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JENNIFER CASTLE ANGELS OF DEATH

+ **label:** Paradise of Bachelors
 + **catalog number:** PoB-041
 + **formats:** LP / CD / digital (LPs not returnable)
 + **release date:** May 18, 2018
 + **UPCs - LP / CD:** 616892541448 / 616892541547
 + **genre(s):** Alternative / Folk
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|---|---|
| A1. "Tomorrow's Mourning" 3:07 | B1. "Rose Waterfalls" 3:51 |
| A2. "Crying Shame" 4:05 | B2. "Grim Reaper" 3:09 |
| A3. "Texas" 3:19 | B3. "Stars of Milk" 2:44 |
| A4. "Angels of Death" 3:54 | B4. "Tonight the Evening" 7:33 |
| A5. "We Always Change"
Reprise Pt. 1" 1:22 | B5. "We Always Change"
Reprise Pt. 2" 1:39 |

- + Deluxe 140g virgin vinyl LP features heavy-duty high-gloss board jacket, color inner sleeve with lyrics, color LP labels, and high-res Bandcamp download code.
- + CD edition features high-gloss gatefold jacket with LP replica artwork.
- + RIVL: The Weather Station, Itasca, Steve Gunn, Aldous Harding, Joan Shelley, Cass McCombs, Meg Baird, Bill Callahan, Julie Byrne, Nadia Reid, Joanna Newsom, Angel Olsen, Mary Margaret O'Hara, Linda Perhacs, Judee Sill, Sibylle Baier, Vashti Bunyan, Kath Bloom, Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, Felt.
- + For more information: <http://www.paradiseofbachelors.com/pob-041>
- + Artist page/tour dates/links: <http://www.paradiseofbachelors.com/jennifer-castle>

+ "Castle reaches a pitch of mystical transport so gorgeously ethereal she seems about to drift off into lands that don't appear on any map." - Greil Marcus, *The Believer*
 + "Castle's music is not so much of the earth as floating above it, untethered to the natural order of time and space. Her songs live in that gray area where observation mutates into rumination, and where the physical world dissolves into psychic terrain." - Pitchfork
 + "Ravishing, soulful ... stands comparison with the best of Judee Sill and Joanna Newsom." - Uncut

A sublime meditation on mortality and memory, ghosts and grief, *Angels of Death* casts a series of spells against forgetting and finality, in the form of mystic-minimalist country-soul torch songs about writing, time travel, and spectral visitations. Castle wrote and recorded this breathtaking follow-up to the acclaimed *Pink City* (2014) in a 19th century church near the shores of Lake Erie, where her family also lived and experienced a constellation of losses that inhabit these bruised musings.

"The fictional concept of death rears its head in so many of my songs, always on the periphery, or as a side note, or a reminder, a punchline or the bottom line, always sniffing around like a death dog. For once I wanted to try to put it in my center vision. In order to talk about death, I armed myself with the only antidote I know: writing. Is this a record about death or a record about writing? Hard to tell in the end. I began to think of poetry as time travel. I tried to write messages to the future." - Jennifer Castle

Among the surviving songs by ancient Greek poet *Sappho* (630-570 BCE), sometimes known to her contemporaries as the "Tenth Muse," is a quiet, confident prayer for immortality through writing: "The Muses have filled my life/With delight/And when I die I shall not be forgotten." The alternative is this terrible curse of oblivion: "When you lie dead, no one will remember you/For you have no share in the Muses' roses." Though often portrayed today as heavy-lidded, passive conduits of creativity, the Muses of Greek mythology were much stranger and more sinister creatures than their iterations in contemporary culture. In his *Metamorphoses*, *Ovid* depicts them as a species of weird angels, airborne and arboreal: "The Muse was speaking: wings sounded in the air, and voices came out of the high branches."

