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

robe,

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,
white and hard on your
   back like a bared fallen sycamore,
   on a raft into the sea
where the current
   turns to North.
I can hear
your stars sizzle and pop like fireworks on
   your pyre, fiery salutes
as you sail for lands of
   ice and snow
   and your midnight sun
   will never set on you,

though no grass in Valhalla
   can hope to surpass
where we laid
   and where, once,
       you loved me.

Atlantis Fell

Remember when you were king
   of a pile of pale, cracked bones?
You kept them hidden in the gloom,
   thought it was the best place for skeletons.
Once you carried them out in the sun to lift their spirits.
Instead they leech off the life, but you they spared.
   They would not put down a king with no crown.

   There you fashioned a throne.
   Your arms sat upon radii and ulnas
   while scapulae cornered its backrest,
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
rumbles in his throat
as thunder in the clouds,
she will not scream
and run away in fear—
“what a deep growl you have,”
she'll say with a grin,
to the big bad wolf
her heart let in.

On the Autopsy Table a Heart Still Beats

Here is the heart
    still clinging to memorized
rhythmic function, taken
    out of the pale hardened
flesh husk of a romance
    turned over and cold.

Here is the adrenaline rush
    that triggers new speed
from a look, the electrical
    jolt to the right atrium
that registers itself as a giddy
    flutter, flight of fantasy.

Here is the percussionist beat,
    lub-dub, lub-dub,
keeping time for you
    when it gets harder to
breathe and pupils dilate,
    faster and harder the
higher that emotions run.
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.