
2022

Spellbound: A Collection of Poems

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Recommended Citation

Alden Cullinane, Julie (2022) Spellbound: A Collection of Poems. *The Graduate Review*, 7, 7-15.
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/grad_rev/vol7/iss1/4

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Spellbound: A Collection of Poems

JULIE ALDEN CULLINANE
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Scorpio

Pt.1

I have forgotten
How governed I am
By water
How frequently I retreat
To her arms
When I can't breathe
When it's too loud behind my eyes/forehead
I turn up the steam/stream
Until my skin beats
Beets bright red
And screams
Heart slowing
In the thick humid air
The weight of soaked hair
Pulling my body down
Anchored
Crumpled
In fetal position
Tub floor

Chin to knees
Surrendering to the glorious
Pressure
Right now I am safe

Pt.2

I am ten
In my red bathing suit
Hamstrings tight
Tender sapling body
Ready to be shot from a bow
Chin to chest
Bowling to my queen
Waiting for the gun shot
Arms bent in prayer/adoration?
Respect.

Tracy next door is trembling
I am stone
It's a race
Please don't let me win
I am just dying
To be alone
To disappear
She beckons me

BANG!

My body
Is the cracked whip
Catapulted
From air to liquid

Glorious pressure
An embrace

Lips curl into smile
In the thick silence
There is sugar in my veins
She seals my ears
Slices my father's voice
Cleaved
My sight is gone
Yet I see
I am free

Embracing holy quiet
Uterine pressure
Seconds
Freedom

My fingers first
Break the surface
In Amen position

Spellbound

I KNOW that it is true that all the good and bad you experience while your bones and organs are still forming are forever a part of you. Your body. Your memory. The only way to undo it all is to die and come back again, try again next time, do better. But I am happy now. Who knows how many lifetimes that took. Something happened and I am free, one day I just shed my skin out of nowhere and my wild horses are racing. It might take me a while to figure out what it was but I've been

sitting in it for over a year now and I have just decided to be happy. And no, it wasn't that easy, but it was and It's sometimes horrible and terrible to bear happiness when it's a stranger but I am so happy, I have no reason not to be. I have more than any one woman should be allowed. And life is so, so short. No thing really means anything. The most precious thing I own is knowing that I could step right out of my current life right now if I wanted to like a pair of too-tight jeans and just move on tomorrow of my own volition and that all of that would be ok, and I would be ok, and my kids would be ok, and my husband would be ok, and I would be happy and that possibility is my treasure. I have flayed myself upon the rock of anti-domesticity. Trying not to be the one thing I hated. Yet now I find peace. When my fingers stitch a perfect hem. When I make bread from scratch and my boys smile with fat, buttered faces and cheeks filled with dough laugh and laugh and shove each other like boys/girls do. How I make sure every birthday present is so thoughtful for the intended person, or every present put under the tree with absurd attention to detail that absolutely no one will notice. That I can tell a fever not by the thermometer or back of my hand but by this gut bubbling, oily feeling in my stomach that something is wrong. How I know that saving up to buy one really great piece of clothing that will last you a lifetime instead of ten cheap ones is always the way to go. I write my name slowly and with a beautiful hand realizing there might have been a day where that was all she had. I know now that I am her and she is me and that her art flows through me in a different way than intended, but maybe she knew this all along. And that she meant me no harm in teaching me these skills, it was all she could do. If I must live with

all of this memory blood recycled and racing through
me then I will remember I was happy.

When I was 9 years old, my mother bought me a book
of spells for my birthday. I still have it on my bookshelf
at home, it is almost brand-new for being 3 decades
old. It has a red fabric cover and is titled, “A Book of
Love Spells” and I don’t think there was ever a happi-
er 9-year-old in the universe than there was that day,
and the days after that I locked myself in the bathroom
with the pink tiles, making potions out of toothpaste
and mouthwash and shampoo and salt and pepper, and
now I see how progressive that was for 1989 and a
9-year-old to have a book of spells in her backpack as
she headed off to Catholic school, so desperate to find
love that her mother knew that magic must be the only
way to find it.

And I was so happy

And I am so happy.

Four Little Birds

Memory is a tricky thing.
It’s like that tree in the woods
If you didn’t see it fall
Did it even happen?

Is there a word for choosing not to remember?
Suppressed memory?
Denial? No, not that.
People don’t like to name things

They are trying to forget
Or pretend never happened at all.

What if a monster
Lived in a house
With four little girls
And only two remember it?
Is it a half-memory?
Does it lose some power?

