Only Skin

An Autumn for Crippled Children

Only SkinAnd there was a booming above you
That night, black airplanes flew over the sea
And they were lowing and shifting like
Beached whales
Shelled snails
As you strained and you squinted to see
The retreat of their hairless and blind cavalryYou froze in your sand shoal
Prayed for your poor soul
Sky was a bread roll, soaking in a milk-bowl
And when the bread broke, fell in bricks of wet smoke
My sleeping heart woke, and my waking heart spokeAnd there was a silence you took to mean something:
Run, sing
For alive you will evermore be
And the plague of the greasy black engines a-skulkin'
Has gone east
While you're left to explain them to me
Released from their hairless and blind cavalryWith your hands in your pockets, stubbily running
To where I'm unfresh, undressed and yawning
Well, what is this craziness? This crazy talking?
You caught some small death when you were sleepwalkingIt was a dark dream, darlin', it's over
The firebreather is beneath the clover
Beneath his breathing there is cold clay, forever
A toothless hound-dog choking on a featherBut I took my fishingpole (fearing your fever)
Down to the swimminghole, where there grows bitter herb
That blooms but one day a year by the riverside - i'd bring it here:
Apply it gently
To the love you've lent meWhile the river was twisting and braiding, the bait bobbed
And the string sobbed, as it cut through the hustling breeze
And I watched how the water was kneading so neatly
Gone treacly
Nearly slowed to a stop in this heat
- in a frenzy coiling flush along the muscles beneathPress on me: we are restless things
Webs of seaweed are swaddling
And you call upon the dusk
Of the musk of a squid
Shot full of ink, until you sink into your cribRowing along, among the reeds, among the rushes
I heard your song, before my heart had time to hush it!
Smell of a stone fruit being cut and being opened
Smell of a low and of a lazy cinder smokingAnd when the fire moves away

Fire moves away, son
Why would you say
I was the last one?Scrape your knee; it is only skin
Makes the sound of violins
And when I cut your hair, and leave the birds all of the trimmings
I am the happiest woman among all womenAnd the shallow
Water
Stretches as far as I can see
Knee-deep, trudging along
The seagull weeps; "so long"I'm humming a threshing song
Until the night is over
Hold on!
Hold on!
Hold your horses back from the fickle dawnI have got some business out at the edge of town
Candy weighing both of my pockets down
'Til I can hardly stay afloat, from the weight of them
(and knowing how the common-folk condemn
What it is I do, to you, to keep you warm
Being a woman, being a woman)But always up the mountainside you're clambering
Groping blindly, hungry for anything:
Picking through your pocket linings - well, what is this?
Scrap of sassafras, eh sisyphus?I see the blossoms broke and wet after the rain
Little sister, he will be back again
I have washed a thousand spiders down the drain
Spiders ghosts hang soaked and dangelin'
Silently from all the blooming cherry trees
In tiny nooses, safe from everyone
- nothing but a nuisance; gone now, dead and done
Be a woman, be a woman!Though we felt the spray of the waves
We decided to stay till the tide rose too far
We weren't afraid, cause we know what you are
And you know that we know what you areAwful atoll
O, incalculable indiscreetness and sorrow!
Bawl, bellow:
Sibyl sea-cow, all done up in a bowToddle and roll;
Teeth an impalpable bit of leather
While yarrow, heather and hollyhock
Awkwardly molt along the shoreAre you mine?
My heart?
Mine anymore?Stay with me for awhile
That's an awfully real gun
I know life will lay you down
As the lightning has lately doneFailing this, failing this,
Follow me, my sweetest friend
To see what you anointed in pointing your gun thereLay it down! Nice and slow!

There is nowhere to go, save up
Up where the light, undiluted, is weaving in a drunk dream
At the sight of my baby, out back:
Back on the patio watching the bats bring night in
- while, elsewhere, estuaries of wax-white
Wend, endlessly, towards seashores unmappedLast week our picture window produced a half-word
Heavy and hollow, hit by a brown bird
We stood and watched her gape like a rattlesnake
And pant and labour over every intakeI said a sort of prayer for some sort of rare grace
Then thought I ought to take her to a higher place
Said: "dog nor vulture nor cat shall toy with you
And though you die, bird, you will have a fine view"Then in my hot hand
She slumped her sick weight
We tramped through the poison oak
Heartbroke and inchoateThe dogs were snapping
And you cuffed their collars
While I climbed the tree-house
Then how I hollered!
Well she'd lain, as still as a stone, in my palm, for a lifetime or twoThen, saw the treetops, cocked her head and up and flew
(while, back in the world that moves, often
According to the hoarding of these clues
Dogs still run roughly around
Little tufts of finch-down)And the cities we passed were a flickering wasteland
But his hand in my hand made them hale and harmless
While down in the lowlands the crops are all coming;
We have everything
Life is thundering blissful towards death
In a stampede of his fumbling green gentlenessYou stopped by, I was all alive
In my doorway, we shucked and jived
And when you wept, I was gone:
See, I got gone when I got wise
But I can't with certainty say we survivedThen down, and down
And down, and down
And down, and deeper
Stoke without sound
The blameless flames
You endless sleeperThrough fire below, and fire above, and fire within
Sleeped through the things that couldn't have been if you hadn't have beenAnd when the fire moves away
Fire moves away, son
And why would you say
I was the last one?All my bones they are gone, gone, gone
Take my bones, I don't need none
Cold, cold cupboard, lord, nothing to chew on!
Suck all day on a cherry stoneDig a little hole, not three inches round

Spit your pit in a hole in the ground
Weep upon the spot for the starving of me!
Till up grow a fine young cherry treeWell when the bough breaks, what'll you make for me?
A little willow cabin to rest on your knee
What'll I do with a trinket such as this?
Think of your woman, who's gone to the westBut I'm starving and freezing in my measly old bed!
Then i'll crawl across the salt flats to stroke your sweet head
Come across the desert with no shoes on!
I love you truly, or I love no-oneFire
Moves
AwayFire moves away, son
Why would you say
That I was the last one?
Last oneClear the room! There's a fire, a fire, a fire
Get going, and I'm going to be right behind you
And if the love of a woman or two, dear,
Couldn't move you to such heights, then all I can do
Is do, my darling, right by you

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