

If I Die Young

*If I die young
Bury me in satin
Lay me down on a
Bed of roses*

It's not the sort of thing she ever thought she'd find herself doing.

But then, nobody does.

*Sink me in the river
At dawn
Send me away
With the words of a love song*

Her life has been so full of love to this point that pain should have been inevitable. The only surprise is that it took so long to come.

*Oh-oh
Oh-oh*

It helps that her little boy is who he is (*was* , her mind whispers treacherously, *who he was*) and has a great many requests written down in advance. Good music and good food they can provide. Likewise stories about his life, about the things, and the people, he loved so well.

“Not too much crying” may be more difficult.

*Lord, make me a rainbow
To shine down on my mother
She'll know I'm safe with you
When she stands under my colors, oh*

He was always the most colorful, the most flamboyant, of his siblings once he got going. The role he played in his fourth year of school, the “walking work of art”, seems painfully apt now. That boy, like her child, was torn away from the ones who loved him by cruel, jealous members of his own family.

Joseph, though, became powerful among those who had been his enemies, and eventually saved

his family because of it. Her little Fox is simply...gone.

*Life ain't always
What you think it's gonna be, no
Not even grey
And she buries her baby*

She doesn't even need to close her eyes to see the moment he became hers. It happened in a dream, yes, but it was no less true for all of that. His tearful, four-year-old face, frozen in shock and hardly daring to hope. The tight, shaking, desperate clutch of little arms around her as she caught him up and held him close. And the question, the question she wishes with all her soul she could hear him ask one more time.

“Are you real?”

*The sharp knife
Of a short life*

“I'm as real as you are,” she told him then, and every time after that.

*Well, I've had
Just enough time*

If only it were still the truth.

*If I die young
Bury me in satin
Lay me down on a
Bed of roses*

Burying him in satin would seem out of place. He was always so active, so disdainful of anything frilly or extravagant. Besides, it's not their worry in any case. There's hardly enough left of him to bury, certainly not enough to dress in anything.

She supposes they should be grateful his father's spite left them even so much as that.

Roses, though, there will be roses for her child. Living, growing roses, sprouted from the ones his beloved carried in her arms on a very special day, and from the one she tucked into his buttonhole before the ceremony began. May is a good month for roses.

June is even better.

*Sink me in the river
At dawn
Send me away
With the words of a love song*

She doesn't know if there's a river near where they'll bury him. Her husband would know, but they've barely touched each other's minds in the last three days. It hurts too much, the pain they share burning both of them like acid.

There have been those who've wondered what could ever go wrong with being so connected, with loving so well. She could give them their answer today.

As for music...she wonders sometimes if any of them will ever again be able to hear certain songs in the sweet tones of a flute or a whistle and not be forced to excuse themselves.

*So put on your best, boys
And I'll wear my pearls
What I never did is done*

So much of what he'd wanted from life, he'll never do. So many of his hopes and dreams and ambitions will go unfulfilled into the ground tomorrow. And his family, his closest friends, dressed in their finest clothes to honor him, will stand around that grave and try to comfort one another, but what words can bring comfort for a life ended so painfully soon?

Pearls, so they say, are for tears. She'll wear the one, and shed the other, tomorrow.

*A penny for my thoughts
Oh no
I'll sell them for a dollar
They're worth so much more
After I'm a goner*

What money could ever pay for that marvelously twisted way of looking at the world he had, and shared so happily with everyone around him? What price can you set on a mind so crooked, so subtle, and yet so determinedly straight and true for the right and the just? What wouldn't she give to have him back where he belongs, in her arms, in her mind, in her heart?

The answer, of course, is nothing. Which is precisely what she can give, and what will bring her solace for this loss, every day and night of her life.

*And maybe then you'll hear
The words I've been singing
Funny when you're dead
How people start listening*

People did listen. He'd never wanted to admit it, usually deferred to his brother or his twin in public, but people had listened to her child. They might find themselves nodding in agreement with his words when they'd been certain he was impossibly wrong, or suggesting minor modifications to his plan when they'd wanted nothing to do with it. The force of his personality, his charm, his certainty that his own way was wisest and best tended to draw eyes and ears to him, subtly bending minds towards what he wanted.

She wonders sometimes, idly, if such a thing would still have been true if he had believed in the mindset he “should” have been brought up to.

*So put on your best, boys
And I'll wear my pearls*

She supposes she'll never know, now.