



jessa forest

girl
+
muse

poems

girl + muse

by Jessa Forest

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Poetry Chapbook/Pamphlet

3rd Digital Edition

for the girls who can see
for the girls who cannot
for the girls turned into salt
for girls who wanted love
for the girls with no hope
for the girls with sharp edges
for the girls who stood up and fought
for the girls we will remember
for the girls who love stories

Table of Contents

Copyright

Joan Burning

Mary Speaks

Leather Jacket

Poem of a Poet I Admire

Girl + Muse =

Wormwood

Mermaid's Songbook

Oracles

Wife of Lot

Holy Woman

Mirror Angels

Aubade for What is Gone

Notes

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Joan Burning

A daffodil lashes fire to every holy word.

All the evil barons are singing and she spins and spins.

Mary Speaks

When I touched my brow to that bloody wood and cried, "Praise the Maker!" the sky opened up, swallowed a passing comet, a multitude of stars, and everything holy. When I told a lie I tasted the salt spray that painted the harbors of Babylon.

Leather Jacket

what
trick
sang
die
like
a

sweet
breath

gorgon?

utterly
leather

carved
her
body? she

only
bite
storm
nightmare
leather

only stitches
only armor

Poem of a Poet I Admire

*after the death of Wislawa Szymborska
February 1, 2012*

I take the petit four
of your poem and put
it in my mouth,
let my tongue soak it up—
soft words
dissolving
soft as a
spring weekend
—inhale the sugar flower.
The decadent scrim
of icing glosses over
everything.

The sun rises and the sun
sets and I eat
this cake and you are
no longer here. In this world
a violet grows at the edge
of yard and street,
efficiently crystallizes
into another poet's
greedy panting
despite your vacant house,
your supercilious cat,
and your mouth that
will never eat cake again.

I am eating
cake and I am not
efficient. Pieces of your
poem clot against my teeth
and I cannot speak.

Girl + Muse =

morning. We woke up
and you performed
another extraordinary miracle:
wings split
the paper thin skin
taped across your shoulder blades,
your wet spine
glistened through jauntily
angled prisms knotted
to your ribcage
with flayed nerves
and slippery veins.
As you flew around the room
you said: "No. That's not how
it happened."

I woke up alone.

Wormwood

She has black dirt on her face.
The ruins of a garden plucked
for winter stain her hands.
She has scratched that greenery free
and bathed in the empty
soil, praying for next year's harvest
with touches
of bare arms and thighs.

She rubs the flesh of the earth,
places stones in her mouth
careful of her teeth
though she knows
this is ritual.
Her tongue rolls in the grit,
hips churn the ground like a spade.
She says, "I will starve myself for the gods
so I can grow poison in the Spring."

Mermaid's Songbook

1. A Boat Alone*

phosphorous moon
over
a boat
alone
singing
of eyes and
stars
dancing with
the horizon
the horizon
unravels
dancing with
stars,
singing of
eyes like
phosphorous moons
over a
boat alone

2. The Sea Witch's Song

love is spinning in the deep
mine is mine and
music is music

if you're wishing for escape
love is love and
knives are knives

love is waiting far away
a song is a song and
sweet is sweet

if you wish for what you aren't
love is love and
yours is yours

love is love
and
hate is hate
and
love is love again

come and see what I'm selling
mine is mine and
music is music

all the wishes you could wish
love is love and
knives are knives

when you regret, regret with your heart
a song is a song and
sweet is sweet

the tide will carry you home
love is love and
yours is yours

love is love
and
hate is hate
and
love is love
again

3. Dead Mermaid Singing

I can't give you lapis less I open
a vein and rupture my organs in
just the right way
staining my blood
in a shade that will say:

"I love you more than that hand that gave you your lapis."

I can't give you sunset staining a canvas
less I open a vein and
paint my obsessions,
falling into dusk
with a gesture that screams:

"I love you more than that hand that gave you your sunset."

When the waves call me back
to dance in the foam
you'll never know how much
I hate my home.

I can't give you music less I tear
out my throat and fling all my chords
to the sky-loving storm
to play on her way to crash down your door—

—she's the only one who knows
I do love you more.

The princess is so pretty,
her demeanor is divine
but her love will break in the shadow of mine.

When the waves call me back
to dance in the foam
I will open my veins and my throat
on your shore ever
singing ever singing:

"I do love you more."

