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Jonah's Morning Song

Karen Marguerite Moloney

PROLOGUE

"Before I formed thee in the belly
I knew thee . . . and I ordained
thee a prophet . . ." (Jeremiah 1:5).

"The veil, Father."

"The veil, Jonah."

"I might weaken. They say a body tires, hungers, grows cold.
It is a long way to Nineveh.

"I have trained long for this, prepared, waited, yearned.

"But there is no guarantee!

"Father! Wilt thou guide me?"

"My son!"

I

" . . . and he found a ship
going to Tarshish . . ." (Jonah 1:3).

So long a child of promise, Jonah turned
Too quickly from the mariners whose god,
Content to smell a sacrifice of blood,
Just specified oblations should be burned.
He left them to the rigging of the sail,
Begrudging all who did not yearn to be
Loved more for self than capability,
And slept until awakened in the gale.
He could not know how near he was to death
As he rejoined the mariners above,
Nor how his God with unconditioned love,
In three days' time, would fire new lungs with breath.
He could not know the natural man would die
To rise a prophet, bold to testify.

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II

“So Jonah arose, and went
unto Nineveh . . .” (Jonah 3:3).

While, dim with distance, morning rays revealed
An outline of the massive city wall,
He paled to watch the brazen river, reeled
Beneath the gates, revile Jehovah’s call.
Again he asked the Hebrew God why he
Who might have died in Tarshish of old age,
Or drowned off Joppa, had not been left free
To flee the carnal city’s certain rage.
When he perceived, his camel briefly slowed,
Jehovah would permit him to elect
Retreat upon an unobstructed road,
Could raise another easier to direct;
It seemed the river’s impudence decreased:
He urged his camel and continued east.

III

“Then said the Lord . . . should not
I spare Nineveh. . . ?” (Jonah 4:10–11).

Rebuked, the prophet, kneeling by the plant,
Its yellow leaves already turning brown,
Prepared his Hebrew conscience to recant
Resentment toward the vast Assyrian crown.
Remembering atrocity, he felt
His anger die more slowly than the gourd.
The sultry sunlight dwindled while he knelt
Beyond the eastern gate and sought the Lord.
With dawn the prophet rose, rejoicing that
He held pure love for Nineveh—whose king,
Proclaiming from the ashes where he sat,
Would honor Jonah with a viceroy’s ring.
But Jonah blessed the city from a hill
And journeyed home to bless his sons at will.