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**Sliding Toward Light / Dying is Fine My Friend /
Bone, Like Snow or Starfish**

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Sliding Toward Light

No one to catch the weight
falling from the height of the table,
falling from the dark womb
of the lady with no eyes.
It was a white table, a black floor,
a green room, an envious day to be born
if one were to be born at all.
If one were to know the texture of breath,
how bones feel in a cloak of skin.
It might be that one could not
be born at all except by falling, except
by the weight of one's own body
sliding toward light, the squeeze,
the shuttle of rocking daylight
at the far end of a tunnel.
How else could one know to sing the scream
of descent, the urge to fly in midstream,
sheer cunning of the draw to life
without promise of a catch.

Dying is Fine, My Friend

dying is fine, but oh baby
i wouldn't like death if death
were good e e cummings

So, you live one more day
coming out of your coma to
sing, "*Skinny-marinka-dinky-dink-
skinny-marinka-doo-I-love-you.*"

All the work of dying still to be
done in each labored breath, you
suddenly laugh out loud at
the failed memories of the living

standing around forgetting the words.
But you don't forget, not at this point.
It's hard to imagine the movement
will stop and at last you'll lie

motionless in peace, your
countenance open to your teacher.
And your eyes at the last, when
nothing is left to be done,

how they rest in your face like
pure glistening marbles
like a sculpture, really,
utterly present and still.

How the bones that slowly eroded
yet look sharp and content to hold
you up as well as they could
as long as you made them do so.

Six years back, when you rose up
it seemed then from death,
you said to the doctors when
they gave you six months to live,

“You don’t know who you’re dealing with.”
You were right. They didn’t know.
Nor did they know this time, when the holy
oils touched your forehead and lips,

a single tear fled down your temple
onto the pillow while the family
held your hands and your
friends held your feet, chanting

or was it moaning at the thought of
tomorrow and tomorrow.
No, we didn’t know until you died
what dying truly means,

but it seems to me now on
the 49th day that you’re on duty
24/7, running hither and thither
in a gossamer gown.

Numerous times I’ve called on you
and you’re there at a single
blink. I take you as guide,
ancestor, healer, a being beyond

what I can grasp. I drink down
the tear, swallow your eyes, go where
I have to go and stumble around in this
fine dying and slow, steady drizzle.

Bone, Like Snow or Starfish

I.

First there were the bones of my father,
the bones of my mother, and myriad
bones before them coming forth
like white starfish out of the flowing tides.
There were bones of my grandfather stacked
atop three babes in their premature grave.
Soil eroding, always eroding, revealing
clean, white curvatures of rib, ankle, hip, jaw.

II.

The skeleton emerges slowly in the body,
year by year wearing away flesh from
the inside out, bones pushing through
skin, pressing to separate from
their tentative assembly.

III.

Clean, white shapes of human and animal
protrude through temporary skin long before
they settle into stillness. Watery floating
of skullcap squeezing through the long tunnel,
arms and legs in impossible shapes moving
in phenomenal rhythm.

IV.

Red ants pull bones of mice and birds
up on their hills, mounting one by one
the bits of spongy rib or tiny fused
vertebrae and spine to hold their forts.
Hauling sun bleached bits of tibia,
ants roof their quarters, fortify
the mounds across the desert floor.

Everywhere, the ground is coated
with bits of skeleton, rows and layers of
prehistoric shedding as we drop our spindly
coats and join the sheeted
fragments of blanketed earth.

V.

I am sister to the bones of the world
lying in bloodied killing fields on every
continent or those left behind
by wandering tribes or pioneers. I claim
the same dust of downtrodden beggars,
queens, and kings alike, nameless and
unremembered in their brief passage.

VI.

Like snow that melts in time,
the skeleton too breaks down,
takes longer in its turn to raggy dust.
I bow to the ground mixing with
silt of herds and tribes. I walk on
the bones of trees that weave
through ribs and feet. I ride
the tides of starfish in the eternal
appearance of life through what
is changed and changing, and what
has never changed at all.

About the Poet

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