

# MAGIC



poems by  
Stephen Brooke

# MAGIC



*Stephen Brooke*

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*Take a lover who looks at you like maybe you are magic.*  
*Frida Kahlo*

## MAGIC

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# *Magic*

## SPELL

I cast my spell,  
I cast a net;  
the magic of words  
will snare you yet.

I sing my need  
to the stars and moon;  
the power of words  
will bind you soon.

I sing my want  
in words of fire;  
their magic holds  
my heart's desire.

I weave my spell  
of night and day;  
by the power of words  
I'll have my way.

## MAGIC

I stand spot-lit on the stage,  
creating illusion. Look at me  
and suspend your disbelief.

Maybe I am magic. Maybe I am  
the dream you used to dream.  
Let your eyes follow my deceits,

as I conceal more than I reveal.  
Did I put it here or there?  
No, it is in neither place.

My lovely assistant carried it  
offstage, as every other night.  
The audience will always cheer.

## UNCERTAINTY PRINCIPLES

I believe that for every butterfly  
in Brazil that changes the weather  
there is another in Poland  
to put things back as they were.

The one from South America is bright  
and flashy and gets all the attention.  
Poster-bug for chaos theory, it flutters  
its wings and we expect surprises,

changes, hurricanes at Christmas.  
And where are they, all the promises  
of uncertainty? Tucked beneath  
the wings of some drab spoil-sport

on the other side of the planet.

## NAMES

By naming a thing, we begin to understand it.  
It becomes solid, becomes real. We can say,  
*it is the wind*, remembering we named it

once before. We can call out for love,  
having heard another cry its name.  
I begin. I understand a little

and let the wind find its way through me, naming  
it in my heart. Tell me your name and we  
may converse, you and I, the wind and love.

## ANYTHING

anything  
you can imagine  
exists

as do all things  
you can not imagine

I, FOOL

I, fool,  
have no name  
but that you give me.  
With bells and motley,  
I dance;  
I, fool,  
dance for you.

This room has one candle  
and no mirror;  
my face is unwelcome.  
All the long night,  
I dance;  
I, fool,  
dance alone.

I, fool,  
speak only nonsense;  
give my words meaning.  
It is to your music  
I dance;  
I, fool,  
dance for you.

## BALANCE

I teeter on this fence  
dividing life and death,  
a drunken acrobat,

a nameless costumed clown  
who seeks only applause.  
It rises from the crowd—

my balance, right and left—  
and when I close my act  
and fall, all the louder.

## THREE QUINZAINES

I'm not good at playing me.  
Could someone write me  
a new role?

Polite applause fills the room.  
Should I give this crowd  
an encore?

The actor became his role.  
Should he find a new  
part to play?

## CONFUSE

I confuse my poetry with life;  
these words are no more real  
for being true. These words are

the cobwebs in my windows,  
the dew drops on my mirror.  
I brush them away.

Spin, spider, spin new dreams  
to filter this day's light.  
My life is woven of your strands,

as flimsy as tomorrow, as transparent  
as the regrets I don.  
I have worn them out.

I confuse my life with poetry;  
none saw the words I wore  
once they went out of fashion.

## WILL-OF-THE-WISP

I'm Will-of-the-Wisp, there isn't a 'me';  
if you look closely, there's nothing to see.  
Made up of moonbeams, bound with cobwebs,  
mists that arise, a dark tide that ebbs—  
hear me go singing through empty night,  
counting the stars, never knowing the light.

I'm Will-of-the-Wisp, I could be a lie;  
men whisper so, in the hour they die,  
following after what they know is true  
through forest darkness, through bog and slough,  
lost in their dreams—no, nothing here's real.  
Only Will's laugh, as I away steal.



## THE OLDEST MAGIC

It was the oldest magic, the unspoken spell  
that bound our ancestors before they looked to heaven  
and learned of gods and demons, ere they counted stars.  
It was a magic born of dark primeval forest,

of prey and preyed upon and of the winds that howled  
about the standing stones, a magic of the hunt,  
the blooded spear, the fire, of woman and of man.  
We cast such spells, once, counting not the rise and set

of sun nor phases of the moon to find our selves.  
The ancient magic roars across all nights and we  
are there; the hearts of dying beasts, still beating, find  
an echo in the savage, hungry drums that call

us to the dance and in the lover's heart that beats  
impassioned, pressed against our own. They bind us yet,  
the ageless, wordless, yearning spells, this sorcery  
of life and death and of creation, this oldest magic.

