

## **Shadefast: The Feast of Saint Libitine**

Beyond the city wall, a black dog  
is running in the frost and stubble,  
nine times under the cradling moon  
like the sickles that sheared the last  
of the harvest down. Who hears her  
howl from the hearth-side will lose  
a loved one before the longest night,  
sooner if she whines from the sun-  
swallowing west, the sky of strangers  
and the guest who never sleeps: tonight  
the casters throw bones, not cards,  
to read the coming year. By gaslight,  
their shadows tumble like loaded dice  
toward the grave, gambling—whose ships  
will creak with spices and spermaceti,  
whose fortunes climb like the roses  
of Sophia? who huddle on canal-corners  
in a beggar's coat, flayed of rings  
and pennies, broken on her wheel?  
Who will sain first grandchildren  
with bull's blood and white barley?  
Who take the leaf-road into the dark?

The *sortes libitinae*, the dead fates  
speaking from the Tree's unleaving  
fire, and in the ikons no one prays to  
she is hooded with rags of summer  
ripped down like sacking, leaf-must,  
grape-mast; the winter-whetted Thorns  
are robed no more gauntly than she,  
who between her pale and dark hands  
holds her own death mask, ghosts  
curling from its lips like a candle  
blown out. Past her, the Sun slants  
only downward, each shortening day  
another lintel deeper into the earth,  
the granite-roofed sky. She will lay  
the Moon's dead petals at its feet.  
Gather up milk-teeth and astragals,  
lighter of the shades that sleighted  
the future in their drystone gleanings;  
the naphtha flares are hissing out  
in the basilica, the cornhusks on  
their doorposts rotted grey as rats.  
In the rime-light before dawn, only  
autumn leaves haunt the cobblestones,  
whispering their own way into the day.

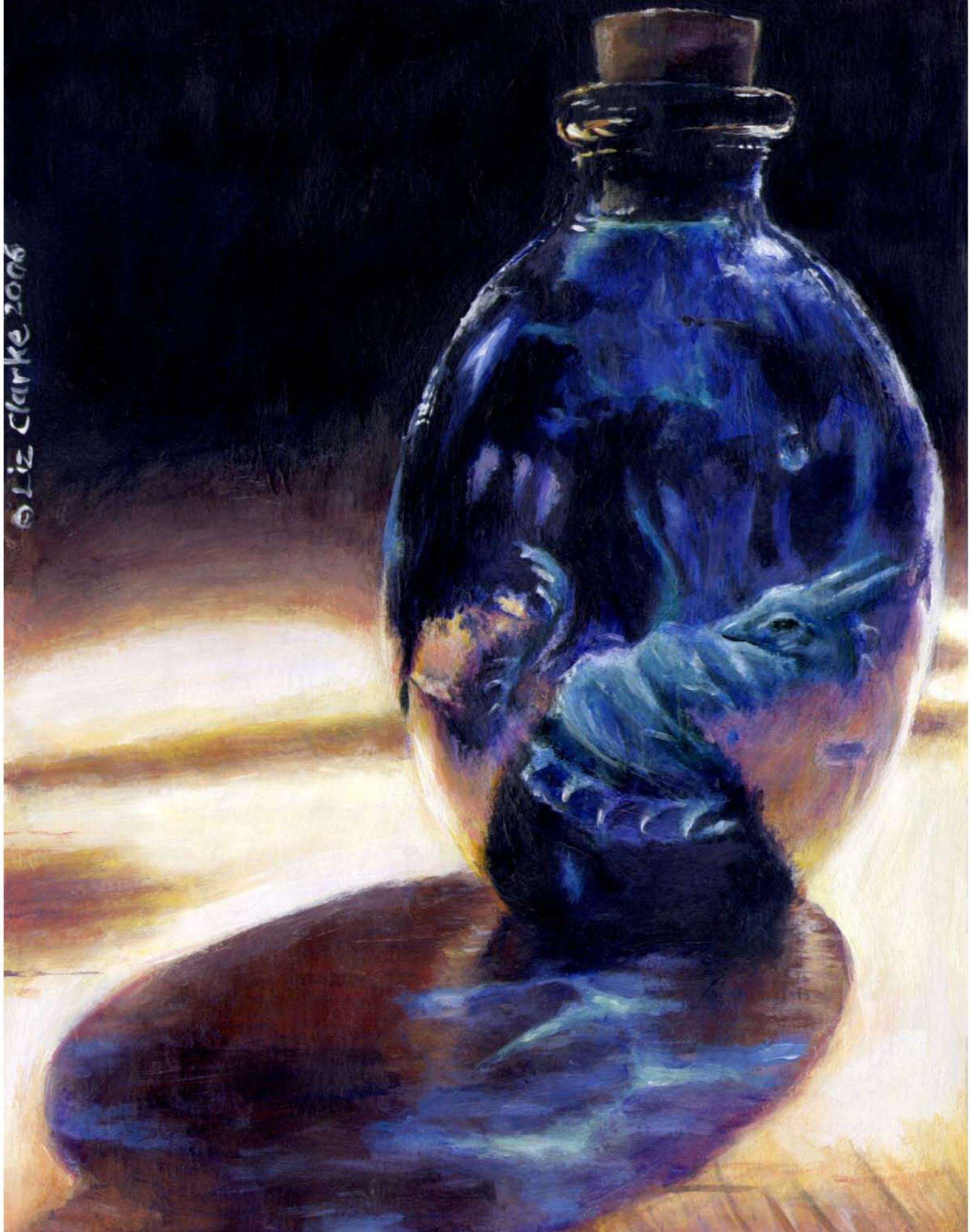
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## **Solmas: The Sun and the Thorns**

