DENIZEN

Coral outcrops; in them moored Tridacna clams

flex fleshy purple or green mantles when shaded,

an empress angel-fish darts off — reef reflexes

meet the finned intruder in this underwater

Gaudi cathedral. But a few kicks along, the sand

angles down, now lightly dappled by wavelets'

higher tease of sun. The lagoon floor that was

a crater swoops to the murk below. From which

a slow looping looms, white flashing on black.

Ten feet wing tip to fleshy wing tip, rippling

to a soft snap intact with the swing, in endless

back somersaults, scaleless, shark-leathery

Manta alfredi, weird batoid angel of some deep,

flexing cephalic finds sweeps water, water full

of small lives into its latticed box of a mouth.

Colors and coral fade . . . I remember: Plisetskaya's

black swan skim backward, into the void of Bolshoi's

deep stage; satellites' autonomous light on dark

pavane; I see - the slow motion replay of a full

gainer off the high board. I am — a runway,

a black cargo plane forcing a landing on me. I am

the updraft, the raptor, I see claws. But that is air,

and here the devil ray's ring dive magic tows me

out to currents I can't fight. The release,

a roiling brake, comes just before envelopment.

The manta breaks for the surface. In the stretched

moment I see, eel-like, the remora, flat oval

sucking disk stuck to the manta's white underbelly.