

LITURGIES OF THE MOON



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DEDICATION

For my priest, Rev. Cathy Dempsey-Sims,
survivor, teacher, spiritual leader, and
Christ's witness on Earth...may she live
long and prosper...



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These poems or fragments thereof originally appeared in the chapbook *The Macbeth Papers*:

"A moonless night trips over dusk..."

"An ecclesiastic moon..."

"Once the moon was easy to devour..."

"In one of those rare epiphanies..."

"When the moon's soft chin..."

This poem was altered from its original appearance in *A Catechism of Regret*:

"A gothic moon..."

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An ecclesiastic moon,
huge Eucharist
majestic in cathedral skies,
transfigures summer wind,
absolves
the night below.

once
the moon was easy to devour...
a crescent here

another there...
a half bite
and gone

swallowing the glow
seemed so simple then
letting it slide

past a quiet tongue
down a throat
empty of guile

there were no rules
of nocturnal etiquette
no sharing of communal plates

only faces upturned to sky...
banquets of light
that filled us

In one of those rare epiphanies,
the clouds,
like temporary cataracts,
blurred the moon

Moonbeams divided a murderous sky,
twilight causeways
connected earth to air.

And, in one enormous bite,
day moved in,
a cannibal,
devouring the dark.

When the moon's soft chin
hangs low when somber light
 lies quietly beside still pines,
 the nightingales
 begin to stutter.

They sing staggered psalms,
try with aching wings
 and arching voice
 to lift the night,
to raise the sagging face of an aging moon
 and force
 the sleeping pines
 to dance.

A gothic moon

crawls through ominous clouds,

splays out uncertain promises.

It drags night's cloak behind, covers

the dreams that never were.

The guiltless moon moves swiftly,

without guile.

If the moon split in half
spitting out that inspiring glow
and if it spilled out framing us
in spotlight

do we have it
could we find it
that desire to perform
to find a stage where we could
sing dance act
and be worthy of the light

or would we run behind any tree
drop into dark cellars
slip beneath an ocean wave
and hide our light for none to see

and if we split in half
spitting out our frightened guts
and if we spilled our fears
in only the light of a lamp

could we live again
knowing that we wasted that moon
the one that heard our prayers
saw our soft kisses
and filled our nights with gentle light

When you were gone
that star of the night
was smaller

it no longer clutched the sky
nor frolicked in celestial cotillions
delighting in itself
thrilled to be nothing more
than the one
the only moon

when you were gone
it lay quiet

hiding itself
behind the closed doors
of millions of seamless clouds
locking itself away
in grief
unnoticed and alone

A moonless night trips over dusk
leaves no prints no walk to follow
nor contrail to view
There is no scent to track
pathways disappear in the dark
and we are left meandering
wandering routes that have no map
alleys that end in disaster
and passages that lead to nowhere

One summer

we tried to resuscitate a dying moon.

In strong measured breaths

we pushed our own lives into the quiet air

until unconscious.

We woke to sunlight brushing

our child faces.

The moon was tucked away,

just a toy

that would compromise us years later

The moon slid across an unforgiving sky
seeking refuge in clouds thick as aging milk.
Slipping silently above continents,
it knew itself to be a voyeur,
observing every willful act and gesture below.
It had seen too much.
It wept over the waters wrecking havoc
among sinners....saints be damned.

The moon flirted with a million girls last night
with promises of forever or maybe just now
flattering bathing
them in light that cleverly bounced
off trees to frame them in portraits of sepia

The moon teased a million girls last night
with false hope and fantasies of evermore
while the sun
lying low and plotting tomorrow
rose early to put the fantasies to rest

A recalcitrant moon

frightened and alone

was trapped by a greedy meteor

hungry to land

the interloper bit hard and deep into an

unyielding sandwich of stone and sand

crippled

the moon limped across an unforgiving sky

half gone

seeking revenge in torrents of rain

shards to cut and avenge the insult

One night, slightly drunk with love,
holding a rope no longer than a garden hose,
I tried to lasso an autumn moon.

Pulling and dragging it from a reluctant sky,
I would present it to you like a ring or watch,
a gift to prove my decades of devotion.

In the light of a sober morning sun,
I could not gather in a dream nor hold
a reluctant moonbeam close at hand.

You were the moon
I was the sun
alien bodies
circling the same planet
unable to touch.

