

Gwyneth Lewis
Happy Flamenco

Don't tell me when to be happy.
I'm losing my mind. No loss,
you say, because outside
oranges ripen in the cold,
to make bitter marmalade. I pray
I'll be put back together in a larger way.

Now that you're with me, back from the dead,
(I didn't turn round! I didn't
turn round!) my heart's
gone missing. It beats like the band
that meets to rehearse by Delicias Bridge
for fiesta or carnival. The bugles are loud
but, for all their practice, they're getting worse.
This is as well as my heart will ever be.

I thought you were gone. But the Guadalquivir
swells each day with a fifty-mile tide
that brought low galleons of New-World gold
to the quays, then didn't. This time round
I'll remember everything and lock it all
in the Toro de Oro of my inner eye.
My body's an empire importing only you.

I saw you drifting on the evening ebb
in a tiny dinghy, no engine, no oars,
under dark eucalyptus. I called
until the herons flew
but you didn't hear me. Don't you know
how strong is the current, how the greedy sea
takes everything to it – dead horses, old shoes,
tree trunks and you, and it won't let go
no, not even when you might have reached
Sanlúcar de Barrameda and the wrecking bar?

Mist covers the river's body like a ghost. Our life
goes through us. You are the bull
I dance with. I no longer know
who leads, who follows but I flick the cloak
as though – *Olé, olé* –
love weren't the ultimate lack of style,
the skill of ensuring that the other survives
in the wet sand, panting to the bullring's roar.
A crimson switch in the back of my eye
and I charge at the lights, at a swordpoint's star.

You say you can't dance, but your blood cells can.
Lymphoma flamenco, full of passionate verve,
technique and *duende*. Deep in the bone
you need a different rhythm now
uno, dos, tres, quatro, cinco, seis,
no *tarantella*, but the writhe of a snake
tuning the mesh of your DNA,
a *Sevillana*, with viper hands,
stamping on cancer.
Now's the fiesta. *Eso es. Ole.*