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Short Poems

Now the Patient Recounts the Houses in Her Mind

I am checking my safeguards
in the summer when there should be jam
and cakes on the lawn in the sun
but they are all wrong.
The silver dollars I dig up
are all bones rattling in the box,
the book nailed to the pine
is a cat's tail and it makes me scream
like this—
I'm afraid to dig up the doll.
Will it be her head?
I'm afraid to dig up the mouse.
Will it be alive?
When I rush down the dark path
the fence is all knocked down
and whatever walks in the house
walks alone.

Eye to the Telescope (Issue 36, April 2020, House & Home, edited by Emma J. Gibbon)
<http://www.eyetothetelescope.com/archives/036issue.html>

Acacia

Use to anoint torches and consecrate hope chests. Endows protection as well as psychic and mystical powers. If planted inside a fairy ring, it will bring prosperity to the closest home. If burned, it creates a hypnotic state that is often perilous.

I am crafting my worry like it is love,
but when you leave me I feel only hollow.
We just need to get through this paycheck
and make it to the next, then we can buy
you some medicine and stop stealing it
off of trucks parked by the pharmacy.
I send you off to work knowing the tumor
is growing in your mind like a bad thought
and I wonder if it will squeeze away all
your memories of me and the time we've had
together. Will you forget all the hope
we stored in open jars to let rot?
Will you forget the song you used to sing to me
before bed with my knees curled up on your belly
and your head touching mine like a lullaby?
I don't know. But I send you to work anyway.
Knowing you might come back empty.
If there was a spell to keep you safe,
I'd cast it.

Liminality: A Magazine of Speculative Poetry (Issue #24 - Summer 2020)

<http://www.liminalitypoetry.com/issues/year-six/issue-24-summer-2020/acacia/>

Dear Future,

It's important that you read this slowly. You'll need words where you are, strong ones that defy argument—you'll be tired of arguing. We were. After the hills crumbled and oceans dried up, we crawled down to the depths we had never plumbed, the deepest secret places of the earth, and we learned there are no secrets after all. The moon came close to us—when it fell it was merely a thin slice of white, as we had suspected all along. It got stuck on a skyscraper for just a moment before flattening the city.

You arrived before we could get eight hours of sleep a night or finish our to-do lists. We craved you like Vicodin. Your budding pink starlight apocalypses. There are so many beautiful moments we let go wrong. We were so certain. Did you know, while you waited wherever you came from, how silent we could be as we lay down before you? Did you know yourself even then? At least we have this to leave you.

Look, we don't have any good advice, just to say that we're sorry. It's important to apologize to the people you've harmed. Say yes a lot but say no when you need to. Eat organic. Give more than you take. We realize these are platitudes, but there's always a little kernel of truth in the words of the past, isn't there?

We hope you've found an answer to the questions we never knew to ask. These were crimes committed for you, in your name. Don't keep our monuments; we don't want them anymore.

Love,
Your past

Star*Line (Issue 43.3, Summer 2020): Dear Future
<http://sfpoetry.com/sl/issues/starline43.3.html>

We Hold Up Eternity

You make me into all of your favorite things. Wax-winged, you model my body to your likeness. Everything must be similar, the remains. You step upon my altar, run a finger along my lips, lick the dust from your skin. It tastes like skin cells and sweat and stardust. You carve a placard on my stomach which says, "straight and narrow." Not meeting, our eyes seek out other things to focus on. The stars. The demons in the pit.

Hungry dears, you whisper. You bend my ears forward. Staple them down. I hear nothing but your breathing. One day I will no longer be stone, but flesh and blood and talon. I will hide among the living. I will break you.

For now, your accusations hold. Your talons disgust me, when they once sent a shiver down my spine, inching up my thigh. Creeping close to you at night, I whisper star-soaked words to your knee, your hips. You turn in your sleep.

You don't belong here, little fake," you murmur, sliding a hand under your pillow to find the cool place, the dark hole kept in your pocket-pillow, the one you stole from my mouth. You grind your teeth.

I slip back to the wall by morning, climb the stairs. There with my sisters, we hold up eternity.

