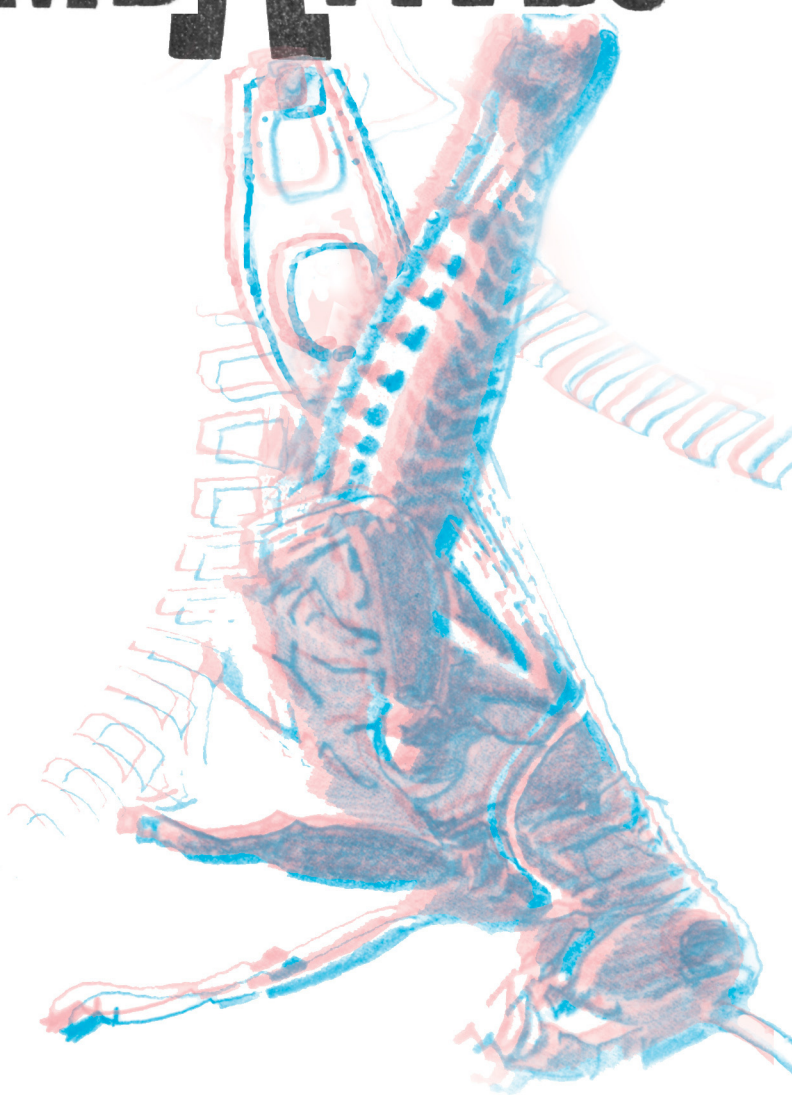


# COMBATIVES

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*About the Author:* Juliet Cook is a poet and the editor of Blood Pudding Press, which specializes in poetry and 'artsy little misfit offerings.' The current offerings are available via [www.BloodPuddingPress.etsy.com](http://www.BloodPuddingPress.etsy.com) — including Juliet's new chapbook, 'Planchette.' A few of Juliet's latest publication credits are 'WOMB,' 'DIAGRAM,' and 'Prick of the Spindle,' which recently nominated her for a Best of the Net 2007 Award and a Pushcart Prize. Her blog is called CandyDishDoom.

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## **Mechanical Pencils Vs. Felt Tip Pens**

She's one of those bunnies who spits  
poison darts; hangs out with a nefarious gang  
of platypussies. She speaks with interspersed  
fricatives, hisses, and swirlicious hums.  
Some say a frosting nozzle is nothing  
like a pen, but she thinks that depends on the hue  
and texture of the contents. How much pressure  
she exerts. How long she waits for it to cool.  
Her root cellar is filled with experimental cakes,  
tiny yet ornate scripts, hybrids of tulip bulbs and red beets.