## CAVE ART

No mammoths are on these walls,  
these rocky hidden walls,  
ancient low-vaulted temples  
to visions of beast and man.

No horses nor bison nor stags  
with wide spread antler crowns  
run here. No shaman dances  
as horned god of the hunt.

I have carried torches  
into these hollows, daubed  
my dreams across the dark  
spans of their empty depths.

I have placed my symbols,  
secret cyphers, in sunless  
caves. None shall know them.  
They are my conversations

with the spirits of the forest,  
the animal guides that walk  
with me. They are the map  
I follow to myself.

Such myths have I woven  
of my heart, the stories  
of who I am. They fill  
me with me. They create

me as I create them.  
No mammoths are found on  
these walls; an age ago  
they followed north the mists.

## REFLECTIONS

Reflections: I have held  
you to me as a mirror,  
each love letter filled

with myself and to  
myself, and now it is  
myself, only, I hold.

Reflections: no comfort lies  
across the river of thought,  
nor in the mirrors of home.

## SKY

I have tried to capture  
the world with a word,

a brush stroke, knowing  
I can not succeed.

The sky this morning  
is breaking my heart.

## ROLES

No, *that's* not me—  
you've seen me only  
on stage, mouthing  
my crafted lines.

I learned those roles  
long ago,  
learned to meet  
your demands,

my audience,  
to fill you up  
while I remain  
empty.

## TOY STORE

In a toy store world, Barbie exchanges  
plastic kisses with Ken. Too removed  
from the animal that prowls our streets,  
there is nothing left to recognize

in their shiny faces, rigid bodies.  
Could I be as hard as they, as lifeless,  
perpetually cold, and still be loved?  
What ideal might I embody, become

for dreaming hearts? Seek no perfection here.  
Seek no future among the staring smiles  
that line our way but return me to my shelf.  
I can only wait, still in my box.

## CARTONS

It could have been my idea but more likely  
I read it somewhere and forgot except  
in my dreams. It rode through there  
on a nightmare, this idea, calling

the names of lost children it read  
from the sides of milk cartons. They could not  
answer. Their eyes were covered with duct tape,  
their mouths full of the lies I told.

Some day, all will be changed. Some day,  
I'll leave here and walk along your highway,  
weighted down with someone else's ideas.  
Can I sell them as my own? Would you buy

the empty cartons, the stolen smiles, and take  
them home for adoption? No matter,  
no matter. The lost remain lost until  
they find themselves, over morning's oatmeal.

It could have been, should have been,  
mine, shining through a six-thirty window.  
Pebbles, lined up by moonlight, marked  
that path. Have you seen it?

## BAD DREAMS (OF YOU)

I've been having bad dreams  
and you were in each one—  
sometimes you had a knife,  
sometime you carried a gun.  
When I tried to hide  
there was no place to run;  
I've been dreaming about you  
and it wasn't fun.

I dreamed I was in a tower,  
tall and grim and gray,  
with monkeys all around,  
a little too eager to play.  
There I was, your prisoner—  
what could I do, you say?  
I threw a bucket of water  
and you melted away!

I saw you on a night mare,  
one of riders four;  
your buddies called you Pestilence—  
I guess they knew the score.  
I watched you rowing away  
from a desert shore,  
happy to be marooned  
and see you never more!

I keep having these dreams  
and don't know what to do;  
why don't you go and haunt  
someone else brand new?  
I've had enough of this,  
I thought that we were through;  
oh, I've been having bad dreams  
and they're full of you!

#### FRAGMENT

All becomes real  
when all is illusion,  
the universe glimpsed  
in the infinite shards  
of a fractured mirror.

Once God held it, whole,  
before his face and threw  
it down, saying, 'Look.  
Here is the truth you seek.  
Find yourself.'

I have picked up a piece  
and kept it by my heart,  
believing in the truth  
and in the illusions  
I saw reflected.



## POTTER

I could a potter be,  
shaping honest clay  
into honest vessels,  
the useful, homely vessels

that hold a patient measure  
of their maker's soul,  
so, even broken, they  
will sing of his hands.

I should a potter be,  
yet I shape only words,  
and know not how much truth  
these vessels of mine hold,

these off-plumb rhymes that say  
too much, while telling nothing.  
I might a potter be,  
had I but the skill.

## PALETTE

Once, I painted poems in Payne's Gray,  
all cool shadow, misted monochrome.

