherine wheel.





Each cipher, a rocket,
forces the helm to veer.
Someday digits will be charred
pinwheels and ash,
while Psyche weeps
at her loss;
not of loveliness,
but of you,
having consumed
all of your numbers.





Eternity

From a severed branch,
yellow eyes watch,
ready to choose
which footsteps to heed---
rapt in foreplay
of hunting.
Wrapped in camouflage
of near perfection.

What should happen next
never does: strutting
wings outstretched
to the female.
Dusk menaces
above white breasts
brown-banded.

Against bark hardened
by many seasons, amid stumps
of oak and ash, the owl's
hooked-steel beak and claws clutch,
cloaked weapons
against an unattainable lemming.

A mouse scuttles.
A snake coils, gripping its tail.





Elysium

A boat drifts
in the shade
over your hospital bed,
a stream of oblivion.
A tube suction blood
collecting burgundy tar
in a plastic flask on the wall.

Mouth open, masked,
your face has died before
your body. Having paid
for passage, your mouth
forms a numeral, a pink
and black zero.

I touch pomegranate skin, ripe
and wrinkled, yellow overlaid
with red. As your lips close,
a black chariot carries me
mumbling an ancient dialect.
Swallowing forgetfulness, you
do not reply.

I let go your hand
at the furthest edge of the world
awash in rose tint
unable to see beyond
the purple field.





City Breeze

This moment on the screen
the pilot burns out daylight with jet engines.
It billows towards the camera.
Ghosed into the air, some disappear
learning to die with no warning, breaking up into molecules
or die urgent as confetti
glinting in the smoky skyline.

Silver streamers or tickertape twirling ribbons, curl
and weave in grainy air. The sun
emerges huge as the skyscrapers
signal with red and blue halos. In a daze
we march heeding a drum in our ears.
Each siren boils then evaporates
leaving muffled fear on this endless sidewalk.

We will not go further until
at the corner we turn to see
the colossus in the river --- jade, heavy, noiseless
and immutable.

As the streets expand, a refugee
coughs up words: How will it be now?
This new evening breeze tastes of jet fuel.





Mulberry

I find you in frozen evening
in the intricate drawings
of dendrites.
On windowpanes, you grow
in crystals and glass.

By bitter electricity
snowflakes cling
as the moon holds a newborn
in halos.
The nimbus is fleeting,
flurrying and dissolving in gray.

Clouds converge in the shape of a child.
An infant Jesus made of rain touches my cheeks.

I see my mother, reflected in the pool.
Behind, a shy girl hides.
A shadow on ice,
she does not speak.

The prayer ends in a blizzard.
On the far side of the rink
a fruitless mulberry vanishes
in white.





To Millbrook Mountain

I look for signs: a distinctive stone face, a malformed tree or an unusual curve. On a thorny footpath of scrub and cones, yellow blazes enclose the lake all day, connecting blue stones with a red trail to the summit.

I check the compass rose, note the pose of the sun, the blade points north. I hear tones of satellites, vibrations of paper wasps and cellophane bees
--- the buzzing of those with no memories.

Here, the carriage way mounts. Glacial rock floats carried by ice, deposited on a shelf far from an Arctic home. Here, the sun clarifies a sea of evergreens and reveals ripples in the lavender mirror of Lake Minnewaska.

Chains of pines break. Stunted, for centuries surviving in the ravine's starved soil and wind, black, burned alive by thunderbolts. Knotted and twisted, the dwarves live outside a ring of giant hemlocks.

Sharply the trail ascends as blazes flash with deadly pink bell petals of lambkill. A brook crosses a power line from nowhere or perhaps from New York City or even from heaven.

The cable enters the hollow as a long spear falling downward. A confused hiker absorbs the lash and surge of the electric eel.

In the west, glacial erratics balance near cliff edges. In a crevice, a pitch pine grows on an exposed ledge with vertical drops of hundreds of feet.

The lake evaporates becoming a legend. It is not a matter of resiliency. On a dangerous crag unpainted rocks protect evidence of past upheavals: great floods, volcanic cataclysms, primeval forest fires---proof more lasting than rainwater or trout.





Every Night Ends

Every night ends small
with crickets, pillows,
a screech owl's trill
in the presence of spirits
eyelids shut, windowpanes and walls
so mysterious
for an instant we ask
from where do the shadows come,
which earthly stuff?
For whom was darkness intended?