Bedazzled by an iron-on unicorn exhaling flames,  
her pink hoodie is all the rage; covers the mundane fact  
she doesn't literally have virulent spurs built into her ankles.  
Literality is overrated when a bunny has pizzazz;  
when she has a vocab like spiked effervescence.  
'Everybody's doing it,' she mordantly says, replacing the segmented lead  
with a flowing purple ink cartridge. She sparkles and surges.  
She pops chocolate eggs with her curlicued heat.  
She curses up a sugary hailstorm; cursives  
violet venom like violent candy.

## Little Death Scenes

once again her eyeglass lens disappears into a snow angel.  
this happens at night. when she gets on her knees, she feels  
pinched nipples, little rosebuds, a garland around her neck  
pulling her breath taut. against her chest, the cold fur.  
then the small clutch of albino marmoset, the shudder,

the glistening muff. she releases a plume of steam,  
flares nostrils like a petite sleigh ride steed.  
this happens at night. when she dreams the pink insides, she hears  
pearlescent canals, lobes that rose when nibbled into lace.  
how the frothiness stiffens and peaks like meringue,

adorned by exotic fruit. the chokecherry is the darkest one,  
he whispers in her ear and she is almost ready to levitate.  
the pinkies she thought were numb begin to tingle, invisible piano wire  
pulling her fingers taut. as she rises up, the nerve endings singe  
then flutter, then freeze. her split ends breed icicles.

this happens at night. when she dreams she is a whooping cough, wrapped up  
in a pretty little handkerchief, fine teeth lurking underneath.  
he unbinds her mouth, wet petals pour out, eyelash lace drips and she faints  
into the ache of consumption. sweet monkey, sweet angel face,  
sweet egg whites and caster sugar whipped into featherweight.

she floats just above her own imprint, her tiny glittering cave.  
her head a panoramic sugar egg with byzantine tunnels,  
pink figurines, a secret room devoted to pavlova,  
adorned by doll's eyes. so stiff she could be zipped into a garment bag  
for the buttons on an empty party dress to flirt with blue fingers.

## Spilled Milk

My socks smell of spoiled milk.  
My socks smell of burnt chocolate.  
Of camphor. Of calumny. Of busted-open lockbox.

I am littered with prepositions.  
With vague premonitions. With dead kittens  
muffled in silk pillowcase. Mottled clumps.

These legs used to be so malleable,  
but now I can't stop tensing. I can't stop scratching,  
spitting fingernail clippings in the butter dish.

I used to hold and be held, but now black holes  
explode out empty sockets,  
suck in such fearsome debris.

Why do they have to keep dripping?  
Why won't they just curdle into heavy cream,  
then clot, dry up, scab, fall off?

I am kneaded thin as a crusty tart with adulterated filling.  
I am a dirge of aborted purrs, dragging fur out  
from under a serriform tongue.

Flinging filthy burrs and milky eyes  
wet my bed. The chandelier is a shimmering suspension  
of spiked copper and dangerous glass just waiting to fall.

What happened to my nice dry socks leading up  
to a bonfire of crinoline? Now I'm some kind of bedraggled,  
dispirited flapper who would pose in a dead kitten stole,

get stuck in the wrong position. With my wet slit showing.  
With ballet flats sodden. With dazzling crystal dangling  
high above these soon-to-be-emptied-out eyes.

Something lapped me up until my buttercream was buttermilk,  
until my buttermilk was skim milk,  
until my skim milk was cracked glass milk

bottles spilling caterwauls and no lids, no way to contain.  
I try to muffle it in silk. I try to sleep with it every night  
except I can't sleep. I lie underneath it and wait.

## Vicissitude

1.

Like you warned you would, you left.  
After your opaque fake fur words dyed  
my hair gothic dark. Blue-black postiche  
like a leech reflected in a spoon.  
Stylized swoon & sucking down

maraschino cherries from the vessel.  
Lick red syrup from lips. Act as if  
I'm not contrived as I puncture  
an inflamed globule, sweetly suspended  
by glazed stem. Dazed gaze down--  
a pin-prick-shaped stain of pink sugar water  
sticks to my shift. Such a dilettante tincture.

