

Poems

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Keepsake

Snowcover lit the late night. A couple walked like two cryophilic creatures through the frigid wood, just so the frost could bear witness to their love. The girl was so distracted by her lover's breath, as it sailed toward her in clouds like opium, that she did not notice the tree branch hanging low with snow in her path. A moment later he was dusting snowflakes from her hair, kissing her forehead and laughing into the night, and they were amazed to see that his laughter froze mid-air and fell to the ground in sparkling shards. She bent down and gathered up the broken laughter. It glowed red like crystallized fire and felt sharp and cool as knives against the flesh of her palms.

She put his laughter in a bell jar on her desk, thinking it was the most beautiful thing in the world. She thought it looked so much like frozen phoenix feathers that after the accident she waited by it for days but her lover never rose up from the pieces. They just kept glittering idly under the glass and winking at her like fragments of a bloody windshield.

One night the moon smiled in the window with yellow teeth and told her not to despair. It told her it was time for her to laugh again instead of spending all her time with those never-melting memories. But she could not find any laughter inside of her. So she took the laughter from the bell jar and transferred it to a candy dish of moss green glass where its rosy light could rise up like alpenglow over the scalloped edges. It did look a bit like rock candy, so she picked up a small piece and let it dissolve on her tongue. She felt strange eating the laughter of a dead man, but it tasted like sweetened juniper berries so she had another. Each shard turned out to have its own flavor: one tasted like burnt marshmallows, the next like too much red wine, then rose water followed by candied winter melon. She cut her tongue on one that tasted like snow. What was left of the laughter glinted like razor blades, like ten swords in a dish.

Haunt

Daylight corrodes away like skin
And the black tulle of dusk
Settles on a cellar door
Where the password is homicide.

Take the stairs down in a stream of ghosts -
Feel the exhilaration of restored weight
As the wood creaks under your feet.
There are bottles behind the bar,
Pale with dust.
Bats flutter all about on strings
In lieu of balloons.

A strangled blonde dances in
Wearing a giant earthworm as a boa.
Its purple segments contract
Along the crease of her elbow,
Up her shoulder blade to her pearly throat.

Flies buzz around the fedora
Of a man who asks the bartender
To pass him some of that coffin varnish.
We roar with afterlife.

This tiger has moonshine where its eyes used to be
And we have spirits for spirits.
Victims? We migrate from our graveyards
To where the maggots are in style.

Curiosity Shop in December

Icicle lights framed the faded sign outside.
On the sidewalk, wives whirled past like snow
With packages under their arms.
They made shopping for gifts look like a chore,
Snowdust like flour on their coats.

I ventured inside and was greeted
By jingle bells and the dead gaze
Of a vervet monkey in a Santa hat.
In the corner, they had set up a balsam fir
With a starfish mounted on top.

The tree was all needles -
Puffer fish dangled from its branches,
Every googly eye gazing down,
Every mouth open in aeonian chorus,
Fins flared out like inadequate angel wings.

I looked for Christmas in the veins
Of an opened rabbit flailing in resin
And in the jar of a diaphonized frog
Suspended in glycerin like a fuchsia x-ray.
I came closest to finding it in a basket of bacula.

Someone asked if I needed help finding anything.
Turning away from a framed beetle
Whose wings shone brighter than baubles,
I saw a man had emerged from the back room.
He removed his gloves, and I inhaled his cologne:

Formaldehyde and evergreen.

The Marchesa Casati, Baseball Enthusiast

The hem of her black mink coat
Trails in peanut shells.
She sits on the bleachers,
Smoothing her nightgown
Of liquid silk cut on the bias.
She's wearing an anaconda for a shawl.

“What would the appropriate attire be
For my first baseball game?” she had asked, and
They'd told her, “Come as you are.”

A player hits a homerun -
She springs up and waves her hands wildly,
Cheering, bell sleeves fluttering,
Pearls leaping about like popcorn.
The baseball soars toward her red hair.
Her scaly pet catches it in his mouth
And swallows it whole.

The Magician

Twilight snuffs out the music of the fair;
The carousel stops turning.
I feed you a piece of pink cloud
And you suck the lingering sugar
Off my fingers as we walk home,
Our skirts trailing in dust.

We scurry out of the path of unicycles
And giggle like children, catching our breath
On the outskirts of this traveling sabbat.
Behind us is the sound of a match being lit.

We turn to see it glow near the face of a man
Whose blonde hair cascades over
The velvet shoulders of his frock coat.
He steps out from the caravan's shadows
And like a gentleman removes his hat.
Then he drops the match into it and
Our hearts disappear in a puff of red smoke.

His pale lips draw back in a grin like the moon.
Out of the smoking black hat, he pulls
The strangest creature. We step close to see it:
A dove with two heads, a freak in white feathers.

The man asks to borrow a handkerchief,
And you beat me to it, offering him yours.
He smothers the bird with it;
It suffocates under embroidery and bobbin lace.
But before we can cry, he tears it in two,
His hands quicker than our eyes,
And presents each of us with a perfect white dove.