The oldest of the frescoes have flaked with time like lichen from the travertine, butterfly-scales, pollen-grains, so many suppliants knelt here—warm bodies in the dark—in wait for holiness, the bright returning or the inalienable cold. The same midwinter grips up from the tiles that ferns the quartered window like grisaille, flashed with the moon, each station of the year star-shot across the benches: the goat-fish, the water-drawer, the blue-mantled maid distant in the vaulting, a pauper's pack of fates; old blood in the mouth tangs of rain and rust, the sweetness of beeswax is summer drowned like a mirage in a single candle, blackening out. *Tu verus mundi Lucifer. O Fortuna velut Luna.* Gold thread caught in tatters on a dust-barked branch, dry needles and deadwood, a kindling heap. The altar streaked darkly over marble flourishing with prickly-holly and acanthus, pomegranates paler than frost that round into the chill-struck palm: hold onto death. Brighter than such broken flesh and seeds bleeds the dying Sun transfixed on the Thorns in lime plaster and orpiment, breath-corroded, shrike-pierced, a berry of flame among unturning stars; the saints of winter with vine-black eyes, wind-tousled Hazinthe, Tiennot whose wrists are chained with laurel, shadowy Veive's arrow-lightnings, arching away into the dark. The heron-headed torch-bearer, upending a cup of light. All spills beneath the threshold for the serpent-starved roots. Touch, and mystery sifts down like leaves, like snow, the flint-strike of prayer and the heart's blood flares like a hekatomb offering up the night—Round and round, Sophia rings her wheel.



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### **Thorntide: Ribbons for Mari**

They wake early, hammering before dawn on any door that opens to their clamor with sword-hilts, drumsticks, fistsful of violets and red-dyed wool, as ragged with greenery as the paving-stones their boots pound over, splashing up the last sallies of old winter's rain. Hoarse from studying until sunrise or drinking, half-leaned out windows with broadsheets and bottles of wine, medical treatises and nib-spattered auguries pitched like flowering may into the wind that warms off the river, the willows yellowing by the bridge— assignments discarded in their branches like handwritten wishes, like the ribbons tossing out behind spring's hounds as they harry away whatever chill clings in the air, nipping at the heels of death sleepless and steadfast, hungover and hallowed, all the same hieratic camouflage beneath their masks of bark. Saint Silvian with a garland of green onions snaps a gilt-stitched pennant into the pale mid-morning, proudly striding though the Serpent slinks up behind, its bleached horse's skull scissor-scraping its slaty jaws, champing for the greenstick splinter of bones. Crown, scepter, and wickerwork orb are in the Emperor's hands, last year's



rushes so brittle a father's grief  
will shiver them like a stricken lance;  
parchments and powders up the Magician's  
black sleeves, nothing the Fool brings  
but palms turned to the sky, brimless cap  
tilted back on his head, wheat-chaff  
in his pockets, glinting on the breeze.  
Whether a woman carries the spinning-top  
or a slender man, white roses plait  
over Sophia's shoulders and she alone  
will not speak, closed within the hum  
of time, the sure axis of the fickle  
world. The rainers and the walkers  
throng them, the patterns they trace  
from back streets to the tyche's court  
as sudden and certain as catkins  
bursting, bantering rhymes to shake  
the Sun from its winding-sheet of leaves.  
Their faces flash up to its new-sprung  
height, freed from the Thorns as the Tree  
gentles toward summer: the days ascending,  
stretching into heat. The soldier-saint  
sprawled where the painted eyes of fortune  
gaze out forever from the sea, the Magician  
is rummaging through crib-notes, name-seals,  
a hip flask, exasperatedly fishing for  
a miracle—only one would stop them now.

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## Meridian: The Sun and the Tree

There is no rain on this day.  
The sun is everywhere—  
in the heat glazing on the water,  
rippling from brick curbs  
onto marmorino facades,  
in the bridges scaled under  
with the reflections the city  
polishes in, soaking up sky,  
the drench of honey-light  
over the tyche balancing  
the Sun spiked with Thorns  
and the rose-rayed Moon  
on her palms, the marble  
weight of a man for each.  
The sun makes incense  
of the loosened hair of girls  
who last night left basins  
of water on unshuttered sills  
for the dawn to draw on,  
one lightstruck glimpse of love,  
the boys who insinuated  
oak-leaf sprays between the panes,  
silver-backed invitations  
of olive onto the doorstep,  
already sweating beneath linen  
and leather as though they leapt  
across bonfires before noon,  
spark-sanctified into the season.

The banners that glitter back,  
silken, the city's pride, the sun  
sews up against white slates  
and the bells sing *gratias*,  
*kyrie, anikete*, humming  
like a hive in summer pasture,  
one gold-combed note rounding  
all the curve of the sky.  
Past the fitful shoots and spurts  
of burgeoning spring,  
not yet the locust-days  
when even the stars stick  
in the parching swelter,  
the Sun in all its splendor  
beams above the flaunting Tree  
in hymns and lovemaking,  
the lazy midday of the year.  
In the furrows, after dark,  
the night will be no less praised.

*And the moon sheds its petals again.*







# Thank You

