

Nightmare

Mummy prays over me as if I am the worst evil.

Our bathroom is small, but she's managed to pull
in a nightstand covered with candles and incense
as I sit in the tub hugging my knees and
hiding my tears.

It's like that old movie, *The Exorcist*,
but instead of a priest, my own mother
is talking the fire out—
is purging the demon out of my body.

Today was one of the coldest days ever,
but tonight,
I will burn.

Steam and smoke fill our little apartment
in Flatbush, even as all of New York
is covered in icy snow.

Mummy clutches her Bible against her chest,
closes her eyes, throws her head back, and recites
an old prayer. Not Creole or patois
because I don't understand a word.

We were born there and
we are making a new life here—
if we can call it living.

This corner of Brooklyn could be
anywhere in the Caribbean
with all its island flavors and sounds.
The smell of curry stew and jerk chicken
grilling outside a restaurant
and the lingering scent of
Haitian pumpkin soup
from New Year's Day wafts
into our apartment.
Soca and compas rhythms
blasting out of car speakers
make our walls shake.
My dancing partner is often a lamp or
the swaying curtains from an
opened window—
except the cold reminds me that we are
now on the other side of the sun,
where our magic may not be as powerful;
as healing; as deadly.
Even though there are more of us here,
we hide.

Mummy makes me feel sinful with her cacophony

of chants, Bible verses, and hallelujahs.
Her American dream for repentance
and devotion won't work on us here.

We

are

nightmares.

II

I wince because the tingling has started.
Then the heat, the sweat, the throbbing pain, then
Mummy's escalating voice. I clench my fists
even though soon, I will no longer have human hands.
I squeeze my eyes shut even though soon, I will still see
everything from the sky. I take deep firebreaths
even though soon, my lungs will be made of flames.

Mummy raises one arm up to the ceiling calling down
everything that is holy
to help me become
everything that is unholy.

Our eyes meet and this is when we are no longer
mother and daughter.

We are comrades in arms ready to wage war
against the night; ready to fight for the true
version of our story.

There's a tiny window where the
night sky calls out to me.
One last time, she gives me a name.
"Jean-Pierre. He accused me of stealing,"
she whispers. "There was money missing
from the cash register and he threatened
to kick us out." Then she recites
the Lord's Prayer.

When I can't think normal thoughts
like my favorite song and
my favorite dances and
my dreams for the future;
when the memory of everything
that makes me human becomes
a dark cloud of rage;

when I hear the suctioning sound
of my body collapsing in on itself;
when my skin peels away
like an ebbing ocean wave;

when my cells ignite, bones dissipate,
and my brain, heart, lungs, nerves, and blood
become a plasma of hydrogen, helium,
neutrons, and cosmic dust;

when my insides ignite like the
BIG BANG
that created the universe,
and my soul becomes electric,
and shifts into a rod of lightning,
and then,
a shooting star caught on fire—

I am becoming
what my mother
is trying to conjure—

a monstrous thing that needs
God
even though
we are made of the
same magic.

III

And I shape-shift
into an otherworldly self.
I become
a mangled, collapsed version of myself
within a raging ball of fire
and
a deep hunger pulls me out of my skin,

out of that tub, past Mummy's prayers,
and out of the small bathroom window
and past everything that is trying to
extinguish all that I am.

Our new home with its
thick walls and locked doors
wants me to stay trapped in my skin—

but I am fury and flame.
I am a ravenous creature
born out of war and
all I want to do right now
is inhale life so that I
can keep on living.

It always feels like It always feels
like wanting to vomit my insides—
nauseating, sick to my core,
pulsating pain,
and
instead of a scream rising
from the pit of my firesoul,
I combust—

and leave it all behind:
my skin, my human self,

and all the holy things
that come with being
a child of God,

as Mummy would say.

Who made me like this?
Hungry and full of rage,
but even as a ball of vengeance,
I know that my destruction in the sky
is small
small
like
a tiny white lie.

But someone is always praying for
my destruction—