

## You Used to Dance so Well

Do you remember

when you would give yourself up  
to the brazen, brown bottle on Saturday nights,  
you'd put on that self-righteous smirk  
and look leeringly at Mama  
with your lewd comments to try  
and make her dance with you?

She would never really want to;  
you always swung her around too hard in your West Coast Swing  
and left lingering red remnants on her arms,  
and that was when she was "a good girlie"  
and gave in to you quickly and quietly.  
You'd get mean until her mood changed  
when she chimed she had a lot of work to do,  
that the silver sink of dishes needed doing  
or the laundry wasn't going to wash itself,  
and when I say "mean," I mean unseemly shaking and shouting  
and fingertips foraging for a grip on coffee stalks,  
and Mother Earth would grimace and stifle her sobs,  
lest you should think more plowing was necessary.

When asked she insisted she loved you-  
really she loathed you-  
and said forgiveness was a part of what family was all about.

Do you remember

when Mama climbed out of herself  
and clung onto a job working evenings,  
or at least over the hours you would be home

so she wouldn't have to Samba with you so much?

A waitress was the best she could do,  
 but its Tango taught her how to smile again;  
 that is until you tried a toxic Two-Step  
 and swore she was meeting male patrons  
 down at lovers' lane past the park for Paso Doble.  
 You did a rough Rumba with her until she promised  
 to never glance at another man again,  
 and once you were confident she understood  
 you left her unconscious on the kitchen floor  
 while you looked to the mattress for your own kind of coma,  
 and when I say "rough," I mean swollen and discolored enough  
 for her unlicensed children to whisk her to white rooms and paper

robes,

where we had a fast-food feast with the sterile smell of death  
 and pretended it was a swell change of scene.

Once she could speak she defended you-

really she despised you-

and said forgiveness was a part of what family was all about.

Do you remember

when you meant to Mambo with me,  
 when Mama wasn't around anymore  
 and you ran out of outlets for drunken feeling?

You looked at me the way you did her,  
 stumbled and slurred that you wanted to dance,  
 and my Foxtrot slammed a frying pan over your head.  
 I wanted to do more, but while you lay I took my brother,  
 and you never did steps with either of us again.  
 Now your Waltz has led you to the white room  
 where periwinkle paper is high fashion  
 and your only partners are pinpricks and cords,  
 and when I say "do more," I mean a cruel Quickstep like you did with

Mama.

You used to dance so well you know, back in the day;  
 it seems such a shame you should never do it again,  
 so I'd like to help you out with this syringe full of air.

Convulsions of cardiac arrest look just like a jiving Jitterbug.  
 You know Mama said she loved you-  
     and you'll forgive me, won't you-  
 because she also said forgiveness was a part of what family was all about.

### **Maybe You Always Wanted to Die at Sea**

You wake up alone, the way you always do.

    You are a mockery made by the size of the bed.  
 The sheets are seas of cotton wishing they were silk,  
 waves wishing they were more than the wrinkles  
 left behind by you,  
     the weary vessel tossed by the tempest of fitful sleep,  
         beaten and battered by the misgivings of visions  
             of sugarplums gone fetid and foul.

You must not be the only one riding these waters,  
 because the rubicund mark of blood goes  
     rolling  
         rolling  
             rolling glossily.

    Didn't you wonder on the whereabouts of your crew?  
 It creates a grotesque sort of glisten, a sickening sheen  
 of shed bodily fluid on your bed's high seas.

Maybe some food will help your seasick stomach.

    You are a mockery made by the emptiness of cupboards.  
 It reminds you of how the realm of outer space must feel,  
 or so you've been told by commonly recognized remarks  
 of people smarter than you,  
     while you search for the north star in the toaster's side,  
         reflecting your blank visage, a tepid and vacant complexion.  
             Your brain could never be an astronomer's.

There are suddenly stars shining out where your eyes should be,  
planets in place of teeth, and out the universe comes

rushing

rushing

rushing wildly.

Didn't your mother say you were made of stardust?  
You choke on a galaxy that must have cut you, you guess,  
the only explanation for ghastly crimson in the mess on tiled floor.

Like a buoy you bob to the bathroom on turbulent waters.

You are a mockery made by your pipe-cleaner nerves.  
Purging yourself of the cosmos was never a consideration,  
nor had you thought it would drop such a heaviness  
in its leave of you,

bearing down hard like the pressured pull of the deep,

daunting and dangerous and demanding to swallow you

and bring you home to its darkness.

At the back a stark contrast of porcelain white and primal red beckons,  
water stained and stagnant 'round the boat out of which blood went

running

running

running woefully.

Didn't the zodiac say yours was a water sign?  
A soul searching for answers, you climb into your body,  
a cold ship on the blood-riddled seas.

## **We Honeymooned in Scandinavia**

We laid in the sun,

in the thick growing green grass

and white wildflowers,

tiny

pinpricks

of missing vermillion.

You told me you wanted  
                                   to go North,  
 to see the ice and snow  
                                   our spring had never shown,  
 and the midnight suns  
                                   you                  heard about.

But I was a fool,  
 and I would                  laugh  
                                   and slide my hand  
                                   to yours,          bigger and rougher, and unknowingly  
 silver-tongued suggest you try  
                                   South instead.

And you did,  
 yet still you yearned  
                                   for                  winter          lands,  
 and I knew you dreamed.  
 I would glide my  
                                   fingers over your chest, tongue  
                                   over collarbone—  
                                   the salt of a sea  
                                   you had never known.