You can’t pay for vindication,
For truth, for freedom.
You can pay for 20 years of therapy
And even then
Your evidence comes to you
In an unlikely medicine.

A drunken text
Saturday night
Little sister
Suddenly.....
Thirty years late
Unable to deal with the memory of it
Weight of it, All of it,
Children, work, husband, job,
..... laundry...
Memory.

Redemption in Arial font.
“I remember.
I was there.
All of the times.
Every time.
Even when it wasn’t my turn.”

The youngest bird.
The protected one.
Assumed ignorant of violence.
Turned out to be the memory keeper
After all.

Sneaking out of the nest,
Peering around corners
In feety-pajamas
Like a secret camera
Recording it all
Peeing her pants in fear
For the older, stronger ravens.

What now?
With proof of words
Free little birds
Caged for too long.

Forget, and fly away.

Our Hawk: Michael's Poem

I was no good when you were a child
Loving you wholly, but feeling too much
All I had was love back then, not sanity or time

I worry about the dark parts of me
That might have seeped into those little, beautiful,
chubby hands

I am 40 now

Thank fucking Christ
The road most traveled is riddled with bombs
I don't recommend it

I am ok now with the God that is or isn't
There's nothing I can do about it, any of us can do
Any of us can do

There are days now when I wholly love myself
..... a magic I have only recently known
I see all my good intentions in your mirrored face
I see all who came before you

I worry so much about all that you've seen and felt
Did I tell you our family history too many times?
Did it scare you when I spoke spells at full moons
Made salt circles and sagged the house – only to protect you

I worry that you didn't see.....
Me sitting by your bed silently all night, on your tiny
blue plastic stool
watching your eggshell rib cage
Rise and fall as fevers ravaged you
Me, just praying to anything, helpless
As the green neon universe circled above us
From your star beam night light.

I was never the same after you came
No one tells you that parenthood
Is actually walking around permanently
with a giant, gaping, aching wound in
Your chest wide open chin to sternum
Just sucking in all the world's ache
You feel the world's evil

You hear it breathing just a hair's breadth away

You have your father's eyes

But you were blessed with that bright yellow
slash - through blue

Amber in your right iris a gift from your grandmother
The witches' kiss

Will you remember our hawk?

She lives in our woods or we in hers

When one of us spots her hunting

We yell for each other to "come as quick as you can!"

To the driveway, like the call of the wild

We fumble for our phones trying to capture her, never
succeeding

We stand together as a family and watch her swoop
full cyclone circles

Above us, our grace, fierceness, pride, protection

She as big as a human four-year-old

Our goddess

On a very rare, perfect day she will land on our deck
and stare and twitch her regal robot head at us with
predator severity.

The Privilege of Details

I worry about you lately.

Even reclined and relaxed in your favorite chair

I see you picking incessantly

At that scab

Below your right eye.

It's been almost a year now

You really need to stop

To let yourself heal.

I know all your details

As any woman who has ever loved anything does

Eyes like the Atlantic in Falmouth

A few days without shaving and your fangs come in
White arrows that grow

Down your chin from the corners of your mouth

My Titan for so long

Cowboy with broad shoulders

Your collar bone, my cradle of safety

Where the cotton candy smell of your skin

Cured anything, Everything.

But recently I've noticed,

You're not as tall as I thought you were,

Your shoulders are a bit sad.

You still smell the same.

We tip-toe around you

On the days when I can tell that the world was a little
too much

I know before you reach the end of the driveway.

I have a look now

That I flash the boys

It's a pact, it's a code

It's a warning,

I see the wheels spinning,

Things are changing,

I know things change.

It is hard to look.

Hard to imagine
A world where we no longer know the details.

To be fair.
I know for sure,
That I am not as tall as I used to be.
I measured.
Once, when we were oh so young and oh so tender
You told me, “No one walks like you,
Like a fearless ballerina, your shoulders are always
thrown back
and your head held high with confidence,
you are bullet-proof”
I found it so endearing that you never figured out
That I was faking it all along.
Trying to hide the damage.
Or maybe you did.
Eventually.
Either way,
I know for sure,
That girl is long gone too.
To be fair.

