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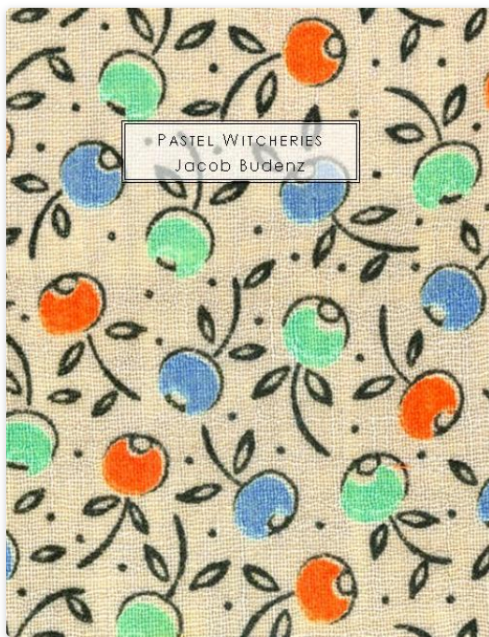
ABOUT

GUIDELINES

IN PRODUCTION

MSS RECEIVED

Jacob Budenz | Pastel Witcheries



Pastel

Witcheries: poems

by Jacob Budenz.

Number 5 in

Volume Six of our

limited-edition

Summer Kitchen

Chapbook Series.

Available this

August.

Cover image: vin-

tage quilting cot-

ton. Series design

by Ron Mohring.

Published: August 1, 2018 [49 copies]

23 pages

\$9.00

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Pastel Witch

Where wealth is measured by the pinkness of the sky there is a man standing at the window wearing a yellow sundress as dusk descends. His lips are lavender. His toenails match. His fingernails match. He does not wear shoes.

Where teeth hang from the doorway by silver thread and tinkle in the breeze the man crushes daisies with a mortar and pestle. The teeth are his own and he has grown them back and torn them out, grown them back and torn them out, grown them back, year after year after year after year. From his kitchen he can see the lake ripple, the mountains lean in. He is pregnant with his third child. The father is the wind.

Where the moss is a pillow and the tree is a lamp the man will give birth to his daughter and hand the baby to the queen of the crickets. The child will return once she has learned to fly and to sing. She will be thirteen years old, then. Meanwhile the man will weep once a week for the first two years, once a month for the next four, twice a year for the next three, only once the next year, never again until she returns. When his daughter returns he will tell her he never wanted any sons. Both his sons died before learning to fly, he will tell her. This is a lie. He had one daughter and one son before her. They are still alive, and have turned into a narwhal and a beetle, respectively. His daughter will never meet them—can't, and so it's better for her not to know.

Where the water is warm he does not swim. He does not know how to swim. Yet here he lives in a house by the lake; here he lives in a house by the lake. The sun has gone down, and the banshees are smiling, and he swears he will not drink a drop of liquor for the rest of his days, after tomorrow morning.

Ano/Rite?

Tincture of apple cider
vinegar, liquor without dinner,
anise liqueur, celery, ram's
horn, green tea extract, spoonful
of male gaze, cocoa powder, bile.

Repeat, nine times:
"Goats drip fat
so do swine."

Light a candle to Our Lady of
Low Resistance Cardio, sing
to the moon at a waning crescent.
Ask Isis and Artemis why
you were assigned male at birth.

Altar: your sister's size six
maxi dress, coffee cups, birthstone
carved to a thin point, pointe shoes,
gymnast's chalk for drawing runes,
glitter dot, crop top, cutoffs, cutouts
of Karen Carpenter, scissors, a picture
of you at twenty-two
with a BMI of nineteen,
oxblood button-down,
blood of a greyhound.

Repeat, six times:
"Come, Lord Resheph,
and take me.
What is mine
is also thine."

Pour greyhound's blood
over your torso
as an offering.
Slit a star beneath
your left nipple
to let the demon
of plague know
you mean it,
let him lap the blood
from belly and breast
at least as long as it
took you to finish

after the last man said,
“I love how you’re slim
but not, like, skinny.”

His tongue like hot iron,
Lord Resheph will linger.
Let him.

Repeat, three times:
“Resheph now fly
where cattle tread not
where people seek not
where iron is the earth
and copper is the sky.”

Offer your abdomen to him
with a gentle push of his bald,
orange-tinted head from chest
to midsection, lift your birthstone
to the crescent moon for protection,
let him slurp the excess fat from
your abdomen, he, Resheph,
mistaking the dog’s blood
for your own!

Drink the tincture to ward him away
once your hip bones
could pierce his tender
demon skin.

Burn your picture. Blow out the candle.
Whisper once without repeating,
“I am strong to come again.”