I brought you back  
                                   to the grass, and plucked all the  
                                   wildflowers, now grown up  
                                   into stars, waiting for  
 their spry green stalk strings to break.  
                                   With love I placed them  
                                   over your body, rubbed them in so you  
                                   would hold their luminance  
                                   and kissed                  them into  
                                   your apricot skin.

You were gone from this space,

the green only our eyes had touched,  
 when under the moon's  
     careful, watchful            eye  
 I gave you a child.  
 The lonely midwife chided your absence,  
 but Sleipnir was never  
     any less yours than mine,  
 and I knew that            you loved him.  
 I knew you were ours.

The star flowers I kissed into you  
     would show me            how  
 to find you when you  
     would disappear,  
 always glowing with  
     the glorious            haze  
                                  of a soul lost,  
 and I            never could tell  
 if the fermented mirth or the Northern call  
                                  had done the damage,  
 but I would bring you back all the same,  
                                  back home,  
 and anoint you  
 with lukewarm tap water and hope that  
 somewhere in your slurred  
 Norse-dream tongue  
                                  you might remember my name.

One night in the grass  
     you called me Freya  
                                  and kissed my temple  
                                  with a tenderness unlike you,  
 and I knew she had come to  
     take            you            home.

We put the shell of you,



half a ribcage and its line of supporting vertebrae.  
 When I found you, you asked if I was a queen;  
 no, but I was born of your bone,  
 and to show you I ripped out a rib.

Some would believe we were Adam and Eve.

Remember when I kissed you for the first time,  
 below the bones melted down to molten gold  
 and cooled to capture the shape of our bodies?  
 I could've been a mythical king moving through you,  
 but Midas's touch did not work as such.

Remember when we felt so in love  
 that we were sure earthen harm could not  
 catch us, and we waved to Helios passing by?  
 We could go even higher, burn brighter, our  
 chariot the heartfelt sculpture beneath us.  
 We anointed ourselves with incendiaries  
 until we dripped like we had never known land,  
 and up on our altar we began to burn.  
 We were sure at the time we were divine.

We thought the flames would not reach us,  
 but we scream as our skin bubbles black  
 and scores of blisters crack and bleed,  
 and the whites of our eyes roll down our faces  
 and sting as they find flesh and its frame.  
 You cling to my hand and we rush blindly into blue,  
 where steam erupts in a violent hiss over rippling waves  
 and our charred flesh falls in floating chunks.  
 I don't remember anymore; I'm too well done.  
 I hear the splash of your fall, and I follow.  
 We'll be the bone in someone else's throne.

## Human Animals

*“The tiger will never lie down with the lamb. He acknowledges no pact that is not reciprocal. The lamb must learn to run with the tigers.”*

*- Angela Carter*

She rises up and down with a rhythm  
 steady as a heartbeat,  
     the near-black fur all but hiding  
     her cream-colored legs  
         in its dense jungle.

Her crimson cape draped  
 over shapely shoulders  
     is a beacon of color in the inky dark,  
     a warning to the forest  
         Big Bad and his girl  
 have come out to play—  
 and play they will,  
     and they will run and chase  
     and proclaim the moonlit forest  
         all their own,  
 because this is where  
 they belong, this is home.

    When bones constrict him  
     to the muscles of a man  
         again, she will know

Big Bad waits just  
 beneath the rough skin,  
     and she will know  
     the too-many white teeth  
         will want to eat her up,  
 and further up big  
 blue irises will flicker  
     to the gold gift of seeing  
     through the black,  
         and when the low growl



Here is the swelling, cause  
    for concern but for you,  
you can't see past the door  
    they walked out of,  
as muscles cramp and rub  
    together and you declare  
your heart is breaking  
    while you fall on the old  
sofa, a cushioned stretcher.

Here is the ache that rekindles  
    sporadically,  
acting on memories still  
    tucked away in a grey  
matter wrinkle, the springs  
    wound up to continue  
the motions of a routine  
    long since passed  
and left behind as dead tissue.

Here is the life-giving  
    red river in its constant  
current away and back to,  
    while the pinstriped muscle  
hopes with quivering impulse  
    maybe they will come  
back with the river  
    one of these days.

### **Vincent Price**

You brought me somebody else's heart  
    in a shiny, red, ribbon-bound box.

It was still warm, still beating,  
     its crimson colliding with  
 bulbous white eyeballs, colored irises—  
 browns and blues and greens—wide, blank,  
 and though not chocolate we ate as if they were.

We danced in the dark, dressed in  
 our best black funeral fashion while our  
     own orchestra of specters played off-key,  
     with strings of muscle fibers pulled tight  
     and fragile instruments framed by bone,  
 yellowing with age. We were aging too,  
 unsure if we were alive or dead.

When the music stopped,  
 orchestra falling and ghoulish  
 slumped bodies impaled on  
 their skeletal tools, we became  
 paranoid with a brain never  
 resting, twitching like a rabbit  
 on the run from the dogs.

And we  
     yelled with harsh voices  
 and we  
     scratched with human claws  
 and  
     snarled deep in our dark throats  
 and  
     bit with canines not long enough  
 and  
     snapped  
         at each other with greedy jaws  
     striving to get a piece,  
         hungry ghosts that we were,  
 and our sharp, pale teeth  
     gnashed and tore

but the bloodied bite  
turned to blackened ash  
in our mouths.