

**JeanDibasson****Following the witch***another hymn to Aphrodite*

Once upon a Time in Italy  
near the comune of Nemi  
while walking at a crossroads  
amidst mystery and melancholy of the street  
I heard a talking walnut tree  
a peculiar pulpit  
and wandered through its holy woods.  
Carefully stepping through grasses  
and over mossy stones  
I came upon a deer path.  
A trail I tread until nightfall  
when it led to a lake.

The water's surface shimmered  
illuminated by the night sky.  
A cosmic mirror speckled with stars.  
Overcast on sunken warships of the Emperor  
sleeping on the lake's bed  
dreaming of a drowned cat  
sacrificed in the sea to summon storms.  
So I made my way along its shore  
ruminating on the reflection  
and arrived at ancient ruins  
where walls had overgrown with weeping ivy  
and boughs blooming with mistletoe.  
A sanctuary where worshipped wilderness  
reclaimed broken bricks as its own.  
And solus amidst this Dianic scene  
was a woman whose white skin  
glowed under the full moon.  
Reminiscent of marble memorials  
or statuesque sculptures of Venus.

She had a red mark on her right eye  
 revealed by lunar light like a hand-mirror.  
 And seeing me stare spoke of slipping  
 in the mysterious baths.  
 We talked until the morning  
 about plants and gardening  
 the family farm and her children.  
 Soon Dawn appeared and touched the sky with roses  
 and taking hold of my hand  
 she said without speaking  
 to follow her on foot  
 blind like Oedipus.

Amongst sights we passed like seasons  
 was a field filled with strawberries  
 around a volcano's fiery tiara.  
 Its produce plump stuff with hay;  
 a queer qualia.  
 And I imitated her example  
 never picking these strange fruits.  
 Nor had we any canned food.  
 Aluminium cans bringing botulism;  
 that icon of modernity  
 producing poisoning inside.  
 An analogy for progress.  
 Instead snacking on seaweed and dried fish flakes  
 from the Tauric beach's palm-shaded shores  
 where we wandered from for years  
 before arriving at the Alps.  
 As mountain peaks soared above.  
 Their beaks jagged cliffs;  
 the domain of Arnheim.  
 As rows of pines sank below.  
 Acting to conceal the uncanny.  
 A furtive forest.  
 A fog-drinking forest.  
 At whose precipice she passed me a pomegranate.  
 And then disappeared.

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And as she put space between us  
whiteness crossing the continent  
formed a seeping poison fog  
bleaching creatures colourless;  
tolerating no  
shadow.  
So I descended to depths  
below all light.  
Murmuring  
to bless darkness.  
Stepping downwards up the Alpine slope  
as the smell of soil surrounded me.  
Coming across ants in trouble in a puddle  
who I ignored like a monster.  
Their ruse read like a book  
of fairy tales.  
And ever after arriving at a river.  
Her cursive current of calm water  
flowing under the new moon's phase  
for building houses and making marriages  
in those five years with thirteen months  
when young salmon swim downstream  
and the old upriver to breed and die.  
Singing the same song from the Paleolithic past.  
Verses carved in the Vézère Valley.  
And the river held the salmon as softly  
as the body holds the soul.  
In the present tense, in the present tense.

And I continued beyond the brook  
 while not leaving the life water.  
 Migrating alongside horned gods of old.  
 Black bulls and stags of Lascaux  
 whose hooves painted a forest path  
 away from Pandora's box  
 like cave walls  
 whose art I read until I found  
 the spot on the map  
 over the border by Briançon  
 in France.

The base of Bacchanalia.  
 With black and white blazing banners  
 marking the Mont Genève pass peak;  
 the site of the sabbat.  
 Twelve camps of carnivalesque cruelty  
 creating crescents around a bright bonfire  
 mirroring the dark moon above.  
 Where estries and elves danced counter-clockwise  
 turning their backs to each other  
 and birds jumped over the flames unburned.  
 The fanatics.  
 While just outside this ring's reach  
 a jester jiggled dressed as Koko the Clown  
 coloured in blue, red, green and yellow.  
 A diabolical festival  
 at which Demodocus sang  
 serenading attendees with tinnitus.  
 All presided over by the Lady of the Game  
 who pointed to the pyre and promised  
 hell's nine circles would similarly not sear.  
 Nine not denoting suffering  
 but counterposing priestly punishment;  
 paradise as a balcony  
 where the saved watch the damned being cooked.  
 If there is a Tertullian heaven,  
 it must be men watching their enemies burn.

I stood to the side where the lady espied me;  
she screamed as if answering a sphinx  
a man!  
Such a shocking shriek my sight became black—  
awaking afterwards amidst barrels  
on the checker-tiled floor of a wine-cellar  
in Bordeaux  
under the gaze of a bartender  
in a butler's tuxedo attire.  
Where I regained my balance  
and being transported and parched  
I reached for a glass goblet  
when the barkeep said beware;  
the tap water is unsafe for drinking and bathing  
being awash in urine and female hormones  
from anguane up river.  
He suggested instead a sugar-free sports drink  
for elektrolytes and avoiding diabetes.  
A sports drink for the Game  
of Huntsman and Hare.

So I took a sip and sought a seat  
bumbling along the basement's brick wall  
while admiring adorning art.  
A particular portrait painted  
by Artemisia Gentileschi;  
*Judith Slaying Holofernes*  
hanged in baroque framing.  
And soon after seeing three sisters gossiping  
about Elizabeth Francis laming a man's leg  
by planting her toad in his shoe.  
Swelling his foot like a Theban tyrant's.  
And the woman from Nemi was  
one of the three  
who even now in the dimly lit room  
seemed to me like Aphrodite;  
mother of Time and daughter of Destruction  
signing sunrises and sunsets in the sky.  
Eternal, infinitely repeatable presence.  
She held salt in her hand  
and apologized for bringing it  
to cure a cavity  
caused by a tampering tooth faery.

Everyone knows it's bad manners  
to bring salt to a sabbat.  
Like everyone knows to eat your vegetables  
or at least take vitamins  
unless you want to get sick.  
Like the needle is today's noose;  
an injection of serenity.  
Like it matters what tales we tell  
to say other stories with.  
Like it matters wherehow  
ouroboros swallows its tail, again.



*Untitled* by Uruchi-mai. “Yummenikki picture after Giorgio de Chirico.”

<https://www.deviantart.com/uruchi-mai/art/Untitled-406322584>