Then, a dab of Cobalt Blue, to sing  
of the passions long kept from my canvas,

Burnt Sienna, rich blood-brown of earth.  
Could I capture Viridian depths of sea?

Bring that to my palette. Give me reds,  
Cadmiums, Alizarin, wild beasts

leaping from the brush. Let golden Ochres  
stand triumphant; let them resonate,

suns in skies imagined, yearning ever  
to exist as more than shades of gray.

Once, I painted colorless illusions  
to evaporate before the sun,

hid within my subtle fogs those poems,  
all those tricks of light that held no meaning.

I would fill my palette with life's colors,  
every vivid hue, each nuanced shade

captured and set free again. The blacks  
must be blacker; let the whites be blinding

and more pure than morning's soul. In dreams  
Ultramarine and Umber, shall I paint,

in exuberant brush strokes of words  
Carmine and Cerulean, of Lemon

Yellow, Chromium Green. Lay out the palette,  
all your colors; canvases await.

## GRAY

I have sought to capture  
the elusive colors of the clouds,  
rushing after them with canvas and brush.

They ran from me, hiding themselves  
in cloaks of shadow and light.  
They have taunted me, the clumsy lover.

From sunrise to dusk, I have followed,  
wondering if a touch of cobalt  
would find that gray, before it fades.

## CANVAS

What colors shall I paint  
upon the blank canvas  
of this day? The pigments  
dry upon my palette,

the ultramarine and cobalt,  
alizarin, gamboge;  
stiff-bristled brushes stand  
in old coffee cans,

the Yuban and Bustelo,  
ready to my hesitant  
hand. Another cup  
before I work, before

I set brush to this  
emptiness? In paint  
is every choice, those made  
and those I leave in sketches.

## A DAUB

The painful beauty of sunrise and women,  
the ache of dreams unrealized,  
has carried me this far. A brushstroke—  
cerulean on gold. A start.

Another start. Each clumsy daub,  
each faulty word, each sidelong glimpse  
of all I hoped, had its beginning.  
I tell myself it is enough.

I say life must remain unfinished.  
Harsh comfort follows such a truth,  
and such a start as I might make,  
this day of beauty and of pain.

## MATTER

My art means more to me  
than my happiness.  
Or yours, for that matter.

Does that matter? I don't  
worry about it anymore.

We could take everything  
we know, roll it all up  
in a ball and dance tonight.

## TO SPEAK

The colors are gone, the colors  
that spoke for me. I have  
no violets of yesterday,  
no deepening sunset blues.

I no longer paint.  
I have forgotten how  
to give a brush stroke its voice,  
pigment its arguments.

I have forgotten how  
to believe I've something  
to say at all. Did I  
ever find my words,

ever fill my silence?  
The old paintings are dumb,  
now, daubs that hold  
no meaning, that never held

meaning, for all I can tell.  
They are but the life's work,  
evidence of the inchoate  
struggle of the soul.

## ABSURD

I would do something both  
dramatic and absurd for you,  
like that artist who draped islands  
in pink silk.

I would fly you to Beaujolais  
to be the first to sample  
the nouveau, the fizzy wine  
of new vintage.

I would bring you Christmas  
in November, then take the tree down  
only so we might celebrate  
again the next month.

I would give you my heart  
completely, like any other  
fool, both dramatic and absurd,  
in love.



## WRAPPERS

The truth is sold in cellophane wrappers;  
pink and blue, mostly, ever  
since we found lies in the green ones.  
On every corner, business has been  
brisk. Buy me a handful, won't you?  
We'll share them on some shady bench,  
taking turns until we've opened  
each little package. Those we don't like  
will go to the pigeons. Look! I braided  
you a chain of pink and blue.  
The green? I'll leave them out.

## MAGICKS

No, I could never quite believe in fairy tales.  
I thought them no more than escapes when real life fails  
Until I found myself ensorcelled by a fay  
Into a world where the unicorns yet play—  
A land where ancient magicks still hold mighty sway  
And galleons ply the clouds on snowy swan-wing sails.

My fairy is of all this wondrous realm a queen,  
Who deigns to favor one sojourner, low and mean,  
Accepting foolish words I gather in bouquets,  
Not laughing too much at my clumsy foolish ways.  
In fairy tales I live now, in them my heart stays;  
That I might make them real remains yet to be seen.

