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Cocktail Glasses, American Poetry (3 CR), Milan Cathedral

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## *Maura Stanton*

### **Cocktail Glasses**

Even as a nine-months baby  
the tulip shapes of thin,  
enticing glasses on end tables  
beckoned me. I'd drop my rattle  
and crawl across the carpet  
reaching for the stemmed crystal  
glittering with something clear  
like water, but much shinier.  
The fat, magnified olive  
pierced by a toothpick wrapped  
brightly in red cellophane,  
bobbed gently near the bottom.  
I learned to stand, they say,  
by grabbing a couch cushion  
then pulling myself up  
as I reached for the glass  
until an aunt, stubbing out  
a lipstick-printed cigarette  
noticed me, and laughed,  
lifting me up on her lap.  
When I no longer ate strained  
carrots with my baby spoon,  
or sucked on a warm bottle,  
my grandfather would save  
his gin-soaked olive for me,  
and I'd toddle toward him  
in my organdy pinafore  
trimmed with red rick-rack.  
I made them laugh, they said,  
my mouth puckering up,

as I chewed and swallowed  
a Manhattan-soaked cherry,  
but I always wanted another,  
thrilled by the odd taste.  
I remember staying behind  
when the grownups filed into  
the dining room for dinner  
lining empty glasses in a row  
along the coffee table,  
admiring the sparkling stems  
under the shaded lamps.  
I'd practice the elegant gestures  
of my grandparents and aunts,  
who lived in the flat above ours.  
When I was older, I'd sneak upstairs  
away from my baby brothers  
playing with their ABC blocks.  
My grandmother took naps,  
so I'd tiptoe past the gold  
chiming clock on the mantelpiece  
and slip into the dining room.  
I'd switch on the chandelier  
with its hanging prisms  
that shot light everywhere,  
illuminating the china cabinet  
filled with a hundred glasses  
or more, all of them different,  
some thin as a skim of ice,  
others carved deeply like jewels  
but strangely made out of lead.  
I liked the heavy-bottomed ones  
called "Old-Fashioned" glasses,  
and the tall champagne flutes  
and the beveled edge water goblets  
and the handblown wine glasses  
and the big bells for brandy,

and the plain shot glasses  
 for Irish whiskey, and the tiny  
 sparkling doll-sized glasses  
 for green and orange liqueurs.  
 Later I hated the tumblers  
 for chocolate milk, the juice glasses  
 stamped with smiling oranges,  
 and the Porky Pig drinking mugs  
 dug from boxes of soap  
 after we moved from Chicago  
 and my father stopped drinking  
 for the rest of his life.

## American Poetry (3 CR)

*"Helen, thy beauty is to me  
 Like those Nicean barks of yore  
 That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,  
 The weary, way-worn wanderer bore  
 To his own native shore."  
 – Poe*

Something shimmers at the open window. . . .  
 A Nicean bark, splashing through golden light,  
 Crab-like oars stroking the sultry air,  
 Hovers lightly just beyond the wide sill  
 Of the stuffy classroom where I'm talking  
 About comparisons, the "tenor" and the "vehicle."  
 I rise at once, gesturing with delight.  
 Shall we step aboard, I ask my students,  
 And let the skilled oarsmen waft us away?  
 They glance down at Poe, glance back at me.  
 Nothing out the window but a football stadium.

How'd I'd love to shepherd them aboard,  
 Tell them to sink back on the velvet pillows,  
 Strum a guitar, or sip a glass of wine,  
 Toasting the clock tower as we float across  
 The Gothic rooftop of the Student Union,  
 Then drift unnoticed over the Business School.  
 Tonight we'd anchor off a flowery island  
 Near some black lava beach. Students, I'd say,  
 Your job's to count the stars, or serenade  
 Each other, or trail your hands in the foam  
 Talking of things worthless and imaginary.  
 I'd watch their tender faces fall asleep,  
 Hoping one or two might remember our voyage  
 Some day in the future on their native shore  
 As they stall in traffic, cursing their jobs  
 In cubicles, or the falling stock market,  
 Then suddenly see that shining vehicle,  
 Hovering in the air, ready to transport them.

## Milan Cathedral

This roof's a maze of spires and pinnacles  
 Casting a tracery of shade as I stand  
 Transfixed in the arched doorway. I balance  
 On slate tiles to peer up at the gargoyles  
 Poised to swoop from a belfry or gable.  
 Marble saints look down on the same Piazza  
 Pious tyrants crossed on the way to Mass:  
 Visconti, Sforza, Napoleon, Mussolini.  
 Not long ago police patrolled up here,

Training machine guns on the crowds below  
 As limousines arrived for the funeral  
 Of a dress designer murdered in Florida,  
 And paparazzi shot the somber expressions  
 Of Madonna and Princess Diana gorgeous in black.  
 But today anyone's free to climb the steep  
 Pitch of the roof to the central tower  
 For the promised view of distant, snowy Alps –  
 But through the pointed arch of the belvedere  
 There's nothing! I see only skyscrapers,  
 Then smog and blur, clouds mixing into smoke.

Descending winding stairs, gripping the rail,  
 I'm face to face with the ornate top story  
 Of the Rinascente Department Store, named  
 By a poet, Gabriele d'Annunzio  
 For 5,000 lire, and rebuilt after the bombs  
 Of World War II turned it into rubble.  
 Half-off placards beckon through plate glass  
 And soon I'm riding gilded escalators,  
 Dazzled by chatoyant silks and crepe de Chine,  
 Touching everything that's shiny or beaded,  
 Longing to pull jacquard or sheer chiffon  
 Over my neck, fingers burning with desire.  
 One shopper, excited by a golden dress  
 On sale, just like the one I'm clutching,  
 Can't wait for an empty dressing room.  
 Her daughter unzips her, and she stands exposed  
 Before men and women in her bra and panties,  
 Her face hidden as she tries to pull  
 The bright cloth over her stretch-marked stomach  
 Get it smoothed down around her dumpling hips.  
 Out on the Piazza with my shopping bag,  
 I sit on a bench to watch the fountain's jets  
 Spurt up to echo the Cathedral's facade

In shapes of water, sparkling, ephemeral,  
 Imitating the floating heaven of stone  
 Built with money from assassins and dictators  
 Who prayed beneath the dome in velvet tunics,  
 Gold chains, soft leather boots, and ostrich feathers.

*Philip St. Clair*

## **Cleopatra's Needle**

What has this obelisk to do with Cleopatra VII? Absolutely  
 nothing,  
     but nevertheless one must acknowledge  
 the slightest of associations: Caesar Augustus (when he was  
     Octavian)  
     removed it from Heliopolis to Alexandria in 14 BC,  
 and despite the fact that Octavian and Marc Antony (Cleopatra's  
     lover  
     and co-regent) were triumvirs who became  
 sworn enemies (Battle of Actium, 31 BC), Antony's suicide after  
     his defeat  
     and Cleopatra's autotoxy that next year  
 (after Octavian spurned her) leads one to doubt that a Tribune-  
     For-Life  
     would need to express his dominance  
 sixteen years later by barging a huge piece of granite (two  
     hundred tons,  
     sixty feet high) down the Nile to the Mediterranean Sea.  
 Our obelisk, in actual fact, was first erected by Tuthmosis III  
     (c. 1450 BC),  
 whose well-preserved body (discovered 1881