

Were

The night that knew me, beckoning
from in between the trees,
makes the most of my old shadows,
and the voice is on its knees:
“Daughter, Darkness, we remember
you; remember and return,
for we know we have our part in you,
as sure as comets burn!”

I am living in a bolted house
of brick and have a place
at the hearth, where flames of reason
throw their lights across my face.
And the wolves are in the distance, but
for one which cannot sleep.
Still, I mustn't meet by moonrise;
I have promises to keep.

All my loves that led me, leavening
my soul with wild unrest,
if you truly love me, let me be.
It would be for the best.
But, if you continue howling
in my dreams, I cannot say
whether I can bear this skin I'm in
or hold myself at bay.

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Broadsided

Jennifer Merri Parker

Daphne, having had enough of winter

i creak and groan with green again
this tree of dead wood winter-laid
in lifeless leafy cold-encrusted
mulch — i feel a budding branching out
and — hah! i'm breathing
like a pale and limp thing prone
to shivers all a-sudden full of blood and
heat
no longer meat but flesh
infused and firm and seething.
now i'll deftly with the tendril-vines of
passion wrap you up and crown you
spring-king with a wreath of my own
leavings aptly fashioned out of
sap and sacrifice
and will hold you fast my axe-man
with your ear against the bark
so you have to hear my heart and cannot
move to make a mark where you
should lay the edge
to take a living slice.

The Wasp

Love, that I cast off because it stung,
came sidling back and stealing up to me
whose heart had had enough of being wrung,
whose mind had made itself up to keep free.
It lighted on my shoulder with a touch
as gentle and as innocent as though
it knew not why I feared it, nor how much.
But anything so dangerous must know,
must feel within itself its awesome might.
Love need not waste its sting if it is shrewd;
magnanimous, it chooses not to bite
and thus inspires a slavish gratitude.
You frighten me to death, but nevermind,
and I will hold my breath and keep me still,
and love you, and grow more and more
resigned
to letting love do with me as it will.

Gestation, Gestalten, Madonna, and Me

Swelling-belly dancer-girl, you sit in
silhouette
and talk to that sweet half-inch worm
that no one has seen yet,
that unformed mass of happenstance
that beats beneath your hand
and changes you in ways you can't
begin to understand,
that makes you, by its presence, more
in essence than you were
and you press your flesh, imagining,
and thinking, "Did it stir?"
and your barren best friend watches,
and she wonders where you are
when your voice goes soft and faint, as
if it echoed from afar,
and your eyes grow soft and misty, as
you unfold time and space,
and she sits amazed by something she
is seeing in your face,
and she thinks, "There is a great gulf
fixed between us from now on,"
And "God, would I get back, if I could
once go where she's gone?"

Adoption

I have taken in my hand
what I hardly understand,
something small, and yet, so grand my heart
must break to take it in:
how this little airborne seed
comes to me, so full of need,
and with weakness overthrows my strength
till I must let her win!
As a stranger I have strayed
onto roads already made
and become the heir apparent to a journey
full of grace,
and I taste a bitter cup
every time I pick her up,
till I stare into the innocent
perfection of her face.
Then a power moves in me,
manifesting mystery,
forging bonds of love and kinship
that the ages cannot break,
and the Spirit makes her mine,
much as sacramental wine
and as bread become the blood and flesh,
that I, too, might partake.