## PRINCESS

She feels, sometimes, like one  
of those girls in an old tale;  
you know, the princess cursed  
at birth by a wicked witch  
and then the good fairy blesses her  
in hopes of lessening the damage,  
of unsealing her fate.  
Always the two destinies  
war within her,  
one part whispering  
how worthless she is,  
the other too often believing.  
One side building its hokey dreams,  
the other tearing them down  
until all that's left  
is her hatred  
of who she is.  
Prince Charming, where are you?  
Someone needs a kiss.



## MINE

What did the dwarfs do once Snow White  
left them for good? Did they whistle  
and return to their mine, hoping  
to delve cheer from grudging rocks,  
seek its ore with pick and shovel?

Being busy might not replace  
being happy nor still their loss  
but it's better than nothing and we  
can't all be princes, you know,  
nor even particularly charming.

## OGRESS

Don't ogle an ogress, she might take it wrong  
and snatch you right up to carry you home;  
you know that an ogress is far too strong  
to escape her arms. You'll never more roam

but stay in her cave, to cook and to clean,  
to mind all the lumpy children you gave her—  
yes, every litter, they'll come to sixteen—  
and fear to explain that you no longer crave her.

When passion is dead, you may well be too,  
another exile from an ogress' bed,  
and likely enough to end up in a stew;  
at least the kiddies will be well fed.

Don't ogle an ogress, eye-contact's a risk,  
but if it occurs, know it could be worse;  
at least the love making is sure to be brisk  
and a grunt is sufficient when you must converse.

The prospects of taking an ogress in marriage  
would seem rather slim that's admittedly true;  
but this is a warning you'd best not disparage—  
there might be one out there looking for you!

### BARBECUE

The monster under my bed  
has been feuding with  
the one in the closet.

I hear them growl at each other  
when they think I'm asleep,  
arguing over who

has the better storage boxes  
and whether I'd taste better  
with a mustard or tomato-based

barbecue sauce. I'm partial  
to mustard myself but not  
inclined to offer an opinion.

## TROLLS

Trolls eat anything,  
including each other;  
maybe their sister—  
perhaps not Mother.

You may find small bits  
of someone you know  
stuck in their beards  
that wag to and fro.

Those beards they are long,  
those beards they are green;  
they're never combed out  
nor are they kept clean.

Trolls deny nothing  
to their appetite;  
pray you don't run  
into one in the night!

So now you are warned  
if a troll be your friend,  
he just might eat you  
as well, in the end.

## BREAD CRUMBS

my trail of bread crumbs  
leading back to you has fed  
the hungry nestlings

someday I might follow them  
when at last they take to flight

## CINDERELLA

She forgot tomorrow  
till it was yesterday  
and at the stroke of midnight  
her dreams all danced away.

Her pumpkin coach had vanished;  
the team, in disarray,  
squeaked and fled for cover;  
one slipper went astray.

Perhaps a prince, enamored,  
found it where it lay  
and searched the kingdom over,  
her glass shoe on a tray.

Or wondering for a moment  
why she didn't stay,  
left it for the sweepers  
like a discarded bouquet,

the aftermath of balls,  
forgotten yesterday.

## ALL TO YOU

*a song*

How shall I woo you,  
What can I say to you;  
Must I sing songs for you?  
Then, with words like birds on the wing,  
All my love I shall sing to you.

How shall I please you  
And prove my love to you;  
Must I do deeds for you?  
Then, with deeds like beads on a string,  
All my love I shall bring to you.

How shall I win you,  
What could I give to you;  
Must it be all for you?  
Then, with pleas like keys on a ring,  
I shall give everything to you.

## NEST

The hen knows but three words  
which she keeps hidden in her nest.  
In time, they will hatch, she believes.  
In time, they will become stories,  
scratching in the yard, crowing  
to the dawn. Whom might they awaken?

## THE FAY

If traveling through the fairies' gate  
be sure to kiss goodbye your mate,  
for it may be a hundred years  
that your mate will have to wait.

When you pass into that air  
of delight and appearance fair,  
know glamour is the fairies' art;  
all that seems fair lies cold and bare.

Count not the hour nor the day  
as you sit feasting with the Fay,  
a night, mayhap a century—  
but with the Fay no man may stay.

## FAIRY TALES

### I. Wands

It's too late, you know;  
everyone's gone home  
and your coach is a pumpkin.

The prince slipped out with both  
your step-sisters, saying  
he digs girls with big feet.

Magic wands don't do  
the job anymore, kid.

### II. Kiss

Think, before you kiss  
that sleeper awake, young prince.  
Think of happiness.