4. Redemption*

the grave sea
breaks and tears
the burning
emptiness
of all that
has passed,
write
your fragile
flight

Oracles

The fake ones eat
the bones and gristle of cats
to see the future. They drink
the blood of rattlesnakes
and wear sharks' teeth in their
long, flowing hair.

The real ones hide in caves,
hang their dead
in cages, suck
the fallen vertebrae
(when the backbone falls
like a clump of grapes)
and gobs of red blot
their mouths
where their teeth
have knocked upon the stone
floor. Their eyes are
inkwells pecked empty,
pecked pious.
They go naked in their
sagging skins.

Wife of Lot

How does it feel with a mouth full of salt instead of the languid, tamarind language of your city? The city that sings to you and you the only one who hears her.

What does she sound like? Soprano or alto? Silk or broken windows? Do the cries of the market slide down her throat like tamarind or salt?

Does the gutter water taste like gutter or peppermint schnapps or bourbon?

What is your real name? The name you abandon as a wife?

I think I could live married to my city as the queen or live lost and alone with no one but my city to comfort me. I think you could too.

When you died, when your city died, you were looking at each other.

What was that like?

Holy Woman

holes in her
hoodieho
I esi nherc
iga rettes
holesin h er pr e gna ncy
testholes
inher shaking
h a n d s h o l e
sin he rvo ice
ho lesinher f e a r h o l e
sinher fer ocity
holes in her dog
h o l e s i n h e r
familyhol
esinherwi l l ow - b
edh olesi n h e
r bookcase h
o lesin her m
emory
holes
in
her
road
h o l e s i n h e r loneliness
holes in her longing
hol
esi
nhe
r belly h o l e s
in her

way out

holes i n h e r
h e a r t h o l e s i n
h e r s h
o e s holesinher
jobholes
in her p raye rs
holes
in her
holes

Mirror Angels

My reflections and I
plot the points of our knees
like stars scratched in the floor,
we can't hold summer
in our flimsy hands.

I rest my head against the point where two mirrors join together in a museum exhibit and suddenly I am one girl split into three. This is educational. This is sacred division. I whisper softly to us but we can't answer our own prayers for rescue, escape. I can only mimic their arms with my arms and I can't decipher the secret within our bodies.

The rough stars
join constellations
Gaping-Mouth-of-Disbelief
with Grinning-Face-
That-is-Not-a-Face.

I look into the mirrors and there are girls who wear my face but not my memories. I look into the mirrors and I am so happy that some of us are free. When I stand they turn their backs to me and greet their secret, intangible worlds. I can't go with them when I walk away.

Aubade for What is Gone

She walks the morning alone.
I want to tell her
serenity
is not some myth-
ical beast she must catch
and kill, drag home
and skin,
quarter and ration. Blood
and hearts are not torn and slurped
up on a dare or for bargains
or rewards
or love. Fate
does not play well with others
but she does play with
hearts that need breaking.
I want to tell her
Fate will be her best friend
when there is no one
left to drink with save
her own weeping shadow.
And when she walks
the morning alone
the concrete crumbles under her boots
and the sun
blinds
every nightmare.

Notes

“Found poems take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems. The literary equivalent of a collage, found poetry is often made from newspaper articles, street signs, graffiti, speeches, letters, or even other poems. A pure found poem consists exclusively of outside texts: the words of the poem remain as they were found, with few additions or omissions. Decisions of form, such as where to break a line, are left to the poet.”

—from *Poetic Form, Found Poem* written for the Academy of American Poets

A Boat Alone: Found poem. Source: *Aquí te amo*, Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair by Pablo Neruda, translated by W.S. Merwin. Published by the Penguin Group (USA) Inc. 1976.

Redemption: Found poem. Source: *Las viejas del oceano*, Selected Poems: Pablo Neruda, edited and translated by Ben Belitt. Published by Grove Press Inc. 1961.

Thank you for downloading your free copy of Girl + Muse. This is the third edition of this chapbook/pamphlet. Previous incarnations were published as Graveyard (2016), Twisted Myths (2016); also previously published under the name Jessica Halsey. This edition has revised and reorganized content. All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or excerpts of this book in any form. This ebook is for your personal use only. Thank you so much for reading.

Previous versions of these poems were first published in The Camel Saloon, Ten Pages Press, Requiem Magazine, qarrrsiluni, amphibi.us, Pink Litter, Atlas Poetica, and 50 to 1.

Wormwood was the recipient of Hollins University’s 48th Annual Literary Festival’s Poetry Contest first place prize in 2008 and a Pushcart nomination from The Camel Saloon in 2011.

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