In Season

Irises the color of maple leaf, make
believe your makeup makes you look
like those marble-carved girls. Pandora
hawks her hope out for street smarts;
Psyche serves silhouettes in stone that
make a goddess seethe green. Throw
those little blue flowers to the river for
your girlhood luck. Wait there night
after autumn night (wearing florals)
for an answer.

None will come.

The wrong face reflects in the water:
you, almost-girl. You, bearded lady
without lady parts. Shed your chest
hair like white bird feathers. Mock
that tired pose of Leda pre-egg, post-
rape, oh, you myth of manhood, of its
swan song. Regrow. If Galatea changed
into a real girl (along with the legions of
starfish in season), maybe you can too.

Slade of the Maiden's Womb

The hole in your right ear begins to heal
& why not

count the little mouths of your Venus fly traps,
your earring holes—

all simulacra for a hymen you'll never have?
You envy-dream

giant plant yoni on highway medians in Florida.
Gobbling men,

you subsist on a supermodel diet, cinch the waist
under summer dresses

& crack the toenails in too-small boots. Flightless
cormorants evolved

wings two-thirds a size too small to fly, and still
they dry the wet

nubs in the sun as if yearning for flight—birds that
swim—mudskippers

crawl across wet land, gaping-mouthed—regardless
of genitals, of their

ill-fitting bodies—& you, lopsided ladybird boy, only
wish to lay eggs.

Blood Moon

My roommate filled the toilet with tomato
soup, forgot to flush. Red-sky dawn, pissing
into creamy water, I wished I,
too, could bleed from
a hole I don't have.

My ass bleeds when I take
too much magnesium. I
get sores on my tongue, egg-like,
from inhaled hormones, and then I
bleed and bleed from my mouth
when I kiss you, when I swallow
you, when I floss my teeth.

My roommate gets slimmer when she's
stressed, doesn't believe in my magic
or my spirits. I ask Astghik, how much weight
will I lose if I bleed out on the blood moon
this October, slit my calf, squeeze it out,
let the full moon have my blood, let the sun
have my baby, carry my child for me,

hold my seed in his swollen belly?
How much will I lose? How much?

My roommate gives me dresses
with holes in the hem line,
*Here, honey, see what it is
to bleed like me.*

Scrybaby

Saltwater, smoky quartz bowl,
garnet pendulum swinging above
like a drop of blood on a silver chain.

A message from the goddess:

your broccoli is overcooking,
its green sunless gaze
scorching the side
of the cast iron pan.

Male tears plop against the seafoam
in the scrying bowl, salt against
salt. When we crossed the ocean

I wasn't in the water, but you were.
I hovered two feet above the swells
while your head bobbed up,
bobbed down.

Inhale, exhale, sing:

“Your mouth is smaller
when you wear a helmet.”

I, a flying crab, poured waterfalls
over your barely breathing head,
afraid to wet my feathers in the waves.

Wings beat up, beat down, sing:

“Touch me and I'll turn to wax.
Hold me and I'll hurt me.”

Kitchen counter, compost heap,
blackened green, molehills in winter,
melt into me, melt into me. I'll sink.

Simaetha

I wake pulling worms
from my teeth while you
yawn next to me. They
wiggle and curl and
burrow through the hole
in your mattress, your

coffin. You think I'm asleep
when you pick your nose,
spink its contents behind
our cypress headboard, but

I watch,
my eyes
like slits.

This is how I make you stay:
while you wash your face
and take a piss, I collect
your boogers in a vial, slip
my hair into your oolong
tea, sprinkle your fingernails
over my coffee. At night I
weep into your soup
while you peel
pomegranates.

Friday nights I thin gin
with your saliva.
Saturday afternoons
I play squash
with your sister
and let her win.

You think dinner
was expensive? I
bought our baby
at a higher price,
canned his laughter
last Mercury retrograde
when you promised the moon
that you'd never smile again.

Give me two reasons
to make you stay:

one for the time
you broke my jaw,

two for the time
I made you.

Fire in the Chart

Venus spins backwards. I stew. I
learn: choose my missed-call battles
with shadow books and Tarot. Rising
sign in Leo (moon in Aries), terrorizing

gender has become my pastime: maxi
dress over hairy chest, lipstick

used as blush to cover razor burn,
fairy rage at the next stranger's fingers
to brush abdomen, ass, nipple. Neck
noosed in his hands, snugly, I loosen

The Chariot reins this once. Twice. Three
days ago, I swore I'd be Queen

of Pentacles—demon lady tamed—little
doll with pins pricked through the heart,
the crotch. My clock clangs an hour ahead
of his. Venus went direct the day before

he said he'd come, but here
I am, still waiting.

My Bones Tell Me It Will Rain Soon

I placed three vertebrae
flat on the second step
of the back patio.

They came from a coyote
I found in the road
and fed to my finches.

