

GHT Creative Histories

The legend of Eliza Harding, aged 14

Eliza made tea from the poison-nut tree
to kill her employer they said, but then she
did not confess and at trial was released,
stern words from the judge, out onto the street.

Where did she go, what next was her fate?
Not back into service, that ship had long sailed;
instead she thought hard on what had been said
in court about ignorance, law, her mistake.

She vowed on the spot to learn all that she could
of toxins from toad's-meat to hemlock and wormwood,
how to mask telltale bitterness when given in food,
she'd use wicked knowledge of potions for good.

Brutal abusers of daughters and wives
caused trouble no more with her tinctures inside,
like calling an exorcist when demons arise,
whispers spread about how those in need might be wise

to stand in front of a mirror alone
at midnight, call her name clearly threefold,
then all will be silent, the air will grow cold -
as she'll appear, asking "For whom should my bell toll?"