On Jennifer Castle's new album *Angels of Death*, her third full-length record under her given name (previous releases were credited to *Castlemusic*), the Ontario songwriter summons a kindred classical vision of the Muses as domestic familiars intimately in league with death. In "Rose Waterfalls," which boasts a melody that cascades like its title, muses stage a home invasion, a pestilence of inspiration. "No one said that poetry was easy," Castle allows at the outset,

*but muses leave me while i make my coffee / and muses don't come watching in the bath
 and muses if you ever catch me in the news / you can kill me muses any way you choose*

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The title track finds Castle wrestling, like *Jacob*, with the radiant angels of death "hanging in the room," while she attempts to navigate, or write, her way through the "loopholes and catacombs of time"—the line is borrowed, with permission, from fellow Canadian poet *Al Purdy*—like *Ariadne* in the labyrinth, with her spool of silver thread. The idea, Castle explains, is that "we might resurface, in various forms, to join forces with the living, and that the living can in turn conjure the energies of the dead." "Stars of Milk" poses the question of how to discern such otherworldly transmissions:

*can you hear me calling / from underneath the fountain
 does my voice sound like nothing / more than water pushing upwards*

Real-life muses haunt *Angels of Death* as well. In addition to *Al Purdy*, whose verse appears as a result of an invitation from *Jason Collett* of *Broken Social Scene* to incorporate a Purdy poem, Castle cites Cuban American artist *Ana Mendieta*, *Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking*, and Spanish artist *Susana Salinas* (the addressee of "Stars of Milk") among those whose work served as catalysts. Castle speaks of manifesting phenomena and people by writing them, or singing them, into existence. That is, I suppose, one definition of a spell—"the majesty of turning/flesh into the storyline," as she sings in "Grim Reaper," or vice versa.

Magical and psychic manifestations aside, the album is grounded by workaday circumstances and poignant personal details, like this miniature stanza-story from the gently galloping, melodically intoxicating "Texas":

*i go down to texas / to kiss my grandmother goodbye / she forgets things / but when i look her in the eye
 i see my father / and he's been gone so very long / in the name of time travel / help him to hear my little song*

The Grim Reaper harvests, and the benevolent Angels remain to comfort with their small gifts of grief, which magnify beauty and pain alike. "And they whip me/with the belt of Orion," Jennifer jokes, "when they find out/I'm not a young American." The thesis of the album is the brittle, beautiful piano ballad "Tomorrow's Mourning," a skeletal song about "passing through/the ever omnipresent song" of death that surrounds us, and "singing along/cause there's no way out." "You're either the one gone, or death's witness," Castle observes. She wept while recording it, the first time that had ever happened, she says.

The arrangements of these remarkable recordings hang in the air like the angels they describe, hovering aloft on pedal steel, strings, and keys. Sonically, songs like "Crying Shame" and "Grim Reaper," in their disciplined atomization of chords and carefully chosen words, are refined to the point of being barely there. Space is sculpted in silence, and the songs resemble gossamer webs, visible only at an angle, sunlight refracting through dew. Castle's voice is an instrument of exquisite ethereality and expressive linearity, limpid and narrow and pure as a mountain brook.

Over the course of her fruitful career in music, she has collaborated with *Owen Pallett*, *Doug Paisley*, *Fucked Up*, and *Kath Bloom*; she has toured with *Destroyer*, *Steve Gunn*, *Cass McCombs*, *Kurt Vile*, *Iron & Wine*, and *M. Ward*, among others. *Daniel Romano* has even recorded a song called "Jennifer Castle." But never before has she sounded so certain of her uncertainty, or so possessed by the urgency of her explorations.

Angels of Death was produced by Castle and longtime collaborator *Jeff McMurrich*. Although augmented by notable other players at subsequent sessions, the core band comprised *Paul Mortimer* on lead guitar, *David Clarke* on acoustic guitar, *Jonathan Adjemian* on organ/piano, *Mike Smith* on bass (he also wrote the string arrangements), *Robbie Gordon* on drums, and Castle on guitar and vocals. Much of it, and most of Jennifer's vocal tracks, were recorded live in the church over one cold weekend; "the moon," Castle reflects, "was a member of the band."

Each side of the LP ends with a reprise of a 2008 song entitled "We Always Change," a bit of wordplay, since "reprise" means a repetition or iteration. And so the record ends with metamorphoses—sequential transformations into a tree, the sea, a flame—much as it began with an enveloping presence neither fog, nor mist, nor cloud ("but you get the gist.") Indeed, we always change. There's no way out. We're just passing through the ever omnipresent song. So let us, each of us, take our share in the Muses' roses before we depart. *Sappho* knows.



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