Might not she be better so  
than married to the first  
guy who wandered in?

Most times, it's wise to let  
sleeping princesses lie.

### III. Hair

Your mom had a thing  
for fresh produce. Is  
that why you have such

a healthy head of hair?  
Nothing like a good  
start, despite what witches

and towers bring later. Let it  
down and catch a prince.

### IV. Apple

So you choked on another  
one, did you? Nothing  
to say other than

there are a lot of poison  
apples out there this year.  
Sleep on and I will be

all seven dwarfs until  
your next prince rides by.

V. Straw

Maybe that little guy  
would make a good father  
to your first born. Did you

consider that? Better  
than your husband with  
his greedy spinning wheels.

Growing up a prince  
is overrated, anyway.



## NUMBERS

The third Billy-goat Gruff  
could handle any bridge troll,  
any day. No troll toll  
for him, just a 'butt out'

and off to his business  
and his brothers. So why  
didn't all three cross  
at once? There's strength in numbers,

after all, especially when  
the numbers are six curling horns,  
twelve sharp hooves and one  
very stupid troll.

That third Billy-goat Gruff  
certainly did a number  
on him. No kidding, kid—  
he must have got his goat.

## CHICKEN LITTLE

When the sky began to fall,  
some fell on their knees,  
seeking forgiveness from their gods,  
from their neighbors, from themselves.

Some cried out in despair,  
covering their heads and running  
to hide in caves or cellars,  
while others welcomed the end of days

and the paradise promised them  
in the days of their fathers' fathers' fathers  
and their fathers' fathers before them.  
Or so they had been told.

This was Chicken Little's fault,  
said one, and the liberal media;  
those are but acorns, albeit  
large and blue and white,

and the sky will not, can not,  
truly fall on we who trust  
in God and country. Perhaps,  
though, on the rest of you.

And then there were those  
who looked about for long sticks  
to prop it up, but it was crumbling  
too quickly and one piece would fall

while they pushed another back  
into place, and the stars and moon  
rolled down through the holes  
like marbles in a pin-ball machine.

It is no use, no use at all,  
they agreed. We need longer  
sticks, more sticks, and then  
the sky would not, could not

truly fall on we who trust  
in science and technology.  
When the sky began to fall,  
the philosophers, the theologians,

all turned poet and sang to it;  
they took up brush, daubing pigment  
in mad hope of catching its essence,  
keeping the broken sky whole.

Who will look upon their paintings  
and say That was Earth, wasn't it?  
Who will read and remember  
what we have written of this day

when the sky began to fall?

## DREAMER

When did you waken, dreamer?  
Your memory sings nonsense  
in each window I pass.

Dreamer, walk with me.  
These streets are whispering  
tunes you have not heard.

In the dark, my dreamer.  
In the dark, they sing  
of endless sleep and mirrors

that hold your memory.



## SLEEPING

Once upon a time came and went  
before I could muster up the courage

to kiss my sleeping princess. What good  
was it to be charming? Dream on,

your highness, dream on, and may  
your beauty last behind those walls.

## THE APPLE

The apple of my eye contained  
three worms, each black as truth.  
Should I have eaten of her,  
swallowed them like licorice whips?

They might have grown great in me, twisted  
generations of hunger,  
long as tomorrow's nose.  
In voiceless fear, I spat her out.

The apple of my eye concealed  
three seeds, that I saw not;  
and, falling to the the ground,  
they took root in another heart.

## ILLUSION

Magician, illusionist, what's up your sleeve?  
You think you can fool me? You think I'll believe?  
Magician, bedazzler, I know all the tricks;  
I'm no simpleton, I'm no hick from the sticks.

I'll see through you yet, oh, I'll figure you out;  
You want something from me—of that I've no doubt!  
Magician, concealer of rabbit and dove,  
You won't fool me with the illusion called love.

## LINES

Unfamiliar actors  
take the stage to speak  
lines with no meaning. Was  
there a plot or only

words? Act follows act  
and each phrase hangs  
above the harsh footlights  
for our admiration.

Who would notice were we  
to slip out of this theater?

### SIDESHOW #3

The small illusions  
I conjure are harmless—  
a shiny word  
plucked from the air,  
an omelet of rhymes  
stirred up in my hat.

Applause and pennies  
thrown from the hands  
of children, claim  
this puppet show,  
where metaphor  
trades jabs with meaning.

Please go next door  
for the dancing  
girls, gents.



