



# *Nuclear Gardens*

*by Beatrix Lee*

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For Claire and Alex

## tag it

who's in your estate tax tag  
who's in your praying mantis tag  
who's in your claustrophobia tag  
who's in your downtown girl tag  
who's in your slingback pump tag  
who's in your crab nebula tag  
who's in your apotheosis tag  
who's in your devil wings tag  
who's in your classical liberalism tag  
who's in your synesthesia tag  
who's in your research and development tag  
who's in your dick pic tag  
who's in your alternate reality tag  
who's in your kitchen table tag  
who's in your french immersion tag  
who's in your deep vein thrombosis tag  
who's in your carhart catharsis tag  
who's in your monster mash tag  
who's in your heavy hitter tag  
who's in your compassion protocol tag  
who's in your cardboard kingdom tag  
who's in your dream suppressant tag

## **pink notes**

Pink  
Notes  
Level of  
Discrepancy  
My wrath is  
Great but don't  
Underestimate my yawn  
Here there be life  
Without end, no true  
Relief yet  
Plausible  
Deniability  
Works  
Time

The  
Chaperone  
Is ill and the  
Party is canceled

## **dinner party**

The wall glimmers with static like  
Writhing kudzu  
Psychic emanations of an entire 10-person middle class dinner party,  
Every maladjustment and calamity present  
Deep radiation poisoning makes  
The green in your eyes  
Really pop  
Something with buttons and tongues  
Lunges from a pocket dimension with  
Prophecy and evasion  
It's interesting what they did with the forgotten

## **Houses**

Houses that are too clean make me nervous  
Houses with white walls make me nervous  
Houses with too few corners make me nervous  
Houses with no knick-knacks make me nervous  
Houses with no pictures make me nervous  
Houses with open concepts make me nervous  
Houses with too many bathrooms make me nervous  
Houses too close to other houses make me nervous  
Houses without basements make me nervous  
Houses with cameras and microphones make me nervous  
Houses with housekeepers make me nervous  
Houses with fountains make me nervous  
Houses with dishes that match make me nervous  
Houses with too many people make me nervous  
Houses with too few people make me nervous

## **fairy tale story time**

They began as three: the swordsman, his lover the barbarian, and the Machine (note: the Machine had formerly been flesh until he spurned the corporeal form for an upload to wires and claws and points sharp and blue). They roamed the stars and the depths of sky

Run away, adventure, bleed

The swordsman blushes and the barbarian roars "I can handle myself!"

And he doesn't hear or doesn't care and becomes the all-destroying Shield, protection in burned husk

And the swordsman sighs with schoolgirl pink

The three are joined by a demon too stupid to be left, so demon pet it is

More arms than should in that places that shouldn't

And a mouth full of teeth and dreams and red

Later still came the warrior women, the angel and the ghost

Alive longer than logic

And could defy it all the same

Doomed and cursed and drinking it in like wine

A group of wanderers, angels, grotesque and wanting

Angles and scars from fires and fathers

By trigger or blade they take their own and demand no answers

The skull box rests with the warrior women, as they opened it once amidst purple and grief and out poured soot and glass and vellum

Voices razor with ire

Ready to damage the veil

### **sky disturbance**

She looks in the water and  
Sees the sky disturbance  
Hair wet, dress wet, mouth wet  
She dreams the sun forth and  
The water flows

The sky disturbance  
Flings itself into the desert  
And dies  
Many flail and burn and  
There is much gnashing of teeth  
How could he be so careless?

The men see the sky disturbance  
Tumble into their sands  
They cautiously approach to  
Warily rescue  
Gazing skyward, more convulsions  
And the men point and quake

### **Drano**

Some dreamless social sleep  
unencumbered by light or dark or colors but  
don't bring them near  
they might sting to see  
and you don't wanna hurt no more  
and everyone thought the bed moved by itself  
it was you at least you got some rise outta them  
they need to feel now and then else  
they'll gunk up with pain and hair  
grab the Drano and  
pour it in.

### **teeth breaking**

I look at him and I can feel my teeth breaking  
Hot as magnetic bone  
I hate how well I respond to externally determined structure

Touch him and let his sweat cool  
On my fingertips as I desperately try  
Not to lick it off

He flashes a smile and  
All my floors begin to crumble  
Like termites or a bad foundation

## i was a gay high schooler

1

Jared  
Shortest of all  
Demon smile and no knowledge  
Obviously gay  
“But he’s a Jehovah’s Witness!”  
Please

2

Chris  
Football player  
Typical, I know  
He used kindness  
And that goddamn smile  
To get my help in  
Chemistry  
I obliged with a grin and a blush  
Spoke to me like you’d talk to  
A human  
Liked to knit

3

Jeremy  
Goddamn football players  
Idiot girlfriend  
Typical, I know  
Too much hair gel  
Not enough hair

4

T.J.  
Lean and taut  
Legs like a vice  
Found out and was  
Flattered  
Probably could have blown him  
If he hadn’t gotten his license  
Revoked

### 3-card draw

Ruin and ruination  
Spilled possessions and spilled mail,  
A federal offense  
Dead but not dead  
Bled out and blue  
But holding on with a grimace and some rust  
Or do the swords  
Keep the blood in?

