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TWO POEMS

Castles

I built a castle in the air,
High and lonely I lived there:
Only gods and demons came
Grinned and stared, and asked my name.
Alas, I had no name to tell,
Castle Firedamp quaked and fell.

*How one fares when pride is gone
They know well who dream alone.*

I built a castle undersea,
Only fish might visit me.
Through my window crept a star
Tentacled, a man o' war
Groping, blind and poisonous:
Castle Fury I call this.

*How one fares when hope's unbuilt
They know well who treasure guilt.*

I built a castle by the tide,
May it stand till I have died.
Open to the wind and sky
Sometimes drenched and sometimes dry,
Agile as a sanderling
I watch what the waves bring in.

*How one shifts in shifting sand
All the salvaged understand.*

A Song for Electra Mad

I am a caverned beast to you
 Banging a nightlong drum;
I make a bloody feast of you
 And while I eat I hum:
Oh take me and I'll come for you,
 Oh take me and I'll come.

My walls are piled with bones of you,
 They line my slimy cell;
My love's a knife I hone for you
 The while I chant a spell:
I'll go down quick to hell for you,
 I'll go down quick to hell.

My raddled talons splay at you
 Spread-eagled in the wild;
My long lean nighthounds bay at you
 While I sing sweet and mild:
I'll bear my father's child to you,
 I'll bear my father's child.

My love's a spade shall bury you
 Some brazen dog-day noon;
My mother's ghost shall marry you
 And corpse-light tell my rune:
I'll whistle down the moon for you,
 I'll whistle down the moon.

I am a caverned beast to you,
 Behold my abattoirs;
I make an endless feast of you
 Till light betrays my scars
And death goes off in stars for you,
 Oh death goes off in stars.

Joanne Turner

TWO POEMS**Verboten**

Days west of Tristan da Cunha and my yawl
Beached at the Chico's mouth. Two hundred years
Had gone since Darwin paused, then pondered, here
And the Beagle's crew rowed toward the western
wall.

This day the cirrus curled the sky and all
That red horizon on the eastern ocean
Was fire across a prairie, quick with motion,
Unquenched by the ancient breakers' rise and fall.

It had begun (I wondered to recall)
At Hiroshima on a landlocked sea.
More desperate forces for eternity
Unleashed themselves on a vanishing atoll.

I wish I could forget, but truth forgotten
Is the madness that put flame to prairie grass.
North, the sun swung west, in darkening glass.
"Verboten, gentlemen, it is verboten!"

Forbidden, yes. To Paulson was forbidden
The saving life that he himself uncovered,
While rat-tailed gentlemen, self-loved, discovered
The better life were better wizard-ridden—

The last-ditch witch or wizard—prostitute.
Lest I should remember more I stepped ashore.

A great stone rolled away from a hidden door
And a man came from the cave, blinking, hirsute,

Gray as the mare that whinnies me awake.
He peered at me as if his peering made
Me real, who for that hour had been a shade.
“Whom emperors would destroy they first make

Mindless as snakes and soulless as the sow.
Within the hand of man was man himself,
But gentlemen, were-wolves for pelf on pelf,
Spit on my knowledge, never asking: how?”

“Hermann,” I said, “the very air’s in flame.
The stinging asps drip venom from our sky—
The final rain. We two, about to die,
Are leaving Earth a planet without a name.”

Two men, long-bearded, gray, with rheumy eyes
Watched the pre-Cambrian breakers beat the shore.
Not with a whimper, but the great sad whore
Dies with a shriek, and curses as she dies.

The Genes Remember

The genes remember what the mind forgets.
They speak a language beyond the urge of words.
Rain falls today. Each tiny unit dots
the gutter water and the sounding boards
along the eaves blur the staccato notes.

I think it is the curve along your arm
that tells me things only the genes recall,
of fire between the rocks to keep us warm,
when all the leaves beyond the cavern wall
loosed splashing raindrops in a pattering swarm.

Your youngest was asleep as ours is now.
The woods were wet. The hunt would not go on,
and suddenly you looked to me to know,
as you look now. As if you hadn't known!
The genes remember rain. You always knew.

Richard Ashman

LULLABY 1969

We got to the moon
but babies are dying
babies that never asked to be born
too many children and more coming soon
is there space on the moon . . .
they are crying and dying
yelled at and shelled at
is there space on the moon?

Frances Hamerstrom

THE DAUGHTER OF HER HOUSE

1.

She has been hanged and comes back now
for vengeance, I thought. No blood left.
She will brood forever twisted in that chair.

Once she was twenty-two and sang in streets,
read medieval history, walked five miles
each day. She washed in sun and silly lotions
bought for flawless skin. Guaranteed. Her skin,
despite the lotions, bloomed peach and almond
on her fine bones. Only the mind was flawed.

Her dowry was a curse, so Hawthorne said,
standing at the curtain of his Sunday window,
having seen the aunts—the supple aunts
and fathers of Brook Farm—stumble blind
from their Utopia. Weeping for their vision
and their cold gray eyes, he drew the shade.

She brought her dowry and her wide gray eyes—
soft then as deep water, warm with love—brought
her singing and her books and bones, lived
happily ever after. For a year and seven months.