## RABBIT

Time is an illusion:  
God's little slight-of-hand  
to keep our eyes turned elsewhere  
while he pulls a rabbit  
from forever.

After the show, we'll look  
at each other and say,  
*Ah, I get it now!*

## MEMOIR

My real-life adventures  
will be read widely  
as soon as I finish  
making them up.

A memoir? they'll ask,  
and, did this all happen?  
Each host of a talk show  
will vie for the truth.

Surely you never  
wrestled Hulk Hogan?  
Let's see those medals  
you won in the war!

Those were all hocked  
to pay for my lifestyle,  
whiskey and women,  
Bukowski-like,

back in the day,  
just before prison—  
but there is no need  
to get into that.

Perhaps things were so,  
I'm no longer certain,  
and when I'm forgotten  
nobody will care,

but I took great pleasure  
in jotting them down—  
those real-life adventures  
that could have been mine.

## Oz

I've been rusting like the tin man  
when he cried too many tears;  
I've been cowering like the lion  
when he couldn't face his fears.  
Like great wizard Oz himself,  
I've been exiled here for years.

Is the wicked witch but myth?  
Have I none that I can blame?  
Cut for me a velvet heart,  
pour some courage, drown my shame.  
I've no reason to go home;  
cyclones carried off my name.

## SHOWMANSHIP

Once, I lived for the word, walked  
its tightropes above the crowd. Their roar  
subsided into distant murmurs.

Balance comes too easily,  
no more than a trick, all danger  
dwindled, turned to showmanship,

meaning nothing. The show is over,  
folks. The poet has left the building.



## IN FIVE ACTS

There was a Dane  
in great pain;  
going insane,  
in fact.

An act,  
it could have been.  
He blamed his kin  
of shameful sin;  
an uncle accused  
and not amused.

He could have used  
more tact.

A pact,  
the young prince made  
with Father's shade,  
debts to be paid.

But meanwhile he  
could not see  
a reason to be  
or not.  
He thought  
too much, it seems,  
of dark and dreams,  
while Uncle's schemes  
were put in play.  
What can one say?  
That was his way:  
he sought,  
he fought.  
With too much rage,  
too young in age,  
he left the stage.

## HAND

All my faces have hidden themselves  
behind this one. I do not let  
it smile; you would misunderstand.  
Cards held close, I'll not raise the bet  
until you throw in your last chip.  
Yes, I have learned to play the hand  
dealt when we began our game—  
to lose and win must be the same.

## DISCARDED

My truth is forged of words discarded,  
words forgotten, left unguarded—  
I find them in the empty ways,  
gather them in dark bouquets,  
mold them into grotesque forms,  
scatter them on rising storms  
to fall, forgotten, as the rain,  
to be forgotten, as my pain.

The sleeping crowd takes up my song;  
words the same, the notes seem wrong.  
Who remembers which are right?  
Who remembers past the night  
what is lost amid these dreams?  
One voice, seeking morning, screams,  
*Stop, thief!* as the felon flees—  
we handed him all of the keys.

A silver emptiness of moon  
crosses clear blue vaults of noon,  
as I count invisible stars.  
Let them rise, Venus, Mars,  
to reflect in evening's pond,  
form again this fragile bond  
of real and mirror, of truth and lie,  
discarded words, uncaring sky.

## THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A GHOST

Even the night has her ways, though she  
be nothing more than absence of day.  
She sits with Death in his empty, cold rooms,  
conversing of yesterday, which no longer is.

There are worse things than not being.  
A vapor of the past, a once-was,  
a might-have, can invent its believers  
and the flitting bats have led me here,

where I lost all the stars. They rimed  
my window once, sighing to the night.  
Wind has taken them and I  
follow, in time, follow them nowhere.

What never was can haunt as well  
as all that has passed the gray  
hallways of your heart. Let  
every ghost find faith in its own story.

Even the night knows the way. She passes  
by my windows and the stars must follow.  
I will too, in time. I will too  
for there are worse things than not being.



## PORTRAYAL

An actor has written all my poems.  
I hired him some time back  
to portray me, to stand on stage  
with a suitcase of my passions,

presenting them one-by-one  
to an unsuspecting audience.  
How they applaud him! If only I  
could slip this reticence and join

my creation before the crowd,  
take our bows together and then  
tell him, *Good job, but your services  
are no longer necessary.*

## SYMPATHETIC MAGIC

I wrap your name in a poem  
and bury it beneath a new moon.

