

Ordinary Magic

Alison Stone

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IV. The Emperor

Every life needs edges.
I protect you from the meadow's
wanton splendor,
passion running amok.

Lean against my law
the way a child lets go
into a father's arms. Pruned
and tethered vines bear stronger fruit.

Defy me
if the sobbing
of jailed innocents
grows louder than rain.

Kill me
when the names
for animals and sky
replace the animals and sky.

Knight—Prometheus Examines his Motives

It wasn't only pity,
though they huddled thin-skinned
and shivering, gnawing raw food,
while animals got feathers,
wings, speed, fur.
Nor to show my brother a fool—
He does that well enough
without help.
I had no plan.
The torch stood unguarded
while earth froze; winter's first
flakes began to fall.
My hands reached and grabbed.

Shackled to this rock
whose crevices and mica-flecks
I know better than my own heart,
I search for understanding,
want my reasons revealed the way
my liver shows itself to the probing beak.
Was I noble?
Scapegoat? Savior? Chump?
Who knows why a god
or man does anything. Punishment
brings no insight, just a dull,
pain-induced detachment from the body
which muddles everything further.
Mornings now when the eagle approaches—rapt,
unstoppable—for a second
while he seeks the spot to penetrate,
his absorption feels like love.

Amazon—Persephone After

True, the first time I went willingly. What girl
could resist his leather pants

and rock star swagger, switchblade
in his pocket, my name

quivering between his lips? How better
to escape Mom's pretty vines

than to sway in a poured-on miniskirt
across hell's endless

dance floor while stretched skin
drums throbbed? My gut burned from pomegranate

juice and vodka. The goth house band keened.
Match light flickered on his skull ring

as he whispered smoky promises and blackened
bottoms of bent spoons. His touch

wiped out every ache or question.
My straight-A vocabulary whittled down to *more*.

Soon my dependence
angered him. He gestured

at my puffy eyes and flat hair.
Turned away with a slap.

Mother hauled me home.
A month in rehab, then a shopping spree

for high-necked shirts and
frilly dresses. Good-girl life

to slip back into like the cloak
I dropped on my way down.

Triggered by a song,
a whiff of sulfur—

in any season, broken
ground inside me opens. Memory

drags me back.
Put off by my pink

cheeks and filled-out limbs, the shades
won't know me now.

I try to tell my mother what I saw there.
How I lived. *All that's over. Let it go.*

My friends steer the conversation
back to fashion.

4. Sweets

I love you like an anorexic teenager
loves chocolate. All boundaries and mastered
greed. Hips sharp, she's memorized
the recipes for Devil's Food, Black Forest—
beats butter and eggs, spoons batter
into greased tins. She won't try a bite, her empty
fork aimed at God.

Vulnerable to you, I might become
one of those moon-faced women, wounded
and obvious, spilling out of a loose dress.

Some nights when we hold each other,
my clenched teeth relax. I taste
how it would be to love you
like a glutton guzzles milkshakes, gobbles
slabs of syrup-drizzled cake. Dizzy
with sugar. All those bony
years of discipline undone.