Shattering golf clubs into trees  
Yeah, it's a mess, but  
The lizards love it and  
The lizards regenerate  
Crooked staff still  
Pink sky and blue water  
Roughed up but ready

Patchwork organ  
Where do the veins lead?  
Heart suspended in space  
Wounded and seeping  
Hanging from willow branches in  
Turbulent skies  
Exploratory surgery may be necessary  
To save your life

## **hinges**

The seed disappeared  
The door won't come back  
The horizon, the surprise  
Cease being without absence,  
Without air  
Open the door without  
A mountain, a hill,  
A fruit, a witch

### **a spell for finding a gig as a trans woman**

Under the light of the new moon  
Make a poultice of  
Foundation, obsequiousness, half-truths,  
Survival lies, and a cute outfit  
Smear this across your body  
Until it settles into you and you soak up the night  
And your pores invite the necessities of the devil and you feel  
Small and tragic  
Feel bad about yourself for the next three days  
Play it close to the vest and the chaps  
The cards are all there but you can't see them  
The game has yet to begin and we can't  
Let you cheat  
It wouldn't be fair to the others  
The others who've worked  
So damn long and hard  
To fuck you over and use your back on the way  
You make for a nice step stool  
Or end table  
Are they hiring for that?  
I'd be good furniture  
Varnished wood and upholstery  
Poultice makes a home  
Squatter's rights, I suppose  
No one evicts, all stay  
Bleeding in the pool  
The dead  
Trembling before God  
But they don't know  
The right incantation  
Revealed from books long burned  
In libraries long buried  
Carry stones from from sea to bay  
Stones heavier than  
Your desire for stability or wealth  
You'll never be alone with her,  
The bleeding mother  
Feeds you with her red  
Always more  
If need be.

### **smooth & tight**

Decompose, recompose  
The snake value of you  
Your forked tongue and cerulean coils  
Hug me until my ribs  
Hurt and that might be  
Enough to last me through the desert  
Of Leviathan and the Great Outer  
Host and if I make it  
Out the Other side  
You'll shed your skin and  
I'll make a robe of it  
Your chiffon scales slide  
Along mine and you  
Tell me I'm pretty  
You always tell me I'm pretty  
When I'm wrapped up in you  
You're so blue and your  
Mouth so red that your  
Fangs gleam like the moon  
On a lake

## **crystal**

Spy in glass, in dust  
The number of the secret lost  
Shadow of the wall,  
Shattered in the air,  
In nothing  
Thief of the star, pent  
In night poetry

### **phoenix time**

Naked body glides through water  
toward the knife like a compass  
pointing to a magnet

The immortal, horrible mother  
Invisible and all-consuming fire  
at the edge of the cosmos

Amiable enemies  
Does the sense of smell exist  
on the astral plane?

A metaphysical fragrance  
An extraterrestrial perfume and the focused radiance  
of a galactic inferno

It's all angles and feelings  
Only special kinds of universes can spring up  
in the ashes left on the heavenly pyre

## **fall forever**

I love to visit, but I hate to travel  
Follow me inside  
I'll show you  
A sky of fire  
Ripe with stars  
Traverse galaxies  
Let go and I'll fall forever  
Abyss ringing with a conspiracy of serpents  
Writhing in time  
They bite with teeth of sky and depth  
Puncture deep  
Like a woman of vague morals

## **2nd degree love**

The ties that bind or those that strangle?  
Don't touch it if it hurts.  
It can't be that bad but  
What if it is?

The shell hardens until it  
Falls off  
But don't touch it until  
The mass does move  
Twitches and tingles  
A blob of ineptitude.

Florals and more florals  
Doubtful of any such thing as enough  
And fractions of space and  
Election of time  
Time, not love, will keep us together.

In the pink book are written  
Many names of the women who  
Came before and threw themselves  
On the pyre of love  
How they burn bright  
With such color and hue.

## Machine hum puncture

Machine hum puncture  
A green spill, a seepage  
like antifreeze but  
neon sign yellow  
Wire walled filled with lights,  
red eyes with no face shift and  
melt into static snow between the channels  
Machine touch and hammer  
Degrade with permanent use, edges smooth  
Electric shocks like thimbles,  
protective and pockparked  
Stimulation under loose skin,  
where they give cats shots  
Machine track the nerves  
back to the source like cables  
thick and snaking, buzzing with sound and dirt,  
caked in blood and frosting  
Too pretty to eat, too hungry not to  
Machine hears your hunger and approaches  
with grace and hesitancy,  
like it's gonna ask you to prom and you dance and dance,  
spinning like a plane crash  
before it's even left the ground

## **Nuclear Gardens**

Nuclear gardens where marigolds  
remind you of mushroom clouds and  
sunflowers bright and celestial  
Blooms igniting in the heat

I wanna be a cartoon frog, all mouth  
stomach, arms, legs  
Maybe I could eat the bomb before  
anyone else can get to it

I put it in my mouth  
but it doesn't dissolve in time and now  
I can't stop spilling and spraying  
fire and radiation from ear, nose, and throat

## happy ending

Terror abounds as the flesh of the sky  
rends open like  
a chainsawed ribcage

Blood drips from the stars  
into my eyes and runs  
into my mouth

My tongue registers  
the end of everything and it tastes like  
pennies and raspberry and naphthalene

The neighbors start screaming and  
don't stop until  
their throats are hoarse and bloody

We watch as fire  
seeps from the lake and makes its way  
through buildings like fingers through hair

The city burned,  
the demons came,  
and we've never been happier