We ought to have been included
with the evening primrose's
unfolding yellow
with the Luna moth's
green phantom wings
round windows
and gold and blue sashes.
She grows faint and slowly,
slowly rises
becoming certainty
and sacred energy.

Even with the nightmares
brought upon us,
we survive the hits and misses of dawn
lingering in the dimness
of dreams
until taken into blackness
as a train pulls so many cars
into a tunnel.
The forgotten night
of each evening is infinite.





Lambkill

Touching the perfect crimson corollas
she does not fret over the reputation,
does not worry about its name
as petals feel supple on her fingertips.

The cool beauty of the bog whispers,
“Caution is dull.”

Seeded globes grow in the evergreen
like swollen tumors. Hands spongy
from damp peat and moss, crystals
coat her palms like sugar.

She decides to free the pentagonal petals
from the chaos of the leathery bush,
to brave the cursed glossy leaves
because it is her life.





Hieroglyphics

Dawn covers the fishpond with its hand.
Past fine wires of a screened door,
an unknown country lies.

I watch you bathing in this frontier,
the haze and low rumbling clouds.
In the morning glare
the face of the pool is sulfur.

You stride, humming, lips enclosing
lyrics unfamiliar, as if
we had always lived apart. Your palsied
cat curls on the sill, white
with black symbols. So I talk
to the rhubarb's fleshy stalks.
Pyramids of white flowers pulse.

Thunder arrives, speaking
in a tongue more fearsome than death.
What do you answer, running
from the water? As you pass I think

to utter something profound
but cannot speak
the nameless language
of the sky.





Scenes from the Sanctuary at San Remo

I. The Sanctuary

Limestone dust and water mixed with eggs, wax,
vinegar, honey and almond gum in the half-moon
apse. Stones form and spin: a deer, a peacock, ox,
lion, sheep and a winged man. A woman holds a key.

Under the wheel window at rest and rotating
fingers touched your lips in awe. Within the ring
ruby and sapphire churn in a pool of squares, triangles
and stars. At the sanctuary of San Remo you looked up

merging with marble in the portico staring at a pair
of bell towers and a glass circle bounded by stucco.

You remain a statue.

II. This Town

I try to live in the town left behind.
A fish tank bubbles, faucets trickle and gutters bend.
An ambulance sings with the dishwasher as rain
shoots sideways. Here the bricks vibrate

where my Sicilian father snapped *pizzelles*
like stars and lingered over tomatoes.
Burlap arms wrapped his rosebushes. In an arc
they grow. Clouds blush encircling organs rimmed by sage.

Corollas loosen as they age.

III. Inside Stonehenge

By your gravestone, my tongue dissolves into jelly.
Behind a row of teeth, my voice cannot escape
from the monoliths enclosing the altar.
Inside Stonehenge's hoops I reel as heels
strike hospital linoleum. Metal hits a keyhole.
Fluorescent glare melts into bars cast magnified





onto walls that smudge into the Formica ceiling
which hangs ever more heavy and low over
the changeable bed. I could let illness snatch me
give in to the skyward tow of the moment.

I have traveled too far to die within the stones.

IV. The Sky Dome

Look up in wonder as the moon unfolds.
Arms draw the string of a bow tight.
Great Bear froze with Little Bear and Plow.
Icecaps glow beside an empty chair.

Gods tossed you into heaven. In the meteor rain
Andromeda swallows you into the galaxy.
The eyeballs track lines of secret geometry.
Pupils shrink to pinpoints in the centers.

From the mandala, energy illuminates the zodiac
and lights the dome. The rosette turns

as you remain still at the core.





Geese in November

November wraps October
in fur. Beneath an aged sun
I find you between fowl and fall skeletons
formed by an ash tree
in the duck pond.

Honking seizes my ears
announcing the departure
of a thousand geese
whose unconscious creation
returns in spring.
The point bird breaks and stirs air.
Current lifts
the flock's white-banded throats up
as all the clouds heave
drizzling down.

No shots; no hunters' rifles;
a shadow passes over.
The brown vee
enfolds the riddle of power
that routs a fox with a blow
beating over a continent.

My eyes open their eyes
to the house's old brickwork.
Our life crumbles into red rubble.

The formation disappears
into a cloud as mysterious as death.
What is it like, always lying silent
in the water? I try to touch you,
but cannot, observing
we were once both of the earth.
Now we are different.