Let both wax. Let them shine  
brighter than every distant star

foolish lovers might wish upon.  
In time, we shall be full.

## BLACKEST

Bring me the blackest thing man's eye has seen,  
blacker than space where comets careen;  
black as a raven's feather in flight,  
black as the soul's darkest storms of night;

blacker than caverns that never knew day,  
blacker than depths where leviathan lay;  
black as the hearts of three-dozen dragons,  
black as the beer in winter's last flagons;

blacker than black and then blacker yet,  
blacker than faceted gems carved of jet.  
Bring me the blackest thing man's ever known,  
hidden away where no light has shone.

## SLEEP

What is that distant moan I hear,  
In the darkness deep?  
It seems the voice of nameless fear,  
Crying on and on.

It's but the sighing of the wind;  
Sleep, my dearest, sleep.  
A song for every man who's sinned;  
Sleep until the dawn.

Whose voices call across the moor;  
Do they wail and weep  
In torment no heart should endure,  
Empty and forlorn?

It's surely but the hunting owl;  
Sleep, my dearest, sleep.  
The gray wolf's distant hungry howl;  
Sleep until the morn.

What shadowed forms do I behold  
From the marshes creep?  
Misshapen phantoms, ghastly, cold,  
Grasp the very night.

It is naught but the mists that rise;  
Sleep, my dearest, sleep.  
The moon plays tricks upon your eyes;  
Sleep till morning light.

Whose eyes are these that hold my own,  
Where such fires leap?  
Ensorcelled, I lose all I've known,  
Dancing with despair.

Your image, mirrored, monstrous seems;  
Sleep, my dearest, sleep.  
'Tis only twisted by dark dreams;  
Sleep, forgetting care.

What bell is this that endless tolls?  
As the night winds weep,  
I hear some choir of lost souls  
Singing over me.

It is your fragile beating heart;  
Sleep, my dearest, sleep.  
And I who mourn my destined part;  
Sleep, now, peacefully.

Whose words are these, who murmurs low,  
Prays my soul to keep?  
This sanguine lust seems all I know,  
Endless, naught before.

It's I who grieves, yet brings you rest;  
Sleep, my dearest, sleep.  
And drives the stake into your breast;  
Sleep forever more.  
Sleep till a dawn that can not be;  
Sleep eternally.

## CURIOSITY

While curiosity  
killed the cat,  
the dog and I  
hid under the bed.

## SANDS

Ever a seeker of that  
perfect moment, that  
unattainable moment,

I have opened gifts  
of anticipation  
to find, not disappointment,

but only the empty glass  
of time and none to turn  
it over. Surely the stars

will sift slowly, softly  
down to fill my hands  
before they slip away.

## PLEIADES

Behind the seven sister stars (yes, one  
is hidden), lie Orion's huntsman dreams  
of conquest, capture, lust. His ardor gleams;  
across the arc of night the heavens run  
pursuing and escaping ere the sun  
mounts singing forth the day with arrowed beams.  
Again he fails before Apollo's schemes,  
all by the shafts of Artemis undone.

Now he who was once lover of fair Dawn  
before her gold and rose approach must fade.  
Insistent chase but for a day is stayed  
as night's eternal wheel turns slowly on,  
and each of seven sisters ever flees  
Orion, hunter of the Pleiades.

## HEROES

All you heroes are not much different  
from me. Your victories taste no better.  
Your songs will fade as soon, into  
the night that falls upon us all.

Pain is as fleeting as joy, and death  
even more pointless than life. If I  
take up my sword, defy the heavens,  
am I the better for it? Sooner

or later, we shuffle it all off,  
and maybe we are happy or maybe  
we just keep unhappiness  
at bay until it doesn't matter.

Laugh, my heroes—the jester dances  
before us. In the end he will  
draw near to whisper his name into  
your ear. But you had guessed it already.

## ANVIL

I'll lay life on my anvil  
and hammer it into shape;  
forge my dreams like swords,  
tempered in the steaming  
blood of my desire.

Into the heart of the fire  
goes each rejected blade,  
broken, to be reborn,  
in songs of steel and flame—  
hear the hammer ring!

Hear tomorrow sing  
of all it can become,  
transmuted. Blue-hot healing  
leaps upon the hearth.  
Lay me on the anvil.

## SEDUCTION

Shall I seduce you with my words  
or club you over the head with them?  
These poems will have their way with you.

They will not take no as an answer.

