

**Dancer**

## Dancer Who Holds the Dance

*(for Carol)*

a sudden leap, stamp,  
a fire springs up  
biting the sharp heels,  
following the black curve of the boot  
over the calf —  
wild, unbidden, disciplined.

from it she snatches the dance and holds it  
close, like a child.

like a small shell in the palm of her hand,  
like a shower that falls  
around her neck and shoulders,  
like a night on which she was young  
she holds the dance

then lets it go out into the world,  
playing it out like a kite,  
dancing at its end like a bright scarf,  
like a red-winged blackbird,  
like a hand that tells a story.

at last she retrieves it, ending  
like the curve of the earth  
that falls away around itself  
so that once again  
she holds the dance.

## Dancer Who Is Not Here

*(for Rita)*

i thought for a moment a small rain  
had come. it was only  
in thinking i might be mistaken  
that i realized you'd come,  
drawn water from a dry place, and gone.

i try to recapture your human smell  
and it is sleep lingering on your breath,  
wet wood left out in autumn rain,  
summer apples collapsing into October ground,  
fallen from the limbs of their dancing.

i listen for your coming  
and it is quick steps in a dark yard,  
the ground quickening  
with the sudden feet of the rain,  
the deft, swift steps of dancing.

i try to remember how you are  
and it is only after you've gone  
that i realize you'd come,  
you came and went like a brief rain,  
i can only remember you dancing.

but if i let my senses all rush out of this dry place  
then you become a tangerine  
that splits open on my tongue,  
i taste the bright, tart juice that runs down;  
you become a rain  
that hits the ground,  
i touch the wet smile that spreads from within you;  
you become a dance  
that ripens, and i become the one  
over whom your aromatic oils pour as you dance.

## Dancer Who the Mind Imagines

you are not this dancer  
who the mind imagines

no, the heady steps, like wine  
have a way in  
but no way out which is not  
through

and you  
dancer who imparts grace  
by loving the dancers  
as well as you love the dance,

hold yourself  
so straight that you dwell  
in that relaxed  
spherical center from which  
the dance originates.

and with each step you celebrate  
your womanhood.

and your clean steps  
leap from a straight heart.

and even when you bend your neck  
its white line still tells  
how straight.

## Dancer Who is Illuminated Tonight

*(for Cindy)*

tonight it is you on whom  
a light shines, you  
through whom the love all things  
have for the dance  
shines, illuminating  
for us, tonight, the dance.

lit from within,  
you stand out among a line of dancers —  
dancer alight in a line of light  
moving from arm to arm  
of the lover  
who moves from night to night  
now to this one, now that  
tonight you,  
aglow, happy, full of light.

heavy-bodied dancer  
light of foot  
short legs stepping through the dance  
exact, with grace,  
lovely

your face lifted  
firm and at ease  
laughing  
toward the face of the lover  
who comes bearing light  
to our dance  
tonight through you.

## Dancer Who Stays in My Arms

*(for Jennifer)*

you are the one who stays  
in my arms  
after the dance is ended.  
even when you are not there,  
you are there.  
even if we dance just the one,  
we will know each other  
that well –  
like a stone dropped in a deep well  
long after its ripples  
have spread away  
sinking  
its weight  
pulls toward the depth.  
so you will be in me,  
i in you.

## Dancer on the Feet of Rain

Dancer on feet of rain  
lines the rain makes  
down the streaked window  
all afternoon and invisibly  
into the night.