

# IN THE RED DRESS I WEAR TO YOUR FUNERAL

*Erin Belieu*

---

1.

I root through your remains,  
looking for the black box. Nothing left  
but glossy chunks, a pimp's platinum  
tooth clanking inside the urn. I play you  
over and over, my beloved conspiracy,  
my personal Zapruder film—look,  
here's us rounding the corner, here's me  
waving at the crowd. God, you were lovely  
in your seersucker suit. And weren't we happy  
then, before the cross-fire triangulation?  
Answer me, dead man.

Wait. Here comes the best part,  
where my head snaps back and you crawl  
blood-addled and ferocious  
from the moving vehicle....

2.

I am undead and sulfurous. I stink like a tornado.  
I lift my scarlet tail above your grave  
and let the idiot villagers take me  
in torchlight  
one by one by one by one....  
Your widowed Messalina, my soprano  
cracks the glasses on the buffet at the after party.

IN THE RED  
DRESS I WEAR  
TO YOUR  
FUNERAL  
*Erin Belieu*

---

I know you can hear me.

Is my hair not coiffed like the monster's bride,  
lightning bolts screeching at my temples?

What electrified me  
but your good doctor's hand alone?

3.

I'm a borscht-belt comedienne  
working the audience from behind  
your headstone.

I shimmy onstage between Pam  
And Her Magic Organ and  
the gigantic poodle act.  
Your coffin is a tough room.

Mourners talk through my set,  
down schmutz-colored highballs, wait  
for the fan dancer to pluck  
her scuzzy feathers. But you  
always loved  
the livestock, didn't you?  
I say how many of you folks are in  
from Jersey?

The microphone sweats  
like your cock did in my hands.

IN THE RED  
DRESS I WEAR  
TO YOUR  
FUNERAL  
*Erin Belieu*

---

4.

I help the Jews drape the mirrors. I peel the foil from  
the Protestant's bleak casseroles. The Catholics and Agnostics  
huddle in the parking lot, smoking a memorial bowl.  
My dear, even the worst despot in his leopard skin fez  
will tell you: the truth doesn't win, but it makes an appearance,  
though it's a foreign cavalry famous for bad timing and  
half-assed horsemanship. History will barely remember that you  
were yellow and a cheat, a pixilated bi-valve who consumed  
as randomly as the thunderheads pass, and yet, how strange,  
how many of us loved you well. So tenderly, I'll return  
what you gave me—a bleached handkerchief, a Swiss army knife  
bristling with pointless blades. Tenderly, I return everything,  
leaving my best evidence in your bloodless lap

5.

I go to our Chinese take away,  
where the placemats say I'm a snake  
and you were my favorite pig, though  
astrologically you were a wasting  
disease and I'm the scales of justice.  
Coincidence?  
Get down on your knees  
and cross yourself all you want:  
all systems are closed systems, dead man.  
I keep my saltshaker holstered in my garter belt,  
ready to spill.

IN THE RED  
DRESS I WEAR  
TO YOUR  
FUNERAL

*Erin Belieu*

6.

I recite the fairy tale

in which only I can save you: it's our story,

so there's a swamp instead of a forest,

and no trail but a river agog with water moccasins

winding through the cypress knees.

Your faithful Gerta, true sister

in my red pinafore,

I've tracked you doggedly for miles,

appearing at the critical moment,

when you take the Turkish Delight into your mouth.

I've arrived just in time!

It's impossible to miss me, eager as a stain

behind the Swamp Queen's white shoulder,

your tattered avenger, your loyal roach, who's wanted only

you in every suppurating hut, who's belly-crawled

through the shit-filled bogs to find you,

to whom you gave your vow, my will undone, family

asunder, my home disappeared by the charm of

your girlish tears...

and that's it. Nothing comes next.

That's the moment you decide, dead man.

You look into my face and gulp her

candy down. You shoot it like a bad oyster.

No matter

how I tell it, this world ends when

you swallow.

IN THE RED  
DRESS I WEAR  
TO YOUR  
FUNERAL  
*Erin Belieu*

---

7.

I was never your Intended,  
never meant to be the official widow  
like that plain, chinless girl I refused to recognize  
or comprehend.

But the plain ones are patient, aren't they?

I'll admit, she's earned her orchestra seats  
at this burial the old-fashioned way.

