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The Aging Ballerina

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in a hotel without one woman in it.
It will be nearly daylight and already
late winter in this room. Coming to,
looking down along his life ending
in hairy legs, feet, and then a window,
forgetting scar by scar, he may wonder
when and what it was took his toe off.

I seldom dream of women now.
I dream of the limbs and liquids
of men beginning to glow in loneliness
like St. Elmo's fire on propellers
in a storm. In the midwest, my father
has checked the shed for new lambs
before eating his breakfast alone.
I feel him looking out the window
at fields of the blue drifted snow
I used to walk on
calling it the ground on Pluto.

The Aging Ballerina / Christine Zawadiwsky

The entrance to the body is red.
I never learned to dance.
I learned to turn around, and to wear
leotards that made me resemble a dancer;
I learned to shed my black pearls
the way petals are shed from a begonia;
and to live between my breasts,
and to surface like my mind.
I learned to steal peaches: and when
the others fed me, I stumbled like a madman
who had been shot in both arms, like
a deer about to rise only to fall
once more. I stumbled till I was large enough
to keep myself warm.

The purpose of the body is symmetry.
Hiding in bed at night with all my clothes on,
in a room with colored pictures of birds
on the walls, a thread of black perfume
hung around my shoulders, I need
to dance as many dances as I can.
I need to dance with you: take
my misery away. I need to think of myself
as an aging dancer; the only wrinkles I
will see will be those of my body,
that the waves will wash the smell of dead fish
away. That I've performed gracefully
more than one time at the cinema
and on a battlefield of tears.

Because the heart is complex and filled
with many rooms. And now that I've excused
my existence once more, over and over
and over again I will say my name,
like the marsh bird that calls to his brother
to feed him, like the molecule that dies
in the tenth of a second and is only remembered
for its uniform structure. I need
classical form, I need exemplary moves
that I myself have invented to harbor my mind
with the ease of a happy sleeping child
in the hull of a ship that makes a pretty noise.
I'm a vehicle of faith. Give me your word.

In Porlock / John Woods

*"He was unfortunately called out by a person on business from
Porlock . . . and on his return to his room, found . . . that though
he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the . . .
vision . . . all the rest had passed away like the images on the
surface of a stream into which a stone had been cast . . ."*

Coleridge, Preface to Kubla Khan