We lie beneath a spangle-shiny, sickle-tooth moon.  
Your fingernails scar my back.  
Your hissed whispers arch me.  
Before my tongue bleeds, your mouth slithers down  
my neck. Succulent stem. Kinky dilation  
of eyes. A scene so glossily nebulous

until you end it, I transcend it, you pretend  
it never happened. We morph.

2.

You could be affixed to a pedestal  
in a museum of defiled relics, waxy  
like artificial flowers. Rubber Calla Lily  
purple as the swollen throat of an exotic monster.

I could claim I have never been the same,  
since you. Say my hair grew translucent roots,  
so frail. Say I skulked so pale and draggy  
in bedraggled housecoat. A series of narrowed eyes,  
errant sighs, inverted arches. Craggy hunchback of ill repute .

The truth is you recalibrate  
from fake vampire to corporate drone.  
An updated version of the walking corpse in which  
seduction is overthrown by the methodical whirring blades  
of paper shredders and facsimile machines.  
A secret photocopy from your past life is folded  
into the silk lining of your sharper image suit.

The truth is I am mutable before & after you.  
Luminous with aspirations to woo my own  
numen. A black cherry beats like a heart  
through the tiny bone-cage nestled in an owl pellet.  
The pulse of my song so bittersweet, creepy, toothsome...



## **Anecdotal Evidence: A Collage**

Blood-streaked petals wilting around a center still sticky  
with bright pollen.

Three tiny pots scraped clean  
of lip balm, one with a rubicund tint.  
A ruby-stained cotton swab tweezed from grimy sinkhole.

A single Polaroid photo of hacked-up knees  
in a hot, perfumed shower. Red felt tip pen  
on white hem, a scrawled word—nosegay.

Pinkish fingerprints dusted off  
a decorative rotary phone.  
Decorative as in unplugged.

A voice in a small sandwich bag  
on a black answering machine tape  
to be played later (again and again).

In an adjacent bag, fragments of party streamers,  
flecks of fondant, half moon shaped slivers.

Her abandoned place setting begs  
so many questions such as how  
and why and where does her ghost reside.

An unsipped sip of sweetish Riesling  
might have dried into residuum at the bottom of speckled glass,  
(except you sipped it...)

## **Fragile Pink Sea Urchin**

It may go for long periods without food.  
It is way too spiny to hold (inside)  
where it lays dormant then suddenly turns on  
its constellation of glowing photospheres.  
Tiny spotlights revolve around me  
as I collapse into an unstable stage.  
I thought she would sink not float.

I spill like prickles in vitreous fluid.  
She spills like blue-green light from a fish  
that lives deep under water. I thought it  
would sink not float (like glowing bile).  
I thought it would settle at some bottom  
until the bones were smoothed, until the flesh was digested  
into tiny plankton and krill. Intestinal flora.

She unfathomably surfaces again, her skeleton  
even sharper, her wedding dress of plant and animal scraps,  
swimming towards me, a phantasmagoria  
of photosynthesized tongues darting  
my elastic stomach, tincturing my wet eyes  
with tainted bioluminescence. What if  
my sodden head is a carnivorous sponge?

Red-tinged saltwater makes stiff casements  
out of silk pillowcases. Krill kill bed bugs.  
It may go for long periods without sleep.  
It is way too deep to contain  
these clots of algae in my sockets.  
I cough up weedy sea dragons like cryptic,  
beautiful aliens. Their fins stop humming,  
  
but their mouths keep foaming (inside)  
my own foaming mouth until I go blind.

## **Self-Portrait as Semi-Extraneous Consort**

I'm a stowaway in a transplanted suitcase.  
The zipper is stuck.  
Or the zipper is broken open.  
Or maybe the broken zipper is my mouth.

I could be mute or I could be gaping.  
I could be coiled in the wrong way.  
I could seem secure then suddenly loosen  
as a Bluish Green Hairstreak flits from a rift  
in my secret compartment. To swelling strains of almost  
glistening angst, a spider attaches silk  
to a substrate and leaps into the air...

I'm his new wife.  
I could be the blackthorn at his side.  
I could be the wide-eyed doe. The sloe  
in his gin. A spiked distraction

soon to lose fizz, to exhaust its own effervescence.  
The old wife is dead, but she could be so phosphorescent.  
She could be a glowing expanse of silk underneath  
my faded fleur-de-lis bedspread. Entangled in sheets,  
a Sad Green Hairstreak wilts in the death web.  
In a dream, his old wedding ring floats back onto his finger.  
His hand blooms amaranths.

