

Rebecca Hazelton: Poems



Dr. Rebecca Hazelton is this year's Wilkinson Poet and will be visiting SEM on Friday, April 12th. Dr. Hazelton is an award-winning poet with four published books of poetry and has had work published in *The New Yorker*, *Best New Poets*, and *The Best American Poetry* anthology series. You can learn more about Dr. Hazelton at her website: <https://www.rebeccahazelton.com>.

WE'LL FIX IT IN POST

Please ignore the leopard. The leopard is a continuity issue we're aware of. We're aware the lead actor has one leg in the first scene and two legs in the second. There are issues with setting in the third. There is no possible way the light across the kitchen table could be that golden, or the lead actress could look so—the notes here say bereft?—when learning of her husband's affair. The affair feels cheap. Let's give him cancer instead. No. Keep the affair, and give *her* cancer. We'll begin with a close-up on the shunt in her chest. So brave. Her first tattoo a black pinprick for radiation. Now let's have that golden light again—can she be a blonde? Get makeup on this—then pan out to the other sad sacks in the chemo chairs. Then farther. Let's take a tour down the hospital halls. I want suffering front and center, but clean. No bedpans. No vomit. A few marijuana jokes here. Maybe a wacky doctor. Then let's have the lead actor show up to say he's sorry; he's so sorry that he's had a leg removed to show solidarity. I think we can make this work. Let's cut in the leopard stalking the halls but keep it clear of the children's wing. The leopard isn't a metaphor for death. There's nothing stalking us. This is a standard three-act structure. The craft table is always replenished. Everyone here is union.

WHY I DON'T BELIEVE

I knit a baby out of spare cells and now
that baby isn't a baby anymore but a baby boy
but a boy walking. His male cells star my brain
and make him always a part of me. In the morning
he doesn't want me to pick him up but wants his father.
He shies away from my arms. I am in an unequal relationship
with a toddler. In the afternoon, my son lies down
on a large piece of paper and I try to trace him
with a crayon. I read on the internet
that children like you to draw spooky copies of them.
We never get much past the head before he laughs
and rolls away. I want him to be still so I can steal
a silhouette of his body right now this very second before
he's someone else. He gestures for me to trace my hand
and I do. He looks at the green crayon tracing, at my hand,
then his own. A copy, I say and he shakes his head. No.

Aphrodite's Last Acolyte

Rebecca Hazelton

You skimmed in on a pearl pink shell, left us bobbing
in the wake of your breasts. There was no party

until there was you. In the wings we all
snapped to — readying your next costume change,

topping off your drink, even pulling a disapproving face
when you needed that, too. One guy just blew

the wind so your hair was always off your shoulders.
Love means never having to say you're sorry

love means saying sorry so often. I'm sorry
I can't say aloud your real name, curled in my mouth

like a mint leaf, crushed between my gentle teeth.
Your false name, the one you gave to me, to anyone

who had hands open to receive, pushes out
from my mouth like a swollen tongue.

Love Poem for What It Is

There's nothing in the world that loves you
more than the space you already take up.
There's nothing in the world that won't
forget you faster than you forgot
the last person that stepped out from your life.
When the cat reaches up
one needled paw to drag down a book
from your desk, then another,
that's not love—that's dominance.
When you reach up your hand and try to wheedle
someone else's to hold it, that's love
dominating you. There's no word for loving more
than you should, just the feeling of excess,
as if your tongue burst in a rash of red sequins,
as if everyone can see your stutter in the air,
staccato *love you, love you*, and nothing in the world
standing in that space to receive it.

Handsome Man

Rebecca Hazelton

Handsome man who rides in to save me, I'm ready
for all manner of rewarding. I have kept
this pressed handkerchief scented with the most precious
of exotic oils in the fold of my sleeve. I'm going
to drop it. I'm going to thank you so hard — oh, oh,

no, I did not mean — of course, of course, certain standards,
protocols, I only meant — Absolutely.

Let's start again. Handsome man
who rides in to save me, I'm ready
to step down from this post to which a dragon

has tied me, despite a total lack of opposable thumbs,
and swoon into your arms like this,
see how limp? I've been working on my lax
muscle tone, I've been flexing my can'ts
and helpless cries, just last month I

couldn't escape from a blanket I awakened under,
it took hours, that's how good
I damsel. Handsome man who rides in to save me,
I have been watching you from atop this hill
as you fought your way past that wild boar

which may have been a hog and that wall of thorns
which may have been a hedge, and that witch
who wanted you to be kind to old women but you showed her
what was what. You have conquered young and old,
and my heart, handsome man who rides in to save me,

you've truly — oh, I see, this is more of a platonic
sort of rescue, you're more in it for the prestige.

You and The Black Knight have a competition — uh huh.

Right. Ok. No, it's fine. It's fine.

Handsome man who rides in to save me — look, I get it,

there's no need to be a dick about it, Handsome man who rides
in to save me, not all of us were born pretty. Some of us
have had to cultivate a personality. Uh huh. Uh huh. Sure.

I bet she said that. I bet you've got a lot of high ratings
from other princesses. You know what? You know what,

handsome man who rides into save me? I think I'm just going
to stay here. Yeah. With the dragon.

I'm just going to swoon by myself. Look at me

swooooooooooning. Yeah. Like that. Like that? That's right.

That's right. Ride away. That's what you're good at. Ride away!