I've filled them from my violent heart;  
my every dark desire seethes  
beneath their surface, honeyed-fair.

They call to you from darkened alleys.

Do not go with them, seeking night,  
believing whispered words of love,  
the subtle, sweet song of seduction.

They hide the hungry animal growl.

To love or force becomes all one;  
my poems lounge in shadowed doorways  
and lust to have their way with you.

They will not take no as an answer.

## UNDERSTANDING THE MANTICORE

To describe the Manticore we must first know that the Romans misspelled the name and it properly is called Martichora, man-eater, by the Greeks and before them, the Persians.

Does the misspelling of a mythical creature's name change its nature? Does it become a new and different beast of the imagination?

There is still something of the lion about it, and something of man, not unlike its cousin, Sphinx.

It, too, was known to dine on passing mankind, though it oft enjoyed a riddle or two, first. Martichora, with its deadly tail, not scorpion-like, as later described, but a thrower of spiny projectiles. Martichora with three rows of shark-like teeth in the face of a man. Who understands it?

The Martichora poses no riddles, asks no questions. It only hungers; in the high peaks it hungers. Beware if you pass by.

## AERIALIST

The aerialist, arms reaching out again  
for the trapeze, leaps ever wider gaps.  
Discipline must carry him across,  
the trust in his own training, in his own hands,

knowing everyone falls. To challenge chaos,  
to fly when God denied man wings, ignore  
the roaring crowd, and be is all that matters.  
For a moment, destiny is held.

Only a moment—then the illusion ends,  
the hubris of control. Release it,  
aerialist, and bow; the act is finished.  
Let it slip into the net below.

## SHATTERED

The truth has been broken,  
a shattered mirror that holds  
still its warped reflections.  
Each lie lies askew  
on our floor. Gather  
them, try to make whole  
the illusion we once admired.  
It hides in every piece.

## CHAPTER

Happiness  
was always the promise,  
waiting only for us  
to turn the page

or turn the age.  
The next year, the next  
chapter, brings the child  
home at last,

all the past  
a story poorly  
told, our fairy tale's  
unhappy ending,

endless wending  
across the divide.  
It awaits us still,  
over there,

and nowhere.

## MISTAKE

Love is never an illusion—  
a mistake, at times, but real.  
A mistake. What a mistake  
it can be. But we learn.

Isn't that the old cliché?  
Learn from each mistake and end  
wiser, sadder, more prepared  
for the next attempt at love.

## ROMANTIC COMEDY

I wrote myself into  
your romantic comedy,  
reserving all the best  
lines for myself. How clever

it then seemed, the banter  
and repartee I scripted,  
and how surely would it  
win you over at last.

It remains unfinished,  
all scribbled dreams and clichés.  
Draft by unfinished draft,  
rewrite after rewrite,

the final scene, our happy  
ending, eluded me.  
Who will know my name  
was stricken from the credits?

In some darkened theater  
the crowd prepares to laugh.



## CURTAIN

It's time to go:  
the bell has rung,  
that fat lady's sung  
and we applauded—

ah, yes, I know,  
much less reserved  
than was deserved.  
We have defrauded

but me and you,  
hoping to fare  
on the evening air,  
a starlight word

of love, or two.  
It's time to leave.  
Did we believe  
a tale so absurd,

told by a clown?  
The play's the thing  
but now we bring  
our curtain down.

## DIALECT

They are the ones without faces,  
their names now words  
in a forgotten language,  
a tongue I might have learned  
in my youth, and lost.

Did I read those names  
in the book of my mirror,  
where all faces become mine?  
I have shouted them  
into the caverns of myself.

They echoed there, mocking,  
when I would have pretended  
to believe in love.  
Speak that unknown dialect  
to me, once again.

I hear my own voice  
only as gibberish—  
meaningless words,  
forgotten names,  
faceless loves.

## TO NAME

The poem began as magic.  
In conclave of fire, beating  
spear-butt time, they chanted  
the name of their quarry.

To name it is to have  
a power over it.  
This has always been  
the goal, to name

the unnameable, make  
it ours. To work the magic  
of the hunt in fire-filled  
night, before we go forth

to bloody our spears.

## THE MAGICIAN

Not one spell remains.  
I have used all my magic  
in the amusement of children  
and idlers. They've filled my pockets  
with pennies and applause,  
not enough to ever buy  
back a single enchantment.



Thank you for reading MAGIC. I hope you have enjoyed this collection of my poems.

*Stephen Brooke*

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