

A. Riding

Let Us Never Part

When I was your widow I was only a girl, I was supposed to lay down beside you and burn up with you but I ran away and set myself on fire a stone's throw from the river with just myself and a circling bird and my strength. The last thing I saw was the circling bird coming down to know the flames which were mine, without your body. The last thing I heard was my own voice going Oh no, oh no, oh no no, oh no, like the water has said to me so many times, a prayer I resist and then quiet with screams, unmoving.

When I was your lover we fled together from the fire and I could not forgive you. Everything you owned was burned and I was still alive, unsacrificed, unyours.

I crept back to sift the ash. I found the bed where we lay when the fire became ravenous. It was twisted and scorched in brown-red like rust, charred as I wished to be.

I gather ash in my hands and pour it over the metal, wanting to make a shape, two shapes. Larger bits of brick will stay, clumps of thicker books. Faster and faster I make two shapes and they will not stay. We are lovers who did not die together, did not end at all, you did not let the smoke conjoin our lungs, conjoin our flesh to nothing more than everything you ever owned.

Faster and faster, I climb onto the bed where you saved me unasked and the springs twist my flesh and the ash is my blanket and the blanket is ash in my lungs. I want to rise and run from the bed where you did not save me and you are safe in a bed I don't know, but everything you ever owned is here. I breathe fast as being your lover, until my lungs are black and the sky falls off, just skin, oh no.

The last thing I see is the ring we stole from a bird which I found buried deep where we used to sit and speak. It's on my thumb and it goes into my mouth and I fall asleep faster and faster. Suckle metal, everything is white and filthy shapes conjoined in smoke that chokes the living with our love.

When I died in childbirth, the last thing I saw was you being held by a man who scrutinized your screams and then both of you were screaming in your eyes as the sense of hearing left me, the splitting burning eased. You were all that existed. The girl was still caught inside. I'm not sure if she ever made it out. But I sang to her, I sang to you, Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no no, until we all forgot again.

And then you were very sick and could not move at all, and I stayed at your side to watch you not move, asking questions to make you more comfortable. Strength will be only a trick of the light, a small and sudden motion, you will open your eyes and cast a shadow and exist again unsick.

Is the light too bright? You've closed your eyes.

An hour, a croak, your voice, No. The light is always on.

Don't waste your strength in an answer. But I need to hear your voice which will make you more sick if you answer.

Do you want me to turn out the light?

A day and then you surge with stubbornness to say, to shudder, No.

Should I leave everything alone? You won't open your eyes, Is the light too bright?

No. It's fine. Your breath eats the whisper and starves.

The light is too bright for you to look at me again. I cannot look away from you or you will grow more old, more sick, you will crumble if I blink. You have so much to answer me yet, to heal me with.

I take your fevered, crumpled hands, place them over my eyes, wanting to see what you now see, needing all your sickness answers.

No, oh no, you stroke my face. I stroke your hands over my face you will not look at. I cannot see you because your hands are over my face and I see what you are seeing. We cave into each other, making one sick shadow, endlessly old.

I have forgotten, you have forgotten me. I don't know who you are. You are feeling me and I am not real.

Your fingernails are filthy, you say. Your dress is dirty. You do not need a dress. Come here.

I suck the moan from your tongue, the fist from your hand. I don't know who you are. I rake the ribs from your cage, the eyes from your screaming, the dancing from your flame. I eat the mud from your belly and the torrent of your loins. I don't know who we are. My body is clean now and your body is gone.

I bury you in different places so that we may remember now that you are in pieces. I put you in with strangers' names and I do not remember. I hope you are happy here. I've forgotten where I put you.

I found someone when I came out from the woods. I am very angry. I forget why I am angry. I remember today is my wedding. I go back into the woods to find you, someone who is you, faceless. I find someone when I come out of the woods. I go back into the woods to find you. To find someone. Faceless. Looking for me.

Someone is calling. How can no-face make a sound? Who knows my name? Not me.

Not this one.

Now that you are gone, and I can't remember what you look like or I look like or what we looked like together and I can't remember our sounds, I can say it and say it and say it and say it.

Let us never part.