There were those rare times
we could see one another
both occupying
the same pale blue sky

each of us rotating in unison
toward or away
we never knew which

when you finally left
you stole thick dark clouds
my sky flew open and clear
letting me shine once again

belly laughs crept up
from the moon's deepest craters
while the sun stole the earth in
a slow eclipse

wiser than its nemesis
this antic fellow
knew all too well
that tomorrow was another night

The moon translucent and cold
above the winter sky
slips cautiously into a chartreuse coat
far from the sun
its dark side facing our warm fire
that once beautiful orb
shivers into February
stutter-stepping
edging away from us

as children
we learned to play with the moon
at the reservoir no trees interfered
we could jump over it
wrap our arms around it
and hold it high over head
little atlases
testing our limits

as adolescents
the moon played with us
wrapping us in its sweet reflection
where boys could steal kisses

as adults
we became wary of the moon
knew the power of its pull
saw its light from the back seats
of old Chevys
learned of its betrayal
prayed to be absolved

I wrote dozens of songs
blew each note
out the attic window
on a saxophone
so they could catch
the tail of a comet
so you would notice me

I danced on scores of roofs
tapped on tile in California
waltzed on shingles in New York
tangoed on straw in Trinidad
fandango'd in Spain

Not once did you look down
nor cared enough to see nor hear
my plaintiff notes
my ridiculous dances
my desperation

a clairvoyant moon
still
in raging skies

quietly
unassuming
wholly cognizant
watches

a tsunami slap
an innocent shore

knowing its part played
this silent moon
understands
the yin
the yang

remembers some will survive

If you could speak
what language would you choose
Aramaic, Chinese, English, French, Dutch
or would it be some alien tongue
something we would spend generations
trying to decipher?

What would you tell us
of tidal waves of countless centuries
of a disinterested sun
so hot it could melt your darkest side

If you could speak
would it be in soft dulcet tones
the voice perhaps of a woman or
would you shake our very being
with a deep and terrifying bellow

is it possible that you are just a
mere child new in a universe
destined to endure for eternity

or are you simply the moon
silent forever in a night sky

In trying to renovate an elderly moon
we slapped a coat of indigo paint on her
covered the craters in red
and poured emerald green into the rivers

We erected towers sturdy and strong
placed enormous lights atop each one
soon she gave out light as powerful as
the sun

The long days stretched on
each rolling into the other
daylight daylight daylight daylight
until we could stand no more

We climbed upon her yet again
scraped the paint until she was clean
soon night fell in blankets of dark
soon the earth slept in covers of grey

First, sit very quietly.
Let the light fall over you,
a transparent negligee,
promising exquisite dreams.

Second, let your memories in,
a tornadic flood
of months into minutes;
pictures of yesterday, every day.

Third, listen to the music within.
Let your heart find a beat;
syncopated, refined or
cacophonous and wild.

Last, sit very quietly.
Let its light wash you in a silence
where only truth whispers in your ear.

Then, and only then, can you
compose a song to the full moon.

They say you go through phases.

We watched your foray into puberty.

YOU were ridiculous!
Mooning over Saturn,
showing off night after night.

Rejected,
we watched you starve yourself
cutting off quarters and halves

stood amazed as you
fleshed out day after day,
consuming thousands of soft clouds
until enormous
you posed in the night sky
like some preposterous lollypop.

Absurd moon:
You are much too old for this foolishness.

I was incredibly foolish to think
that making you my moon
could stop the constant changes
the unending wax and wane
that was part and parcel of you
the lack of symmetry
the arc and the fullness
the darkness and the light
the eclipses and the face
that came went came again

I was naive to believe that
I was the one to tame your nature

I was to blame for trying to harness
your fame

Drunk with the thought of you,

I jumped to sit on the moon's lap
tripped upon an imagined silver lining
fell the length of a mountain

there was pain
sometimes a bruise
a mere contusion
once
an agony so severe
that death's door
cracked open.

soon, I learned not to leap
learned how not to take
another sip of you.

You think it easy
seeing that face
night after night
knowing that
other women
see that wink
that tilt of head
believe you are theirs.

Did you mean to fool me
to hear those endless giggles
to laugh at that childish crush
to feel the rush of feelings
on cloudless nights?

I no longer go out
leaving the night sky
for you and your minions
to cavort across the stars.

