



Deborah L. Davitt

Bounded by Eternity

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by Deborah L. Davitt

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Acknowledgements and Gratitude

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Caught

1. A Captive of Free Will

Under autumn leaves, she wandered,
grieved her losses – father,
husband, son;
accidents still happen
in our bright modern world
the one lit by gas lamps or electric.

The time? Between wars.
Because there's always a fine brace
of wars to stand between.
Perhaps the globe-spanning conflicts
of our grandparents,
perhaps the ones fought on puppet-stages,
shadows of the ones *not* waged
by superpowers,
perhaps the endless ones,
we fight today –
it doesn't matter which;

she lost them all, all the people
who mattered,
to whom she mattered,
and she sought respite in nature
beside a gleaming stream,
its waters dyed
with the reflected glory
of autumn leaves.

The fey king came to her then,
out from under the branches,
whispering her name
in all the voices she'd lost,
offering her forgiveness,

respite, blessed forgetfulness
and she took his hand
despite all his strangeness,
and went with him beneath the leaves.
of her own free will.

2. The First Days

He wore a glamored mask;
she would ask to see his face
yet even when he refused
she felt bemused by his grace.

He showed her how to loose rivers,
gave her shivers, kissed her neck
set his power in her hands
watched fey lands rise at her beck.

He gave her bow and arrow
Best to harrow herds of deer;
they looked fit for a barrow
first touch to her marrow with fear.

But she forgot fear again
like a wren safe in its nest
when his breath traced her soft cheek
and by a creek they found rest.

3. The Hunt

At first he carried her on his steed,
but they gave her a palfrey to ride on her own,
a gentle beast, to her well-suited,
whose silver hooves ate miles with ease.

The terrain of the fey world
metamorphosed as they rode;
there was no map as plains became mountains,
cliffs became deserts,
deserts became sea,

and still the palfrey's hooves
crested the waves, following in the king's wake;
she laughed as she petted narwhals,
and gasped as they next rode
across the face of the sun unscathed.

He showed her wonder in a world
contained within a raindrop,
let her fly his hawk from her hand—
phoenix-like, it settled in a cloud
of cinereous ashes
then blazed to life as it crossed the skies.

Then wild horns blew,
as his huntsmen and retinue found them,
and she found that the fey
were not mortal or human-like,
but took the aspect of ideas.

The master of hounds was, in fact, a Hound,
pitch-black and red of eye;
what followed him was a tumult of limbs

and fur and scales and fangs,
howling and baying and singing
in time with the horns;

the riders did not just ride horses,
but fish and whales,
birds and beasts,
deer and bears,
and other, stranger things —
she thought at least one
might've surmounted
a cockatrice.

And the riders all wore fantastic garb,
Made of moonlight or nets of spiderweb,
chaplets of dew, necklaces of teeth;
in every hand,
bows of horn and blades of ice.

She met Chase and Lure, twins, she was told,
one fierce and leonine,
the other coquettish and serpentine,
yet inseparable; Lure rode twined
around her brother's shoulders.

Then powerful Bay, who hopped from foot to foot,
impatient to be back on his steed —
she thought him short as a fireplug,
and built like a barrel, his yellow eyes gleaming
in a face as dark as night, white teeth
disarming in his smile.

Track and Trail, two more twins, looked
More like conventional woodsmen,
but while they stood tall and broad-shouldered,
both had the heads of bloodhounds,
complete with dangling jowls.

She might have laughed, so incongruous
were their courtly bows,
but then Coup-de-Grace herself rode up,
tall and haughty, with the grace of a knife —
looking, in fact, as she'd been taught elves should look:
willowy, lethal, and fair of face.

4. The Whirlwind

And what did they hunt,
but creatures of
raw entropy,
the baseline desire
of a universe to find
everything in order
everything at rest –

– gray creatures without
defined form
but with an aching hunger,
leeching life
from everything they touched –

she drew back the arrow to her cheek
and let it fly,
feeling the exhilaration of it
the thrill of the chase, of the kill.

One of the creatures threatened her,
and the Hound caught it in his jaws,
crushing it back into mist and nothingness;

another caught Coup-de-Grace
and she saw the fey female's arm
begin to wither away into ash,
but then the king caught the creature
with a feathered shaft
between shadows that might have been eyes
and it, too, faded from sight.

The hunting party bound their wounds,
traded drinks of some fiery liqueur
distilled perhaps, from raw life,
and for a moment, she thought
she could live like this forever

5. The Coming of Sorrow

Though it all began with a kiss,
and she lived in a fog of bliss,
finding her life to have meaning
for the first time in many years,

on a hunt in what seemed like fall,
(though in this realm, time moved not at all),
one of their quarry caught her hand
with one of its nebulous stings.

The pain seared straight through to her soul
though, human-born, she felt less dole
than one of the fey might have done.
The king wrapped the wound, kissed her palm.

But the beast's insidious bile
soon reached her heart with all its guile,
and poisoned her bliss with despair.
Memories returned to taunt her,

of her husband's beloved face,
an infant son lost without trace,
and suddenly all her new life
seemed empty, hollow, and forlorn.

She didn't know the reason why,
refused to bid the king good-bye,
but asked him to use his power
to heal her aching heart and soul.

6. The Anodyne

First, forget what pains you –
consign all your travails
to oblivion.

Second, embrace joy –
live only in the moment
between heartbeats

Third, know that there is
no past, but also
there's no future;
that's the joy of immortality.

Fifth – why do you look disturbed?
there was no fourth item to this list;
or if there was,
it didn't matter anyway.

Seventh, just dance;
sway weightless under moonbeams,
let your frail mortality slip away,
it'll only weigh you down.

Eleventh, let me take away
that nagging sense of regret;
the feeling you've left something
undone; here, I'll steal it
with a kiss.

Thirteenth, why do you frown?
there's nothing here
that should cause you pain—
here, everything's joy;
float with me
like thistledown
upon the lambent air.

7. What She Became

She asked him to free her,
to make her light as air;
each sorrow she burned
removed more of her self,
till she was free of care.

But her humanity
was what the king found fair;
she became a sylph,
hollow inside; when he
left, she was not aware.

She drifted through his court
(a sparkling affair),
his name on her lips;
while he could not be found,
she could not feel despair.

It seemed to her that his
loss should be hard to bear;
she could not say why,
just that it was something
they could – perhaps *should* – share.

8. It Might Have Been a Kindness

If he'd erased her memories of him,
it might have been kind —
but he had no more kindness left in him.

He remembered all the times she'd wept
and begged him
to take it all away.

He'd done all she asked
and unmade all that she was —
the empty shell that looked at him and smiled?

That was his punishment;
her memories of him and his love —
those were hers.

And so he left her to the mercy of his court
to all their hollow smiles
that held the glint and flash of knives

and went back to his hunt,
riding a shadow, cloaked in night,
it seemed better to be alone

than to spend one more moment
alone among the ruins
of the woman he'd once loved.

A Sea Change at Court