Twisted Moon Mag (Issue 5, August 2020): We Hold Up Eternity
<http://twistedmoonmag.com/5/walrath.html>

Divergent and Rotten to the Core

I am cutting out pieces of me in spirals.
She whispered in my ear, Apple Girl—
Can we just not?
I need a spell for how to believe in my own sex.
Sometimes I think we're just drunk on impulse-whimsy.
She's sleeping on Esplanade with the muse.
This place is a smoke railway.
Her voice is an arrow
pulled from the quiver, broken.
I need to work on vengeance.
If I squeeze my eyes real tight
I can see its elfin shame—
so tiny.
I walk down Frenchmen Street and
take off my plaining clothes.
I am the least barren thing here
and I let myself lie under the tree,
knotting up my baggage,
shoving it under my skin.
She is panoramic.
Abandoned-house empty.
At night we will drink
will drink null drink
null numb
drunk
with love.

Liminality (Issue #25, Autumn 2020)

<http://www.liminalitypoetry.com/issue-25-autumn-2020/divergent-and-rotten-to-the-core/>

Yes, Antimatter Is Real

In theory, a particle and
its anti-particle have the same
mass. This is not like the thinness
of your shadow. Nor is it like
love. If they touch—mutual annihilation.
We can only observe so much—
the unsolved equations living
in each other's eyes—
this radioactive decay.

(Dwarf Stars Eligible)

Analog Science Fiction and Fact (Sep/Oct)

So Many Blank Moons

After Edward Hirsch

We redrew this galaxy
one planet at a time.

With charcoal, we smudged
out the stars and left
only the space between,

with oils we swept
suns onto pallet knives
until light was a memory,

with our fingertips we erased
satellites and moons and auras
until the canvas was blank.

Dreaming is easier
when you can start
from scratch.

Analog Science Fiction and Fact (Nov/Dec)

It's Never Going to Stop
after [REDACTED]

Look / this is the life / I'm living
down here / with the snails /
underground
where no / one / can hear you
except / the bones / of dinosaurs

we / don't need / our eyes
/ that doesn't mean /
/ you get to keep them /
/ for your / collection /

There's an army of men
gave up their hearts
/ to be cogs /
in the earth machine
fingers slotted into wires
snaking through the hot core

but I wanted to go deeper
to come out on the other side
with my innards still intact

You told me / one more drink
if you die / let it be beside me

I ate up / all your dirt
/ carried it inside me /
licked it / off your cocaine / fingers
tucked it / under the flaps /
/ of my muddy body /

Pork Belly Press (Love Me, Love My Belly Zine No.5, 2020)
<https://porkbellypress.com/mags/belly5>

Long Poems

Daughters Saving Mothers

I keep her in the hope chest
and when I come home she presses
her lips to the keyhole and asks
are you holy? are you harmless?
her body is a ring, her mouth
clamped around her ankles
acid teeth slowly devouring skin
and bone from sinew
and I promised I would save her
so I go out into the ashfall
and inquire of gold sellers
snake charmers, dumpling carts
do you know a way to save my mother?
I'm asking all the wrong questions.
am I like her
the men wipe their hands on towels
and listen with kind blue eyes
shaking their heads sadly
and I shrug farther into my coat
where the red ash forms a line on my skin
will I be like her
I don't feel any urge to suck my toes
my teeth are ground flat, I chew
on my lips until they bleed
in alleyways I give men a quick kiss
for the next piece to the puzzle
I knew a woman with the disease,
once
they say before they hold me
I come home empty-handed
I pull her, slippery and heavy onto my lap
I want to lock her away like a secret
and throw away the key
but I can't, I won't
I love her like I love myself
In the shower, red swirls of ash
Our World isn't long for itself
I curl up in the porcelain tub
and sleep under the water
wasteful, wasteful, she would chide
there comes a day when I crave flesh

no, need it, want it, don't care how
am I her or is she me
I don't let her see the man I bring home
I twitch the blanket over the hope chest
kick it into the closet
and make the choice she wasn't
able to make, for she was braver than I
and I keep looking for ways to save her
even when her mouth is at her waist
and so little of her remains
soon I will be the only reminder
of the devourer we've become

Liminality: A Magazine of Speculative Poetry (Issue #23 – Spring 2020)

<http://www.liminalitypoetry.com/issues/year-six/issue-23-spring-2020/daughters-saving-mothers/>