Called Home

Repeated frames
Hawk Flying
Grey blackness
Like old film
Until
Sun flickers
Into golden amber
Beyond the horizon

I’m driving
Stone pavement
Confusion
Slow motion

I cannot move
The house
I cannot scream
The house
I cannot get home
But I’m here

She is there
Naked
She does not touch me
Softness
She knows the way

It is Sunday
In the city
Beyond the horizon
We are late
I’ll miss church

But I am here

Stolen Goods

I have a favorite
Black leather motorcycle jacket
It’s one of those items of clothing
You own your whole life

Maybe even pass on
It's that once in a lifetime transformative piece
That turns you into yourself

Mine has a story
That I can't shake
.....And there are so many stories
But every time I throw that leather over my shoulders
I remember.....

I stole a woman's scarf once
At the gym
While she was in the shower
I never even saw her face
But I knew it was hers.
Judging by the looks of her purse
She would never miss it

I never liked scarves much or wore them
Yet there it was
On the shower bench next to me
Like it was meant to be mine
Calling out to me

I liked how it smelled, how light the fabric felt
Expensive lavender perfume and the softest cashmere
It was warm and thin at the same time
A pale purple-grey that I would never have purchased
On my own
Or chosen for myself
It was above my taste
At the time

I wore it for years

Bridgewater State University

It looked so good with my black motorcycle jacket
Everyone complimented me on it,
Not knowing it was stolen goods
It made me feel so feminine
Elegant, like someone else
Me, the boy of the family
Good at being a girl for once

I would hide my face in it
When it was cold, while I started my car
I could hide my face in it
When waiting to see the dentist
I'm immune to physical pain now
After many years of fixing my teeth

After a while, it started to look dingy
The color had faded to a dirty brown
It no longer matched my jacket
It just looked sad
I put it in a bag of clothes for donation
At the Goodwill
As if that would pay my penance.

Sit In It

Let Mozart play
It's useless.
It's just white noise.
So much pressure
Poison to my reason
Hot water to ice

All this beautiful music

Is hurting my brain.
I don't want to hear it.
It will rip your heart wide open
If you let it.
I'm not ready.
It's only Wednesday.

I'm that person
In yoga class, meditation time or whatever
That opens their eyes and peeks around
While everyone else sits butterfly style with their eyes
closed
Pretending to concentrate.
I was that kid
That lay on the yellow mat during nap time in pre-
school
And watched all the other kids sweetly fall asleep
With no cares in the world

Holy crescendos are breaking in my ears
And all I can think of
Is how much I miss my dog
And his big block head and silly smile.

I can't sit here
In this.
Take my tin can armor off
I'll come undone.

The problem could be
I love another.
Drums, bass, steel-guitars, stomps and yells
Rocks, rolls, my bones understand it.
Lyrics are the salve

To my brain on fire.
Maybe it will come back from the dead
Considering the state of the world these days
I heard global trauma begets artistic genius.
Rock stars, for sure.

HIStory

I am already
Bitumen and straw
I will speak no more
But to say my own name
To the annals of HIStory

I will die a woman,
Once a queen of queens
A mother besides
The Whore they say
They hunt my children now
As I sigh in a prison of my own building.
The pinnacle of the sun
The planets spoke to me, chose me, crowned me
And I fall. I have fallen.

From the only poison that ever can really fell an in-
vincible woman.
I have betrayed my people and my sex
For nothing.

They will scrape my names off the walls with chisels
A eunuch should have been the ruler
From the beginning of human time
They can at least remove from threat

The embarrassment of the weakness
Of the flesh
Or heart
Or familial line
And have more noble reasons for savagery, murder
and war.
Like revenge.

Stupid, stupidity not vanity
How careless. How basic.
I lowered myself to this
She who is the God.
I thought us the moon and the sun aligned.
The best of our species, how could there ever be
another?

Now I hear them coming
Those droles who fear the next life!
Idiots, armies made of muscle and lies
My mind is deeper than the sand
They would never let me live
Without suffering their own embarrassment
Men with small minds and big swords
Stomping stone in their straight lines.

I will laugh as they enter my tomb
My death was seen in the stars
I've always known how my death would come to me
That it would never be anyone else's but mine
Even though many would try
I was taught very young
Practicing poisons with doctors and priests
On prisoners and criminals
Harnessing my knowledge

Befriending the asps.
A backup plan.

I hear them now
I laugh harder and harder
They assume my humiliation
I stand tall and brave
As I raise my future
Up to my painted smiling lips.

About the Author

Julie Alden Cullinane is an “old” graduate student of English in creative writing at Bridgewater State University. She is a mom, poet, and writer. This collection of poems was written under the mentorship of Professor John Mulrooney in fall semester 2021. Julie Alden Cullinane plans to finish her master's degree in the summer of 2022 and then apply for a PhD program.