

THE DANCER

by Eygló Karlsdóttir

The sword in the ground, all fight is out of us.
Nothing left but to sit in the dark, let hope seep through
our bones and into the dark sand underneath us. We are not
one, and we are not many. Knowing the true secret of our
being has proved beyond our capabilities.

We are, and that's all there is to it. That's all we
need to know.

Our minds lost, our souls shattered, shards shrouded
through the world. We have become a singular entity, one
out of many, not whole by any means. Never whole.
Fragmented, united, sundered.

She moves in grace, the dancer. Her secrets no longer
hidden behind a veil, but behind an armor finely fused
together by the nameless one. How she managed to get such
favor is beyond anyone. It's beyond us as the nameless one
hasn't been around for centuries they say, they coo and
they pray.

They say she died and went to heaven and that she found herself in the hall of the sacred. White, bright surroundings, no walls, no sorrow, the souls singing in unison, a choir of comfort and joy. How she ended up here again, in the pit of the world, at the opening of the abyss is a riddle that will never be known.

She walks in grace, the dancer, and she will not let anyone pass her humble abode. Her lean features will rally upon you like the harrowing goddess she is. Some whisper that she came down by her own accord, that the sovereignty of the white halls weren't to her liking, that though she did deserve her place beside the gods, in the haven of always, she decided that it didn't suit her. The story tells of a furious god who told her that if she didn't think she deserved the halls of the white Lords then perhaps she deserved to be cast into the abyss, into the fiery pits of this world lost in darkness, lost in hopelessness and with nothing left but the splintered souls.

There truly is nothing left of us, for us, nothing but these shards that we try so maladroitly to put together. We are mere shadows of the figures we were,

nothing but remnants of the disdained. We walk in darkness, holding on to the world that we let fall apart.

The dragon swerves in the sky. The sound terrifies us, has us huddling underneath the cliffs, hoping the beast doesn't set to rest here. Its dark bones will hack us to pieces. I fear it more than anything. It will not eat us, it will pick at us and leave us for the corpse eaters, or cast us into the abyss, the flight more horrifying than crawling through the swamps of Drakeria.

The dancer looks up from where she is sitting. Her long limbs and thin body seem to follow her intent reluctantly, as if some sense of her, some part of her soul moves quicker than her body. She moves the veil from her eyes, normally it follows her like it is made up of the spirit of a thousand ghosts that only occasionally remember who they are.

I didn't love her the first time I met her. She came down, looking like she was born from the darkness itself and she came down on me, fire in her being, in her limbs and on her bones. Swiftly she tore me apart, tore me to pieces.

And so we stand on these cliffs, overlooking the doomed valley, that she watches over as if there might be

something here worth saving, as if there might be someone here worth protecting. As if everything hasn't been lost.

I didn't love her when her sword ran me through. It is made of something more sinister than steel, something more powerful than any metal known to man. It cuts through bone with such ease it's as if it melts, not just our flesh, but our entire being.

It melted my bones, melted my soul and suddenly I was a part of this pile of goo that we are. This pile of-

I see the light in her, and it occurs to me that the white halls above left something in her, gave her a gift, something powerful, although they may also have rejected her. Or was it she that rejected the halls? She still seems to be able to harness this power, grand and extravagant as it is.

It's hard to recall what she looks like. It's hard to recall what she is underneath the armor. She is fused with it, and though some of us remember her eyes, we do not recall ever looking into them, we do not recall ever looking at her, just this metal exterior that is her.

I don't know when I started to love her. I don't know when the feelings started to burst out of my broken body, combined with the others who had fallen by her sword, we

who have become one, who have become a combined mess of separated entities within a body that seems united in its awkwardness, in its multiplicity.

We are united. We are pieces of our former selves, we are the broken ones, the ones that failed and yet we are still here, still staying put in this hole, underneath these walls that once held the heart of an entire world.

What does she protect, the dancer? What was it that had her give up oblivion, salvation? What made her come back, risk her sovereignty, her glory, her very soul? What was it?

The dragon sets on a cliff in the distance, its long dark neck reaches forward, the head just a skull with stars for eyes. It was once a magnificent creature, now only bare bones are left, dark as if the world burned it alive and left it animated. The world left us all animated, heedless, shameless, lost.

I am-, WE are what is left of the hope that that once rose in the depth of the curse of the undead. The others are all transformed beyond recognition or dead. Unable to help themselves, let alone anyone else. The one hero, talked of in tales, legends and prophecies, gave up long ago. Sat himself on a throne in the hall of the Lords and

quietly turned to stone. For a while the pilgrims flocked to see him, led by the arrogance that they could change the fate of the world. As if a single soul could change anything when the giant Lords themselves couldn't, packed to the brim with souls of those scorched in the final fire.

We wait our turn, not yet rooted to the earth, not yet stretching our hands up to the sky, trying to find a hint of sunlight that hasn't shown its grace, even in our memories, for a thousand years.

They live not on the rays of the sun, or the light it gave, but of the hope. And as such they are the best of us, they are the creatures this world should have been solely made of. They should have been allowed the grace to die, to perish and not suffer the curse of the undead.

We move to be closer to the dancer, unanimously maneuvering to feel her presence. She fills us with fear, but she is also the only thing that keeps us safe from the abyss, from withering away and perishing into the night, forever aware, forever stuck in a dark moment that lasts an eternity.

She approaches the dragon quietly, and we want to scream at her to stop, to not go that way, to not do what

she is planing to do. The dragon has outlasted everything. Its skin scorched dry, its wings nothing but bones with a thin membrane of charcoal colored cartilage that somehow helps the enormous beast ascend and descend as it wants.

But she won't be stifled, we know this. It will gain us nothing, and it will only remind her of our presence. She still has the same attitude as before. If it moves in the vicinity of her precious secret, then it has to be vanquished. Except we don't perish do we? We just huddle in the vicinity soaring, spectral.

She walks slowly towards the dragon, climbing the steep path engrained in the cliff. Her movements as jerky as ever, but still graceful, elegant, determined. The dragon doesn't budge, just sits there at the top of the cliff vaguely aware of her approaching. It could easily cast its spell on her, the breath of a charcoal dragon isn't fatal, but turns you to stone, petrifying.

She isn't afraid of it. She isn't afraid of anything. We watch in awe as she walks up to the top of the cliff, walks to the dragon slowly, but surely. Then she approaches it head on. Callously she walks up to the head and reaches out with her hand.

Nothing like this has ever happened before.

The dragon puts its snout up to the Dancers hand and sniffs it. She puts her palm on its, on the very thing that has turned countless of smoldering souls into the very thing they fear the most.

She then lifts the front of her helmet. We didn't even think such a thing was possible for her, thought her armor was a part of her by now, a second skin, unmovable, unchangeable. We can't see her face from here, and it's viable to become our biggest regret in life. But she puts her face to the dragon's snout, so close to its gaping mouth it is unfathomable. And then she pushes her sword, the one that could as well be sowed to her hand, through the dragon's eye.

The stars falls out of their sockets, dead stones. Glistening, and glimmering, but only stones, full of light, still full of hope. The dragon slumps down, its last sigh a hint of gratefulness. The giant feet hang over the edge of the cliff, the dancer pulls away as not to get caught underneath when the giant, bony body starts to ascend down the cliff.

It's going to sit there, as a permanent reminder of her soulfulness, of her grandeur. Of her brutal

gentleness. The charcoal dragon is dead. We've never seen anything like it.

It's a glorious thing, though we wonder silently, why she couldn't grant us the same grace, the same love.