

Joanna Newsom, Only Skin

And 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 cavalry.

You 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 spoke.

Then there was a silence you took to mean something:
mean, Run, sing,
for alive you will evermore be.
And the plague of the greasy black engines a-skulking
has gone east,
while you're left to explain them to me
released
from their hairless and blind cavalry.

With 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 sleepwalking.

It was a dark dream, darlin',
it's over.
The fire breather is beneath the clover.
Beneath his breathing there is cold clay, forever,
a toothless hound-dog choking on a feather.

But I took my fishingpole (fearing your fever),
down to the swimming hole, 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 me.

While 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
frenzy coiling flush along the muscles beneath.

Press on me:
we are restless things.
Webs of seaweed are swaddling.
You call upon the dusk
of the musk of a squid
shot full of ink, until you sink into your crib.

Rowing 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 smoking.

And 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.

When I cut your hair, and leave the birds the trimmings,
I am the happiest woman among all women.

And 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 dawn.

I have got some business out at the edge of town,
candy weighing both of my pockets down
till I can hardly stay afloat, from the weight of them
(and knowing how the commonfolk condemn
what it is I do, to you, to keep you warm:
Being a woman. Being a woman).

But always at 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
dangling 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 are.

Awful atoll
O, incalculable indiscreetness and sorrow!
Bawl, bellow:
Sibyl sea-cow, all done up in a bow.
Toddle and roll:
teethe an imalpable bit of leather,
while yarrow, heather and hollyhock
awkwardly molt along the shore.

Are 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 done.

Failing this, failing this,
follow me, my sweetest friend,
to see what you annointed,
in pointing your gun there.
Lay it down! Nice and slow!
There is nowhere to go,

save up:
up where the light, undiluted, is
weaving, in a drunk ddream,
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 unmapped.

Last 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 labor over every intake.

I said a sort of prayer for some 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 inchoate.
The dogs were snapping and you cuffed their collars,
while I climbed the tree-house. Then how I hollered!

Cause she'd lain, as still as a stone, in my palm, for a lifetime or two;
then 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,
dog still run roughly around
little tufts of finch-down.)

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 fumbling blissful towards death

in a stampede
of his fumbling green gentleness.

You stopped by;
I was all alive.
In my doorway, he 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 survived.

Then down and down
and down and down
and down and deeper,
stoke, without sound,
the blameless flames,
you endless sleeper.

Through fire below,
and fire above,
and far within,
sleep through the things that couldn't have been,
if you hadn't have been.

And when the fire moves away,
fire moves away, son.
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 stone.
Dig a little hole not three inches round
Spit your pit in the hole in the ground.
Weep upon the spot for the starving of me!
Till up grows a fine young cherry tree.
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 west.
But 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-one.

Fire moves away. Fire moves away, son.
Why would you say I was the last one?

Clear 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,
could move you to such heights,
then all I can do
is do, my darling, right by you.