

■
(STANDING IN)
THE WAY

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red





VANISHING

something is off on this train, it smells
like the tropics in november
i smell of dampness. it reminds me of being
a teen-ager minus the shame
i smell wet and it reminds me of
having a body i do.


i recount a journey so precise readers think
i have made it, i have *made it*,
they shout me out except those who
of course shut me out
but not you.

beware: this is not a you that loops
or looms unknown
in the shadows of my imagination –
which readers call:
my life – not the poetic you made of moss, old
drops of tears and some fibrous ligaments,
filamentous left
overs by the tearing of past lovers;
not the needy you of mysterious letters
for which, once sobered from
feeling, i'd apologize

nor does this go out to the you who in reading
swallows the key to my mouth having
bought it; whose consuming eyes extinguish
words and for whom at night i tear at
sentences, molars eroding
undoing a day's work of making myself heard
palatable known
retreating into gleanings
chewing perusing
retreading the path of a perhaps filamentous left
where when others talk i listen so hard
i forgo the urge to speak a while.

No: this is about you
who are different from the rest –
you don't think i have made it or anything at all

yet you at least try and make out the shape of my
anguish, my body, i mean; you hang around,
attempt to distinguish my smell from
the jasmine, the tear gas, the salted water and
foul mouth, onion raw and onion sizzling, beer
stains and boiled nettle and cocoa butter and
rotten apples and cow dung and gas heating
and cherry hand lotion and leaked petrol





and cardamom and oil refried and damp dog
 and mangos imported or fresh, fireworks,
 the palm wine and harissa, something
 burning against clay, goat skin in the heat
 and tell me: where do you think we are? where the
 hell have you been?

i: being seen, disappeared behind a flurry of good
 and bad intentions – and you try and find
 yourself in there it's like a needle in a trench.

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being read i faded off and that then made my
 absence felt. it's tough to write about the
 vanishing because it's tough to
 write about the vanishing because it keeps
 on happening. i'm not speaking as abstractly
 as it seems: it is people who are disappeared
 that are on my mind, which in turn is so
 crowded you wouldn't know a good
 thought if it crossed your path. there it would
 be looking for wisdom in a haystack jeez,
 it's another poem about not being
 enough, isn't it?

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being so little that your neck flutters in the
 wind, disastrous flag of a pirate ship
 incorporated
 coerced into emptiness or worse coaxed into
 not much,
 saltwater nagging at the corpse of the mutinous –
 a process slow and definitive as time itself.

there are many words for disappearance they all
 erode me i mean evade i mean escape me,
 i wish them well like i do for all who flee see
 where i come from – movement –
 there is glory in leaving and returning and even
 a father's disappearing trick, if well executed,
 can be treated like excellent magic
 i choose to say “leaving” *and* “returning”
 so you, or another reader less familiar with
 the feet of the uprooted,
 might understand me better, or
 perhaps even see me
 that the direction is not as
 relevant as you or another
 believe it to be,





as long as feet or the
tip of a train are headed
somewhere,
as long as i don't have to stay
where i can't think, tasked,
as i am, to draw contours
called mine.

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i've been avoiding the mirror it's not that i
don't want to see.

it's just: in the window of the train a farm stands
firmly underneath my left cheek, where a
wrinkle will emerge if granted time and joy,
a flock of birds draws a line across my lips,
a wall obstructs my face for too long and
when i look up, a cloud has nested inside
my hair. I squint to make me out, seek out
the shape of my eyebrows now covered
in power lines – or is it barbed wire?

see i do not know my reflection from my reflections
on the world,
or its reflection on me.

look: if the shape of my body is only the prelude
to what it can do, if it is being of the world
which activates my reflection; if, therefore,
it is caring which moves my body away from
symbolism into the realm of the living –
and: if care understood as protection is virtually
impossible under the immense threat of a
society of capital, whiteness and conformity
to the rules of gender
and further: if you were trying to shield me from
the math of more, and less, worthy lives
on these and other streets – how big are your
arms? how sturdy is your soul? how much
comfort can you dig up from underneath
your own despair? what happens after all the
fracking?

and then: if one of our primary needs is to feel
that we can provide and care, what happens
when we can't? what happens when
we're so small and our bed doesn't fit through
the hole in the doll house we call life?

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a sacrilege, i know, to invite vanishing into a home
when one ought to chase it away, dress it up in
red and black raffia and have it dance around
the block, stomping away at its fire with our
child-like feet, broil a chicken and come home
smelling victorious, drunk on wine or someone
else's spit still feeling the imprint of where
death bumped against us in the middle of the
parade, then a slap on an ass cheek brought us
back but oh, what a precarious thought

what destructive task

to return home full of imprints smelling like
someone else's cheek covered in spit and raffia
and evade escape cover up every mirror
for days

only to find, when finally the courage
to look is mustered,
that another piece of self has gone – was that
a morsel of the spine? a shard of hope?
was that a piece of what made a *good* person?
was that a long metaphor on vanishing
right as it unmetaphorically unfolds?

naturally i search for the culprit of this sudden
and foreseeable loss
in the reflection

by the time i solve the mystery
my eyes have become a butterknife;
with each gaze, i attempt to cut myself away
from the belly of the beast that bore me

leaving a mirror in pieces.





OBSTRUCTION

It reoccurred to me as i was staring into the void this abnormally hot train swooshed through that some bodies are more disappearable than others; some are rural bodies, gender-defeating bodies, bent bodies and haunting bodies and bodies told they are not white and bodies broken by labor – bodies more prone to being called bodies than people. i am reminded of a sentence i saw online – when people come to the neighborhood who call Black people *Black bodies*, coffee is about to become twice as expensive –

some are more symbols than others, who tend to remain alive. Eventually we are void, whether we merge with discourse or with the earth. Before that – here is my Blackness that doesn't care for excellence, here is Blackness not to be consumed, not to be subsumed into the next big thing, here's a construction full of holes, an ending so untidy there is no choice but to start again, an aesthetically unpleasant undoing

because in order for me to break neatly into a million colors

i'd have to have been white in the first place
and how come i have never been told what
darkness refracts into or toward?

To refract – i.e. to break me into light, orchestrate my disappearance into a new language for hurt, find the words readers will take as promises of collective healing, to take on their imperative to repair until i think it is mine

instead, i channel
the menace of small obstacles,
the ball of hair that clogs the wheels
of moribund progression nicknamed progress.

duck i bathe my feathers in shame then
rub myself against the passerby's leg
he no longer feels innocent.
root i place myself inconveniently
enough for men to have to detour in
large, cumbersome moves.

In my reflection, i seek out the shape of





nettle
unseen at first then burning like hell
guarding the steps of a house or a son's
bed or the room where lovers come.

Whatever the outline of my body,
let it stand in the way.





A LOVE, A MIRROR

... and how are you? how was the ride? i ask as i
pluck old screams from the cotton i'm wearing,
to no one in particular – i am alone on that
train and i swear i am keeping the plot –

except you: are particular, looming in the mirror
in your own assemblage of bones
unbroken or healing, picking yourself up after
another dusk of mourning
and i hold you in my thoughts the way i'd
hold you in my arms
force, gently, your head into my heart,
steady my breath
whisper a pagan prayer to the gods
of restoration.

