

Charles Baudelaire
Carrion

Remember, my soul, the thing we saw
That lovely summer day?
On a pile of stones where the path
turned off,
The hideous carrion-

Legs in the air, like a whore –
displayed,
Indifferent to the last,
a belly slick with lethal sweat
and swollen with foul gas.

The sun lit up that rottenness
as though to roast it through,
restoring to Nature a hundredfold
what she had made one.

And heaven watched the splendid
corpse
like a flower open wide –
you nearly fainted dead away
at the perfume it gave off.

Flies kept humming over the guts
from which a gleaming clot
of maggots poured to finish off
what scraps of flesh remained.

The tide of trembling vermin sank,
then bubbled up afresh
as if the carcass, drawing breath,
by their lives lived again

And made a curious music there –
like running water, or wind,
or rattle of chaff the winnower
loosens in his fan.

Shapeless – nothing was left but a
dream
the artist had sketched in,
forgotten, and only later on
finished from memory.

Behind the rocks an anxious bitch
eyed us reproachfully,
waiting for the chance to resume
her interrupted feast.

Yet you will come to this offence,
this horrible decay,
you, the light of my life, the sun
and moon and stars of my love!
Yes, you will come to this, my queen,
after the sacraments,
when you rot underground among
the bones already there.

But as their kisses eat you up,
my Beauty, tell the worms
I've kept the sacred essence, saved
the form of my rotted loves!