Then the inquisitions started. "The truth.
Do you love me? Or not? I want to know."

"Yes, I love you," he would say and laugh
that she could think herself unloved. Later
he grew tired.

"Do you really? I want to know.
I **have** to know."

"O for God's sake, yes,"
he said, passing his hand before his eyes

where the pain began; and then, "I'm sorry. Yes, I do." But his heart darkened bit by bit. She brooded, lonely, certain no one loved her.

Finally, of course, she had her way. He ceased to love her. Or perhaps he loved her still but was deprived the right to give—one cannot give what is demanded—and gave no more.

Her hard gray eyes grew hot with madness and she scratched the almond from her skin when she awoke and found him gone.

2.

In the eighth summer, the year she strangled on his heart and died whispering, "Can't it ever be beautiful? Can't love ever be beautiful?" he found his mind had torn down the middle.

He missed his heart, but grieved for his torn mind. He dreamed of window shades frequently and finally when he saw the doctor—who urged he take a rest and find a hobby—he knew the shades were drawn for good and realized he had died. Death, he had thought, was more expensive. No matter.

That year he spent by the water.

"Taking the baths," he said to friends, smiling wryly at the pity of their eyes. They could not see his heart returning.

The mind came later. He set about repairs in winter of the second year. He read some books on art, on love, on arts of loving, on sex. Sex books were the best, proposing an aesthetic of the loins he recognized as funny. And with laughter came release.

He dated time then from her death. "It is three years now, years of the Lord, since the eighth summer," he wrote on postcards. "Three and a half years. I am writing an obscene novel." He never finished. He met the elderly madonna who rumbled to the waters with sunrise, back again at night to her parrot and geranium, and found himself in love. "But I'm safe. I know that gambit." He packed and left, returned again to the uncomplicated warmth of friends who never risked the word of love, left him, so he liked to think, free.

His mind is mended now and his heart is strong enough; it seems to flourish in our warm wet climate. He thinks of her rarely: gray eyes devouring his own, an almond branch in rain, a young voice singing. But he is free.

"Peace means not to be involved," he says. And he is busy. He reads and keeps up on things in general.

3.

She, in dreams, had wandered in a jungle:
all the flowers folded inward, petals
bending back upon themselves to hide
the groping heart. Leaves of metal clinked
upon the wire stems. Carefully she crushed
the fleshy blossoms in her hand, tore them,
knelt in anger to rip hard roots from earth,
but then the earth exploded and she found
herself trapped among familiar mirrors.
Her face, her haunted eyes, bloomed
like evil plants. Hands, thrown up to shield
her from her eyes, attacked. She ran,
and stumbled on herself.

Waking, she thought
she saw them at the gate, blind and foolish,
groping from the garden one late fall afternoon.
Smoke was wisping in the leaves, the smell
of burning would remain with her forever.
They turned to watch the fire and she saw
their eyes grow cold; they did not look
at one another. The vision done, she found
she could not weep.

She strangled finally.
Her blackened lips still formed the "beautiful"
that was her last complaint. Unwilling
to accept the gift with grace, she chose
her self, the holy cell of the determined damned.

In her red wig and willful lovelessness
she sits forever brooding in the antic chair.
Her wide gray eyes look in, appalled, staring.

John L'Heureux

TWO POEMS**The Zenith And After**

He was sitting in front of the fire, looking out the big picture window and watching the deer browse on the short green grass that grew up through the snow. In the other room his beautiful children were playing quietly.

He sipped his drink and breathed a huge sigh of contentment.

When he heard a woman's laughter, he walked to the front door and looked out. There he saw his wife sprawled in the back seat of the station wagon. Except for one tennis shoe she was nude.

Starting at the door on the driver's side and leading down the driveway for a few yards was a short line of men:

two college kids in fraternity sweatshirts, one short man with a Corsican bandit's mustache, an

Episcopalian minister and an ice cream man sucking on a popsicle.

All of them had their pants down around their ankles and were chatting amiably.

When he heard his children start to scream he turned, and as he sprinted through the living room he noticed that the deer were gone, too.

Going Out

It was this morning that the gypsy woman took one look at my palm and fainted dead away, this afternoon that the mailman glanced at the return address and got white as a sheet, this evening that the delivery boy refused to get out of the truck because of the shape of the package.

At 9:00 I went out anyway to meet the girl who called from the dating service. She wore black, was thin, used a strange scent and drank like there was no tomorrow. You couldn't say she was pretty but she knew what she wanted. About midnight she looked at me and said, "It's you, babe."

By that time I was almost too numb to care and besides, she was different. God knows I'm sick to death of the other kind, the gloomy virgins with the crying and the crummy promises. So I finished my drink, took her across the street to the park and laid her on the ground.

Under the dress I found the winding sheet and under that the loamy flesh: Believe me I didn't know what to do. I wasn't scared that stiff.

Finally she grabbed me and I started to swell with the nothing I had to give.

When I rolled off her it was dark and I was cold and tired but she came back for more — fleshless lips stabbing at my neck, breath rattling in her throat, racket of the naked bones, till I filled my ears with earth to stop the clatter of her wooing.

Ronald Koertge