I'm his new wife.  
My teeth tingle when I hear that phrase;  
when I fear the ache of a fresh bite  
that feels like a beheading.

A flash of stained fleur-de-lis.  
A fake bird called Broken Zipper Wing.  
I could seem like I'm flying then suddenly crash  
as Many-Banded Daggerwings dart my eyes into shirring.  
I plummet face-first; my teeth loosen  
in her neck and start dissolving. Pieces of me  
mutely break. Once-hidden rifts gape

into streams. They could be a naturally beautiful  
convergence. I could be a solitary green  
leaf trapped underneath a rock  
they rush past, burbling...

I could be a homeless pygmy goat,  
gnawing fallen apples by the side of the wrong road;  
stained teeth not quite cutting through to the core  
of this coiled debris. The suitcase could be broken open.  
Glowing artifacts could be strewn with cheap forgeries.  
I could unzip my mouth and chew  
all these sharp tiny interlocking pieces...

## **I Call this Hair Color Pretty Little Plague**

—the tiny mouths of grasshoppers never stop chewing—  
even when the wings are tattered lace—even when it's raining confetti—  
a shrill killy killy killy—another cloud of pinkish debris—surprise hit  
to the scintillant bug light—the flair of pastel electrocution—  
the flare of unlikely interlocution between electrodes & a high gloss  
locust swarm—stained cellophane at the pulse points—sparks  
behind shimmery lids—ghost moths swaddled in ultraviolet death cocoons  
burn—ghost mouths close around glowing orbs—mutated tongues uncurl—  
finally the sweet perfume of melting tungsten drips out filaments—

## **Blood Pudding**

The little dogs seem to ooze  
syrup, not grease, when cut.  
Us? Our blood sizzles neon green  
like snake pit ectoplasm.  
Like misfit pussy poets spewing  
lemon curd, gluten, bug guts,  
purple Kool-Aid in a drastic spit take.  
We've clambered out of the dunk tank  
with some serious damage sopped into our brains.

Like a throbbing tick in a private place,  
fully engorged. Like the thick kind of sticky  
cupcake frosting that totally fucks up  
the hole that leads down our esophagus  
is forced to gag and remember those slumber parties,  
fake séances, misguided sex tips, missing limbs.  
We'll pretend this is another sorority initiation  
gone terribly awry when we poke out the eyes  
with a compass for calling us flat-chested.

We're curvy in other ways. We're scurvy in other ways.  
We've devised so many other games for protractors and sharpies.  
We've visualized so many dance steps with grisly glitches  
like high kick, crotch shot, bloody pom poms,  
razzle dazzle bang. (After that slumber party past life regression,  
we came to with a mouthful of knocked-out baby teeth  
and a cotillion queen looking down on us, giggling.  
We were forced to swallow our own fragments.)  
Now we've mistressed the art of how to spit.

We are the other Juliets, oblique and yet extreme.  
We won't eat vanilla. We suckle blood pudding.  
Our maw drools clotted cream into vicious skeins.  
We pluck rotten cabbages from old story books,  
subjoin them to the heads of glossy pony girls,  
pretty princess girls. Doll injection mold girls  
mate with poison and we sniff our glue sticks like cocaine.  
We gloat over paper cuts, catgut, perverse lexicons, ambushades.  
Don't giggle at us. Don't tell us to shut our traps.

Don't dare label us rabid or try to muzzle us.  
We will bite with our spiked milk teeth (glued back  
into our mouths so we would have another layer). We are a creep  
y scene of enjambment. A googly-eyed, gooey-haired monster-nymph  
wriggling out of clammy wells and through foetid walls.  
A dress so sodden, tattered, tainted with horrid porridge stains.  
Beware our urges to snuff out lap dogs with cervical pillows.  
Beware our urges to lick silk linings, leave mercury vapor slime trails.  
Inside us a mucilaginous mass of unborn twin hands is metastasizing.



### ***Colophon***

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