She's up front, next to your mama,  
that Chanel commando baked medium-well  
in her spray-on tan. A rare example  
of the real Southern lady, how many nights  
did it cost her, patrolling  
the family compound for Jezebels like me?

Your women, dead man. From here  
they look like two snap peas squatting  
in the same pod.

And they did their job, didn't they?  
They made it easy for you?

But later, once the ladies go,  
I'll climb down to you again.  
I'll come to you in that dirty box  
where we've already slept for years,  
keeping our silent house  
under their avalanche of flowers.

IN THE RED  
DRESS I WEAR  
TO YOUR  
FUNERAL  
*Erin Belieu*

8.

EYE AM THE PROMISED VISITATION

PRIESTESS OF BLACK POPLARS

MY TREES R HUNG W/ BRAZEN BELLS

EYE HAVE AUGURED THE PREGNANT SOW'S INTESTINES

RORSCHACHED

THE PICKLED WORM

GLUED TO THE BOTTOM OF YR SHOT GLASS

EYE BRING U NEWS OF

THE UNIVERSE

AND THE NEWS

AINT GOOD

DEAD MAN

B-HOLD!

THE ZOMBIE COCKTAIL HOUR

OF THE YEARS TO CUM

A PURGATORY UNBENDING AS

A BADLANDS

HI-WAY

IN THE T-LEAVES

EYE SPY YR OUTLINE

YR CORPSE

SNORING IN A VINE-

STRANGLER HOUSE

REBEL DRAG MOUNTS THE WALLS

LIKE A CONFEDERATE

HARD ROCK CAFÉ

O! THE BLURRED DAYZ

COLLAPSING INTO DINNERS

WHILE THE MAID BURNS

THE FAMILY BISCUITS

&amp; YR WOMAN BEATS

THE GRAVY STIFF

U ARE LOST

GANYMEDE

GONE THAT BOY

WHO Poured HIMSELF

WHOLE INTO THE SIBYL'S

LOVING CUP

NOW EYE CUM

TO BURY U

4 EYE AM

THE GHOST OF X-MAS PAST

AND YR FUTURE

BEGINS

NOW

DEAD MAN

IN THE RED  
DRESS I WEAR  
TO YOUR  
FUNERAL  
*Erin Belieu*

---

9.

I do not desist in my delusion do not permit the victor's history  
will not admit your fake religion what jams your fingers  
in the dry vagina of tin idylls will not will not go quietly  
your evil goody who cries me in the marketplace who knocks  
my ear to the pillory with false instruments my crimes never  
crimes for firstly I be the pretty pony of all plague slant-gashed  
a coil beneath my scum of loveliness No! I was I always am  
your yellow roses in a beer bottle your weakness and reward  
one organ conjoined in the blue tipi of floating whistles  
doubled thunder coming in my wicked mouth to eat you and your  
grandma too Name her! Name her who bites you harder little girl!  
Will not say for seconds I am filth dirty as the damaged apple I bore  
not yours never yours that unspeakable sunshine Turn your head!  
Turn your head and I'll kindly cut it off Yes Yes the best reason I am  
left only the mother of a great sun you would go blind and blinder to look  
upon its number and for finally I am not of your being being Queen  
of the flat kingdoms what crop your emptiness I do not admit these nor  
I lied nor I betrayed nor I am starving for you nor can you make me  
never Will I disappear

IN THE RED  
DRESS I WEAR  
TO YOUR  
FUNERAL

Erin Belieu

10.

I peel myself  
and wherever these rubied  
feathers drop, a poppy unfurls  
in the graveyard, each head plush  
as a stitched lip.

                    You're right,  
it gets me high, how thin I am, my  
love, the substance uncontrolled.

But this molting becomes me,  
your naturally-occurring razor,  
your baby I.V. Now I am fashioned  
the gun so truly fired  
I blast like a magic cap through  
my own skin. So go on,

throw the bones  
to your hairy pack and let them gnaw.  
I'm done with the meat. Soon, I'll be  
demolished. I'll step away free.

"In the Red Dress I Wear to Your Funeral" appears in Erin Belieu's most recent book, *Black Box*, and is reprinted here with the generous permission of Copper Canyon Press. She is also the author of two other collections of poems, *Infanta* and *One Above & One Below*, and the co-editor of *The Extraordinary Tide: New Poetry by American Women*. Belieu teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Florida State University, and her poems appear in publications that include *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Best American Poetry*, *The New York Times*, *Ploughshares* and *Slate*.