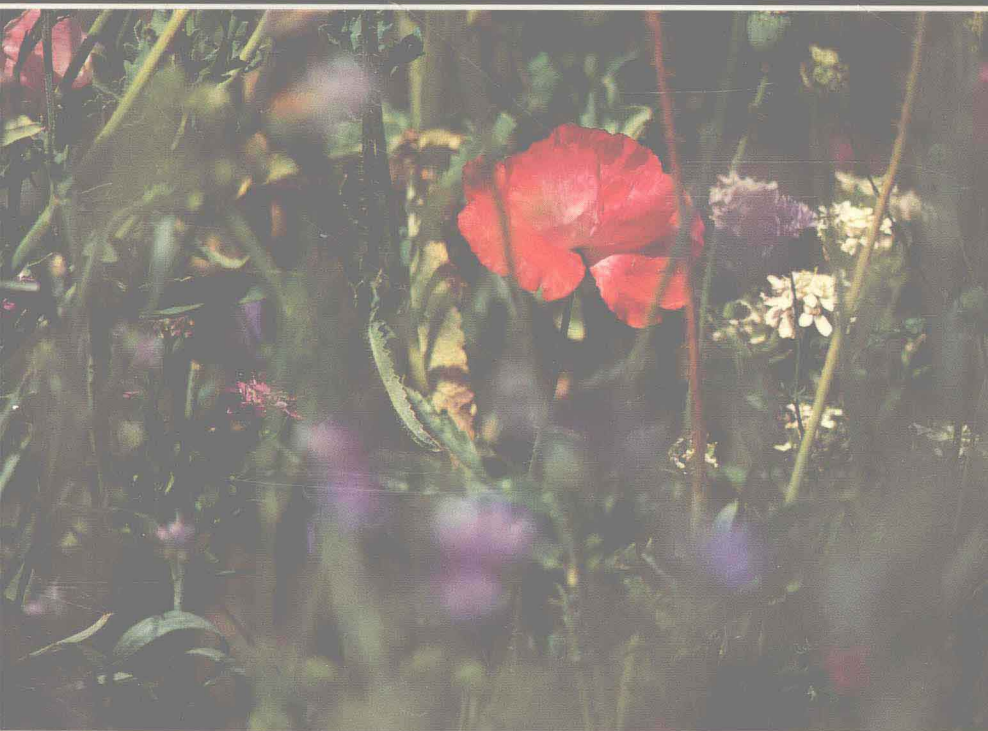


Kore in Bloom



Poems by
Margaret Holley

Kore in Bloom

Also by Margaret Holley

Morning Star (Copper Beech, 1992)

The Smoke Tree (Bluestem, 1991)

*Beyond Me,
Voices of the Natural World,*
with photographs by Christine S. Beck
(NorthWord Press, 1993)

*The Poetry of Marianne Moore:
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First Edition

This book is for Annie.

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Kore in Bloom

The Dancer

Say you came once as a dragonfly,
a one-inch serpent-twig, the suspended "I,"

its double pair of barely air-dried wings
sewing one moment to the next. Quietness

makes it clear: it's not an exact equation,
the weight of clouds and the dusty mirror

of the pond. The nymphs are always hatching.
Something is always disturbing the surface,

changing the leeway: future perfect, past
imperfect, this green ocean of air in between.

Fire-Watch

The uncut meadow sang.
 It was pale gray,
lighter than the night air,
 and I thought I could see
the black cows still standing
 knee-deep in it,
where the stream loses its shape
 among grass and stones.

All over London the rank smells
 of ruined buildings,
of charred living rooms
 filled with rubble,
and clouds of dust and ash
 hung in the air for hours,
lit by fires and water
 leaping from the hoses.

The air let its burden down
 slowly, powdered stone
and white ash descending
 like a ghost of snow.
Eliot on the roof of Faber's,
 ill and exhausted,
watched it cover his coatsleeves
 as the night wore on,

and didn't know what to say,
 "East Coker"
his Easter gift to England,
 and now this.
The burning clots dropped
 from story to story
and sparks flew up
 like seeds on the wind.

