

Carol Light: "Postcards from Ponza, The Prison Island"

To celebrate the passage of the winter solstice, we asked poet Carol Light to brighten our days with postcards from sunny places. Here's what she she sent us, from a hotspot off the Italian coast...

"Ponza is one of the islands of the Italian Pontine archipelago, near Cape Circeo, in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The island may have been the haunt of Homer's infamous sorceress, Circe. Inhabited since Etruscan times, the island served as a place of exile for Romans plotting against emperors, as a penal colony, and as a dazzling vacation spot for celebrities, including Gina Lollobrigida. While visiting Ponza, I became fascinated by the idea of prisons, especially the idiosyncratic prison that contains the self, no matter where one is lucky enough to be. The poem began as a series of postcards written in blank verse."

Postcards from Ponza, the Prison Island

1.

My panoramic lens apprehends
a hammock slung between two lemon trees.
Beyond the terracotta potted palms,
grapes cluster, plump slubs twisting
through the vineyard's unwound skeins. Damp towels
flap in the hibiscus-heavy breeze,
and terraced hillsides ziggurat to meet
a rocky harbor. Splashed coral pink
and periwinkle blue, flat-roofed villas,
like licked stamps, attach and overlap
around a sprawling beryl bay.

2.

Tacking in and out of view, a yawl
runs and comes about, heeling over
the old caldera. A guidebook tells me
it's Pontius Pilate (so legend has it) for whom
the island's named. He bellows from a grotto.
And Circe taunts the seas. Hear her laugh
above her snorting, truffle-hunting crew?

Expats conspire beside me. I spy, maybe,
the plotting sisters of Caligula,
exiled here eternally. What luck
to spear an olive with such dauntless ghosts.

3.

Swollen Zodiacs weave water webs
across a shallow cove. Wakes froth
from yacht to jetty to wobbling dock.
Throttled down, they set their bow lines now,
looping cleats, tying up. One slip over,
a trawler unloads the day's cargo. The catch:
slick holds of polpi and scampi, soon to swim
the length of a rich risotto pescatore.

4.

Toasting Monte Guardia, I raise
my rubied glass past fifty fish eyes staring
from a basket. Did I seize the day?
Did I mention yet the always amber light?
I plot to overthrow the god that shrimps
my shoulders. Even here, I know, I'm not
Gina Lollobrigida. Not yet

5.

Gina Lollobrigida I'm not.
So what? We just got here. Our pensione?
It's lovely, only the bedroom door won't lock.
And what have we to steal, my beloved asks?

I feel it too, but, to be safe, standing
on the countertop, I reach three shelves
above our kitchenette to stuff the passports
in a stoneware crock. I don't unpack. I do
refold a suitcase full of clothes, ever
ready for departure.

6.

Did you see her,
back there, the one who just whizzed past, straddling
the Vespa, spackled across the trapezius
of his (whose?) brawny torso? A carabiner
clipped her bikini to a haversack;
it slapped the sky.

7.

I set a cosmetic case
beside the mirror. Bottled serums clink
against vials of embalming oils.
How much happiness is squandered waiting
for the end? The present tenses when
it can't accommodate the future. And we
just got here. Madame Pluperfect peeps
through her marcasite lorgnette. Above
her head, contrails swipe and pig the firmament.

Carol Light's poems have appeared most recently in *Poetry Northwest*, *Narrative Magazine*, *32 Poems*, *Literary Bohemian*, and *American Life in Poetry*.

She received a GAP award from Artist Trust in 2011 and was a Jack Straw Writing Fellow in 2012. Her first book, *Heaven from Steam*, is forthcoming in 2013 from Able Muse Press. She lives with her family in Port Townsend, Washington