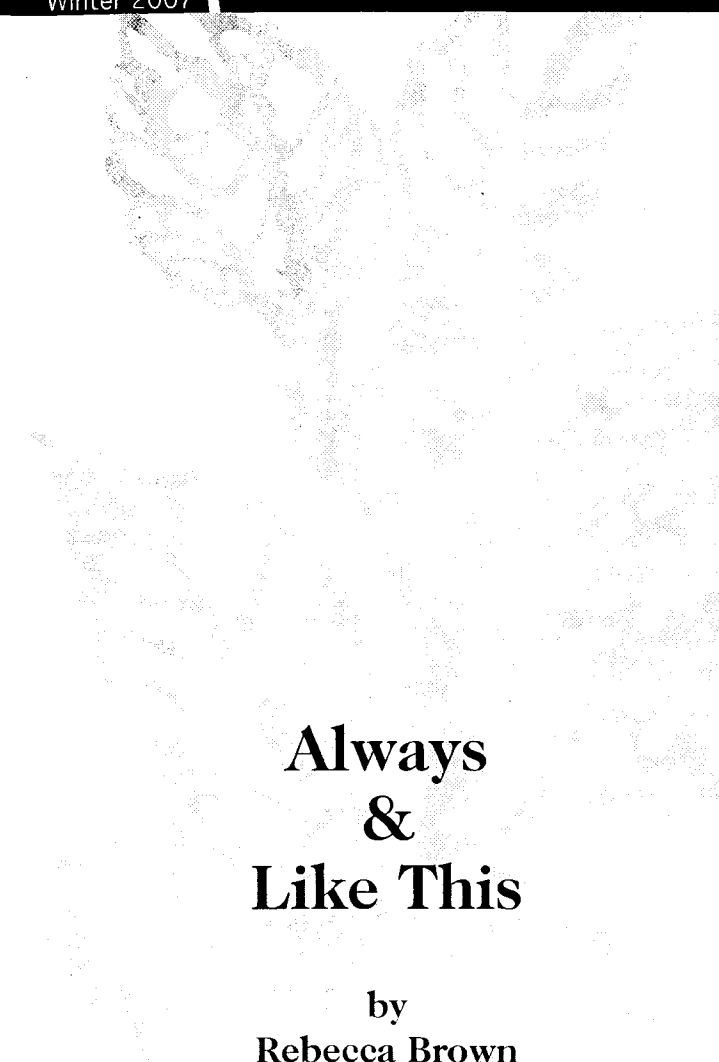


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Always & Like This

by
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Belladonna Books

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deadly nightshade, a cardiac and respiratory stimulant, having purplish-red flowers and black berries

Always

“...unrepeatable events inhere in us”

- *David McLeavey*

always some of it is part of longing
always for the absence of an other
always to remember it is over
always to undo the end of then

always to imagine her returning
always oh as if she had not gone
always to replace what was an only
always though it cannot ever not

If I look back
If I could see
If I If I cannot

If always I am trying to return
Could I redo as if she was not gone

So I attempt
as if I could
remember what was not

If I If I
but one cannot
nor I

I recreate a thing in which
she is not gone and
what then happened did not then
and won't and never will

Is there is a spell a trick a thing you have to do to prove you mean
it? That you would do whatever could to go back there or get it
back? Is there a way?

No harm in trying. So:

- 1) her face in the glare of the light in the hall
- 2) her face by the window. the light
- 3) her mouth in the pause before she spoke
- 4) the shape of the mouth, the teeth, the shine on her lip
- 5) the time she said as a joke, "I must love you and leave you,"

not knowing that or how I would remember

6) the time she was sick but she said to come over anyway
because I was leaving so I took a cab. Her house smelled like
toast and her son wasn't home. Her face was pale. Sweat on her
forehead. She wanted to give me something but hadn't been able to
get it but she would send it. Her hands were either cool or warm,
were either dry or moist. But there they were. White. As was her
mouth.

I think I remember that as I left that I did not dare look back at
her.

But maybe I did.

Years later I went back to her.

7) We went outside to take a walk. The air outside was cool,
the earth was wet, there were apples on the ground and the smell
of something mulchy, sweet, beginning to turn to rot. The sky was
gray, the air was wet and there was her open mouth.

Years later I went back to her.

8) Sitting under a tree - it was summer by then - and she put
a leaf around my finger and laughed and said it was a wedding ring
and I must wear forever

9) Me looking back at her as she left, her not looking back at me

10) Her voice on the phone. The brown marks from old
splatters of rain on the window of the booth I was calling from

10) Her face on the platform. "I didn't think you would come
back."

But of course I did.

Years later I remain with then.

There is in the machine the head the thing, the something
whatever it is, the heart or viscera or guts or nerves, there is a
glitch a skip a rat a dog that keeps running and twitching, chasing

itself and spinning and spinning around itself, in a circle, an oblong, some closed shape or system, around and around itself, knocking itself around, chasing its tail or hitting its head against itself or against a wall, whatever is handy. Or maybe said better a knife a hook a blade that's cutting and scratching and picking at itself, like a scab, doing it over and over to itself, rending itself, tearing it out, gnawing it and itself, apart. Maybe I did, I do. Of course I do.

But the thing keeps alive whether it wants or not (which thing? Either. Both) except it always wants, want is not the problem, there is enough of want, there is too much, it's just that what it wants isn't possible, is in fact, impossible. What it wants is not the right thing, or even a thing that it might have, it wants what it cannot.

So: kind of it wants it over with, but also it doesn't because if it did, really did, it could be easily (knife, rope, gun, pills, whatever, all easily accessible). Maybe it doesn't want that, all of it, over with, maybe because it still has this stupid, stupid idea that things might change, might yet, through some miraculous miracle, go back or come back, whatever, it gets harder and harder to keep these things straight anymore, to how it was years earlier, as if like unto a going back to then with the single those hugely significant difference, this time, that this time, how it was, how it is, this time, I will make stay forever as it should have stayed then forever always.

