POETRY

Caught in the Rhythm

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For Toni Morrison

A few beats sounded out of the earth
like a heart in the depths
of water. A soft modulation of *tam-*
doom-tam, like the first beat out of the womb,
a call to breathing, new air, new breath — *tam-doom-*
tam — A hand beckoned me to step on a waxed
wooden floor — timid — *tam-doom-tam* — I glided
my legs. First the left, slowly, tracing an arch
from left to right, then in reversed motion. *Tam-doom-tam.*

A hand flung a red scarf into the air — *tam-doom-tam* —
tam-tam-tam-doom-tam — waves descended on fluffed
cloth like a robin riding the air. *Tam-doom-tam-tam.*
My right foot itched with each beat. Waiting — waiting.
The red scarf landed on the floor. My right thigh
muscles twitched — the hand of hands beckoned.
I moved from one hand to the other as if
attracted to a magnet — *tam-doom-tam* — I closed
my eyes. My right leg traced a circle as I pivoted
counter-clockwise with my left leg — I am a trace
within circles — *tam-doom-tam* — I am within
circles, within circles, a drum, like hard love,
beckoning — a heart beat in the depths of water.

I shivered on the rim of mercy. My body intoxicated
By Congo drums, plunged into the fury of hands and legs
Embalmed in an ancient aura that refused to untie.
The wombs were saltwater, drums, and night skin
With spines doweled in rhythm — *Tam-doom-tam.*
I'm caught — *tam-tam-tam-doom-tam* — waves ushering
Me to a circle of re-memory where the beloved refuse
To stay drowned in silences. I'm dancing among the ruins
Of lost souls. There are no monuments, no burial mounds,
Just the infused saltwater with marrow and cells
That ceaselessly flow in the globe's currents.

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Tam-doom-tam — I picked up the red scarf as intricate
Sinews codified into millions of threads wept the rhythm
Of their deaths. *Tam-tam-tam-doom-tam.* I'm not a stranger
To my blood, the rhythm traces the silent dwelling of history.

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