On the night of the Perseids
 “stars” fall silently
high over the crickets’ song
 in the meadow’s hair.
Millions of meteors
 enter the atmosphere
every day, and most of them burn
 to cinders as they fall.

Like a dream
 guarding the mercy of sleep,
the watcher on the roof
 keeps what he can of silence,
while the weight of darkness
 sifts invisibly down,
several tons of it every day
 all over the earth.

The Stars

Remember the pail of starfish in seawater?
Hands heavily muscled, they clung to the rocks
as we pulled them from tidal pools.
Remember the seahorse, wide-eyed,
curled on the sand like a question mark?
Ribbons of seaweed dusted with salt
and the air-bubble berries that kept them afloat?

The spray hit me straight in the face
with its blinding lights, amazement of surface.
Then the undertow took my heels
and hung me up in the wall of a breaker,
squalling and slime, ravenous lungs
and the gift of permanent appetite in their least
perceptible billowing, still life on the beach of the bed.

Like manes of the sea driven by winds,
these shores have traveled with me
on a long current of waking, a hungry vigilance
gathering whole galaxies into its cellular skein.
It was the stars that set my heart going
from the first, the cringe of their fingers,
their cold palm to palm.

Where the waves rose and receded,
coquinas dug themselves in,
large populations without heads or eyes,
all foot with a grip on the shifting sand,
bits of translucent mucus secreting shell,
simplicities of nut clams, venus and bittersweets,
remains of the angel wing.

Animals, birds, and flowers,
the ocean kneads them all down
to their finest particles, grains of sand

so much stronger than boulders,
down to the infinitesimal, blind, willful
dust afloat on gravity's ocean,
the sleepy intelligence of the electron cloud.

So earth rides in the sling of the sun,
this star unfolding from within, perpetual fire.
Where the moon holds onto us
in its whirling dance, the ocean swells,
even the continent breathes,
as the guy wires of gravity swing over it
with their dead weight, their load of reflected light.

The stars, it turns out, are not hands
but eyes, a red-photosensitive eyespot,
a lens of pigmented cells in the end of each arm,
sentience clinging to stone,
as the waves rise and fall with a ruby moon
shining on red-wine water in a world where red
is unknown because it is all there is.

Among the ruins of Pompeii
was a collection of seashells
perhaps belonging to Pliny the Elder,
at work on his thirty-eighth book of natural science
when he died on the smoky slope of Vesuvius.
On this slope of years, this shoreline, everything
is rinsed in salt, the brown-haired sand dollars,

hundreds of butterfly shells,
the landscape of the lettered olive,
and the mind half-understanding itself as debris.
Remember the tide of the tiniest muscle
pulling against you with all its strength,
folding its wings around it, then leaving them
on the beach stained with sunrise.

The Book of Changes

We have read our horoscopes over coffee,
the tea leaves, lines in the palm.
We have deciphered the flight of birds,
rustling leaves, patterns in water,
the motion of objects dropped into a spring,
and we have heated turtle shells

till they cracked with broken or unbroken lines
meaning *no* or *yes*.

King Wen passed his time in prison finding words
for the sixty-four hexagrams,
broken and unbroken lines in stacks of six,
each with its legend:

Thunder and mountain, movement and stillness.

Water, fire. Danger, light.

In the twentieth hexagram, Kuan ("View"),
seeing and seen are one word.

This hexagram stands for wind and earth.
The rock you see is a dance of atoms.

"The wind blows far and wide over the earth,
and the grass must bend to its power."

We have read the map of wrinkles,
the dapple of shade in late September's
autumnal equinox when darkness gathers
and disintegration begins.

A layer of cells at the base of the leaf stalk
cuts off the flow of sap.

The Great Commentary says, "By changing,
it is able to continue."

The earth, too, is a cohesive mist.
But how can I change without dying?