The Broadcast

Eavesdrop on alien radio
from another planet of another star.
Gossip in an anther world;
a language never mastered.
The hive takes care of itself.

Retuning from milkweed pods oozing latex,
on waxed floors bees salsa upright.
Hexagon chambers fill with gold.
Yellow and black carnival costumes
move in Caribbean figure eights.

Orgy unseen in dark rooms,
antennae touch dancers'
pulsing bodies,
releasing a locomotive of sound,
the train to god.

In the whine of a thousand wings,
jarred response of a threatened nation,
the beekeeper foresees a swarm,
sensed by resonance alone, amplified
by deep vibration of the cone aroused.

In the comb, trembling, beating air
as the ant withdraws, sentinels pipe
soothing primitive brains.
No video, no flashback
captures the virgin queen
emerging hardened from a cell,
stinging rivals and lovers to death.
Honey walls do not reverberate.
All day tales of nectar...
rumors of pollen broadcast.





Apollo Returns

In the orchard
of pears
in the aroma
of figs
near a woodland stream,
he stood with rigid legs
erect in armor,
plumed helmet,
holding a fiery shield.

Silvia sank
as bubbles rose.
Above her, a bough of weeping beech
flashed and fluttered;
a crested god clung
with a rigid tail.
A beveled bill bored.

Revisiting the waters,
Apollo at daybreak
chisels pale beech,
rattles her window
shakes long winter shoots.

Amid buzzing, Christina
goes down,
arms flailing, kicking, gurgling
smelling sugary fruit, hearing
groans in the grove.





Space Opus

Stone ranks form a grand staff,
the last quartet plays for my deaf mother.

Ash trees' diamond patterns rise. On opposing branches
leaflets hang, musical notes on a scale.

Pressed to a pianoforte, vibrating, Beethoven pounds.
A seventh chord's muscular cadence rises.

Ready for launch, a mirrored craft gleams
beside stubs and monuments.

With Mediterranean *caponata* and olive oil,
why did my Sicilian mother choose this, a space age mausoleum?

Perhaps polished faces smiled with inscriptions.

Etched names grow large and warn to pay attention
to the priest. I do not know his liturgical language.

Brutal fugue...folk sonata...
the rattle of the skeletal third movement...
a lightning bolt.

What remains for me to hear?





Hologram

Seeing has been my life,
sooner or later I would look upon the dead.

Air is a resin through which to view.

I see you (although you are no longer here):
a collapsed biology,
an indefinable conversion from person.

The shadow of an arrow angles in the ground.

To say “transformation” is incorrect.

This is not the change I know,
this is an utterly different physics.

The most awful death is to die far away
from home.
Dear, if you were not here, you could not be seen.
Who would I question?

Mementos: photographs, letters. Perhaps
your favorite boots would be laid out for burial.

At least I have you here
(absent).
Not you: an eddy of light and dark

so I can make a final farewell,
so you remain in my gaze a while longer.





About the Author

Rosemarie Crisafi lives in Fishkill, New York. She works for a non-for-profit agency that serves individuals with disabilities. Her poetry has been published in *Poetry Super Highway*, *Canopic Jar*, *Great Works*, *Alba*, *Red River Review*, *Whistling Shade*, *ken*again*, *JMWW*, *BlazeVox*, *Tattoo Highway*, *Lily Literary Review*, *Wicked Alice Poetry Journal*, *Pemmican*, *elimae*, *Avatar Review*, *Poems Niederngasse*, *Triplopia*, *Dirt*, *Perigee*, *The Rose & the Thorn*, *Quill and Ink*, *Locust Magazine*, *Poetic Diversity*, *Eclectica Magazine*, *Facets*, *SubtleTea*, *Millers Pond*, *2River View*, *Nthposition*, and other journals.

Acknowledgements

Several of these poems originally appeared elsewhere: “To Millbrook Mountain” and “Every Night Ends” in *Canopic Jar* #13 (2004); “Scenes from the Sanctuary at San Remo” in *Red River Review* (August 2004); “Hieroglyphics” in *Eclectica Magazine* (Fall/October 2004); “Apollo Returns” in *The Rose & Thorn* (Winter 2004); “Days of Reckoning” in *Triplopia* (January 2005); “Eternity” in *Canopic Jar* #14 (January 2005); “Elysium” in *Red River Review* (February 2005); and “Space Opus” in *Wicked Alice Poetry Journal* (Summer 2005).