This morning, the bones pointed
skyward, tips straight up, as if
pulled by invisible skeins.

Last September, when I could smell
death coming in the leaves of the trees,
you said to me, "It's not that you smell

like the sea. It's that your eyes,
wet, are the color of the city
sidewalk and I myself am a bird."

It hasn't rained in seven months.
I hate to say, darling, but you—you—
have stolen the storms from my fingers.

My mouth has dried
for the last time. *You*
will hurt, dear—

I tell you, this will hurt
us both. Watch the mirror
for cobweb cracks.

Watch its fragments
for blood between brows.
Hell hath some fury

left for you, my duck—
a queen turned to dust
and a faggot burned

in the wake of your wingspan.

Bed Death as Chrysalis

In a rainstorm, monarch butterflies in migration
fall dead in armies—fat, stained-glass snowflakes
wet with cloud-water, with their grandmothers’

shame. What about the migration of monarchs once
inspired sex instead of sleeping? The insect sense
of obduration? The three-generation journey? “*Shame*

*too much poetry has already been written about
butterflies,*” you’d say, hand in his waistband, with
wing-like sheets crusted over from the night before.

Now, hungover, you emerge from the shower gunning
as though from a cocoon—“*Fresh, glamorous, poisonous,*”
you’d once have said—to find he’s left for work already,

floating from the house like a butterfly’s ghost
that rises from the splatter of rain, grandmother
dying before the next generation takes flight.

Fantasmas

I will return to Madrid

y os veré en la plaza
 en Tirso de Molina
 (aunque no tendrá sentido
 for me to go there, with its churros
 poco ricos y camareros
 hardly gracious, hardly friendly
 and black plastic bags
 llenos de la orina de vagabundos)
 y tomaré un agua en el café,
 imaginando vosotros
 needing my jacket
 to warm your transparent form.

I will see you all in front of the ticket booth
 at the Museum of the Reina Sofia,
 pálidos y lejos aunque
 sabréis que os espero,
 que os busco,
 that I don't see you.
 Os veré
 mirándome,

but the midday glare
 y el frío seco de Madrid
 os ocultarán,
 I know,
 de repente.

Os veré en la Calle Fuencarral
 con un pendiente espiral
 como caracol.
 You will all blow
 in my ear
 como susurro, pero
 cuando os miraré,
 you will already be gone.

I will see you all
 in the Retiro Park
 flirting with me,
 french kissing me
 hace muchos años
 en la hierba, la sombra,

the crepuscular moment
 when we're sure
 que no hay nadie
 pero no nos sentimos seguros a pesar
 de que nadie nos vea.

But I will hide myself
 in the shadow
 of the statue of Lucifer, and
 os miraré allí también
 vestidos en negro
 como vuestro reino,
 and it will look good on all of you
 but not on me.

And again
 on Calle Fuencarral,
 ¡Dios mío!
 Con las putas
 alrededor,
 saying to me,
 ¿Oye, guapo,
 porque te vas
 solito?
 Y yo diré,
 “Well, it's that
 I'm seeing someone—
 I was seeing someone...”

Y no lo terminaré
 porque os veré
 in the mouth of the metro
 on gran vía,
 arriving late
 pero con sonrisa
 que no pide disculpa,

and we will fuck,
 y desapareceréis
 hacia la luz pálida
 del amanecer
 and the pale smoke
 of your cigarette,

and I will say that
 when you want to capture

un zarcillo de humo,
what you have to do is
inhalarlo,
agarrarlo,
y dejarlo salir
de los pulmones,
la puerta abierta,

the heart not yet broken.

Queer Migration Patterns

*“The ‘Red Death’ had long
devastated the country.”*

Flee. Again. Slowly.

And with such patience
drag your platform heels
desert to desert.

Written on stone, on
wall. Tortoise years
trail in the sand. An
hourglass. Figure:
Next town ’ll be

different. Grow. Older.

*“No pestilence had ever been
so fatal, or so hideous.”*

You. Red. Plague

bringer, judgment bringer,
hurricane bringer. Stones
between their fingers,
gold on your nails. False
lash squeezed between
thumb and forefinger,
leave those lizard men who
licked their lips at you behind
closed doors, no one but you as
witness—lizard men with bones
to throw, stones to pick. *Depart
from me, I never knew you.*

*“And one by one dropped the revelers
in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel.”*

Never. You. Old

granny, tortoise, monster,
hag and that which rhymes

with hag, with granny, get out
before they get you, slow
as the tortoise, strong as her
mother. Draw on her strength,
she who wanders a whole year
without a bite to eat, lives
a hundred years or more with that
world-shell on her back, leaves
her story in sand undisturbed

until the wind lifts the dunes, carries sand hills across tortoise
trails, erases them. Slow as glaciers, crawl to the next desert over.
“And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last gay.”