The people down street
Mr. and Mrs. Moon
named their twins
Apogee and Perigee

those girls were as different
as night was to day
each moving in separate circles
going her own unique way

we watched them grow
and grow apart

as soon as they were able
one moved to California
the other to New York
they wanted distance
to be themselves

we watched in horror to see

Almost a century ago
a moon
with lots of moxie

gazed on photographs
by Man Ray and Ansel Adams
pronounced its best side missed

swayed to the Black Bottom Stomp
read *The Moon and Sixpence* to
great personal disappointment

loomed above an outdoor theatre
where lovers watched in black and white
but saw only a full-colour moon overhead

heard "*The Moon Belongs to Everyone/
The Best Things in Life Are Free*"
and thought about recompense

did the Charleston across a sophisticated sky
ignored the middle America drought
and cared nothing about repealing Prohibition

Some will tell you that
Gen. Stonewall Jackson,
splayed out on a battlefield
by his own soldiers,
lay on hard ground,
eyes upward,
blood gushing,
under a blinding full moon.

Had it been days before,
days later,
they would have seen their own,
coming hard on ground,
eyes forward,
blood coursing under a
dull and lifeless
half moon.

I made the tragic mistake
of falling in love with an
ancient moon,
an old, bald, derelict
perennially chasing
a disinterested sun.

Each day,
I longed for nightfall,
loathed my nemesis,
bright light,
and the way it
casually, lethargically,
forced my patience.

Night after night,
ignored and lonely,
I began to see the flaws:
the pits in the face,
the creases in the pate,
the grooves along the chin.

Finally, I left,
with no place to go,
to spend my life inside.

It was a Blue Moon
we saw that night
face etched in agony

We swallowed hard against the edge
of what would come
we had seen it many times before
the water roiling
waves higher than buildings
and soon it began

We prayed for calm
but knew there was no stopping

A silent and stalled moon
begged for a theme song

more than a ditty
where spoon
becomes a silly rhyme

less than a flag waving
chest-thumping anthem
leading nations to war

perhaps something
with a twang from Nashville
a serious opus from Budapest
a rap a reggae a soca beat

and the competition raged
around the world
until
a breeze turned a corner
became a wind
a hurricane a tornado a tsunami

the song was familiar
an old tune
his music
and he danced
across the sky's huge ballroom

Take every notion
the scientist and poet
posed to fool you
toss them on an errant wind
few are of any use
as you lie silent
under summer skies

You know how to parse
the moon
divide it in quarters
watch it fit itself
back together
over and over again

It is what it is to you
a friend a lover
a companion to last
your lifetime
you need read no books
collect no theories
it is what it is to you

Rumour whispered that
after a day spent in
the company of five of
Jupiter's drunken moons

leaping over and under
Saturn's rings

that a careless stumble
and fall over the Matterhorn
caused
a bruised and swollen moon
to limp across an August sky

This was not the truth at all

Ours is a solo moon
It does not carouse
with myriad moons
among ubiquitous stars
it does not trip nor fall
on cloud-covered mountain tops

it is a workman moon
with just one job to do
over and over
over and over
and over
and over

The Man in the Moon
heard the beautiful girl whisper
"the sun rises and sets in you" to
the handsome young man.

Eavesdropping
had resulted in trouble before.
The jealousy, the hurt, the rage
all set in so swiftly.
The sun had usurped him again.

"It is I" thought he,
"I, the friend of lovers,
those who do their best work
'By the Light of the Silvery...' me.
It is I who shower them in moonbeams,
backlight a cold, harsh night,
It is not the sun they wait for to propose,
to make promises,
to steal sweet kisses."
And, it began.
The moon moved across the stricken
face of the unsuspecting sun.
Minute by minute
it eclipsed the light,
stole the day.

January's wolf moon
loped into the sky
in full howl
searching in anguish
among countless stars
for her wayward pups

denying they may have
casually trotted off
to police a million nights
above another planet

leaving her alone
to bark at the sun

The Snow Moon of February
suddenly stormed the mountains
of Montana

burying homes to the rafters

a lone skier rolled
over and over

a huge ball
of frozen flesh
propelled
onto the roof
of a log cabin

alive

he watched the moon
cross over the mountain
and wept

For seventy years
this moon and I have shared the nights

it is hard to know that my time
is coming to an end

while this friend
so close at times
I thought I might reach up and touch it
will go on and on
making friends and enemies
shining bright
and disappearing into itself

will it miss me
will it remember the child
and the old woman

probably not



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