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Dance from Valorie

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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Dance from Valorie

A friend gives birth to a child. Six days later, the
child dies. The lifecycle carves itself deeper into Valorie.

It is not as if as I have never died before
Or that I have only stilled myself
In finger bowls of change.

I have laid down, level with the undertoe
And not questioned the route of the water.
I left myself in white walls of armour
To watch the sun open into one colour,
Then another until I was sure I was not dreaming.
I woke alone, many nights
Without understanding
And poured like sand through myself
Until the particles settled into familiar forms.
And I waited, God, I waited
For buses, in hospitals, at telephone booths,
For words to lay me down and even me out again,
Upon roofs and in stairwells
With only my trumpet and a few specks of daylight
To share my rising joy.

But you, my child
You never waited.
You never promised to stay.
Six days after you leave this body
You turn back into thunder,
Back into the space between the stars
And I, back into a crystal-eyed woman
Lingering in the trees.
All I know is your touch
Brushing against me
As you dance on.

If I had a voice
What would I say to you
In whose body I ignited?
You remain firm and walking
As if I was never your own
Or never dull-edged or human.
In your sleep I passed
Through dances as steady as simple ai
Dancing through these souls
To wake on separate sides.

Caryn Goldberg
Dance from Valorie
Page Two

If you could hear me,
If it would matter,
What would I tell you?
That we are always one another's children
No matter how slowly you twirled into my life
And how swiftly you finished this dance.

I am left with my daylight
These old poems and woodwind instruments
This silent man who washes my tears with his own
The hands of friends to place my head upon
And all the voices of my life
Returning with their offerings.

Your steps pour like unbreakable glass across the sky.
Your prints leave no visible trace
And this hollow trunk flourishes outward like spring,
The wood refilling itself with more answers.

April, 1982