

## Joanna Newsom "Only Skin"

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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

And 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 cavalry

With your hands in your pockets, stubbornly 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 firebreather 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 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 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  
- in a frenzy coiling flush along the muscles beneath

Press 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 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  
And when I cut your hair, and leave the birds all of 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  
'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 are

Awful atoll  
O, incalculable indiscreetness and sorrow!  
Bawl, bellow:  
Sibyl sea-cow, all done up in a bow

Toddle and roll;  
Teeth an impalpable 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 anointed 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  
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 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 labour over every intake

I 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 inchoate

The 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 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  
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 gentleness

You 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 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 fire within  
Slept through the things that couldn't have been if

you hadn't have been

And 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 stone

Dig 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 tree

Well 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  
That I was the last one?  
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,  
Couldn't move you to such heights, then all I can do  
Is do, my darling, right by you

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