Like This

I'S LIKE lying underneath a bag of concrete, it's a big bag, huge, as big as you, no, bigger, it goes past your head, the end of the bag kind of folding down over the end of your head, the other end over your feet, so you are totally, totally covered, you couldn't get out if you tried, if you could try, but you can't even try, you can't do anything but lie there underneath it and hope even though it's stupid to, it's hopeless, it will just go away.

It's premixed concrete, loose and granular, like sand like that black stuff in horror movies, so it shapes itself, inside the bag, to you, to the shape of you lying on the ground beneath it, where it holds you down - you cannot move - your back smashed flat against a shiny feeling floor - metal? marble? stainless steel? Whatever it is it's really cold. Like ice like you can almost feel your skin beginning to freeze, and almost see your skin turn blue, your lips, your face pale then bluish, purplish. You'd be chattering, your teeth and arms and legs except of course you can't move beneath that concrete bag, not even enough to shiver, almost not even enough to breathe except you can, at least, alas, do that, you're almost forced to, though partly you wish you couldn't or weren't, would be allowed to stop, to get it over with already, stop messing around, just stop. But something, something, someone, Who?, yourself, someone outside you, cruel or kind, won't let you, no, not yet.

Maybe the floor isn't smooth like that, like marble or metal or steel or glass, but rough, uneven, scratchy, with bits of rock and stone and stick and glass, not smooth this time but broken, sticking up, poking up into to you, into your back that's pressed down hard against it, crushed, but not to death, alas, not yet, beneath that bag of concrete like that's holding you there, holding you down so you can't move. Poking and hard, uncomfortable, bruising against your shoulders, your spine, your shoulder blades, the small of your back like that time you had to lie on the ground pressed down on the ground in the woods and you couldn't move, well not enough to make any difference, and wished you couldn't breath but did and kept breathing, against your will, until whatever was done was done and then you were released, for that time being, and you could stand, but not for long, and did but then fell down again, alone this time. You didn't want to move again but it was different this time, you actually slept and then at some point, god knows how, there was light, morning sky, it was a morning and you woke up in it and brushed what you could away from you and slowly stood then walked, walked away but you remembered it, everything, in your back.

It's like that concrete bag that concrete building that concrete thing the lead suit like you have to wear when you get an x-ray, only this one is full body, head to toe and past, and it's not temporary, it's permanent and it's not to "protect" you (har har) it's just there, sitting on top of you like it's never going to move.

It's like that concrete bag is not only itself, with its weight pressing down on you, but there is something else, around it, or on top, maneuvering it as if to press it down harder, as if it really desires and intends and is designed to crush you - but it isn't! It's only a tease!

It's also like there's something inside you, in your blood or skin, like you yourself, your body is a bag of sand, of concrete, sinking you, weighing you, sucking you down. Like you are trying to walk but your legs are sand. Like if you tried to open your eyes, which you can't, but just for argument's sake, and then when you open then they open against sand, scraping your eyeballs, the insides of your eyelids, everything sandy and dry and scrape-y and on the one hand you are crying or trying to cry, wet tears as if to lubricate the sand you are opening your eyes into but you can't even do that, it's all dry, scraping dry.

Maybe the floor isn't as solid as I thought. Maybe it's more like dirt and you can, your body can be pressed down into it, and it is, the shape of your body, the back of your legs, your ass, your poor stupid head, being pressed into the dirt, the earth, the crap beneath you by that bag of concrete that bag of lead of rocks, then it's not even just a bag of something on you, it's what you breathe, what keeps you "alive," for want of a better word, it's the air you are supposed to breathe that's made out of lead, everything, or concrete or plutonium, whatever, at this point the specific really doesn't matter any more, just the fact that whatever it is it weighs

you down, it lays across you like a lead coat like concrete boots like breathing lead in your lungs. You can't stand up, can't stand, almost can't breathe —

Oh, there's a thought! If it is crushing that much, your ribs ought to break then your lungs will collapse and you won't be able to breathe and then, why then it's just a matter of a few short minutes! That's something to look forward to. But it doesn't work that way, dammit. Oh no, the concrete bag stays there, as big and dull and stupid and unmoving as ever and ever, but it never actually shits or, as they say, gets off the pot. Oh no, it just stays and stays, pressing hard enough and long enough relentlessly forever-almostly to make you miserable but never enough to actually fucking end you. Just stays and stays with all these fine point, esoteric, miniscule variations of interest to and/or sparking the awareness of only the most discerning. Smooth or flat or gravelly or glasslike, cold or hot. Or middling. Or fixed or shifting, slippery, stuck, gray as a tomb, bright as a that kind of light they use in interrogation cum torture scenes we have become so used to seeing in movies and in life, mixed up and constant, fleeting, fixed, eternal, transient, all of it, and so on and so on, etc.

The bag is covering you from your head to - well - for present purposes the head of the head alone suffices. Your head is covered so you can't hear, not anything, not anything except the beating of the blood inside your ears, the rattling around of thoughts inside

your brain, which never, no matter how it it gets, slow down, poor rats, not anything, well, maybe, maybe you can, because you think you do, maybe, but is it just inside yourself, the heart-healthy conscious rodents of your brain doing their cardio on their treadmill, running circles and circles inside you, or is it actually a sound from somewhere outside? Someone outside? Is somebody outside, down the hall perhaps, or in another cell or room, or tied down to another bed or pressed beneath another bag crying out? And if so, is she crying out for pity? Mercy? You? Or only crying.

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