helena | Lena | ⲗⲉⲛⲁ

The on the brink

of bankruptcy

.

Its gutted shell
company remains—

the Cape archive kept in the former
Roeland Street prison, its

'instituting imaginary' (Achille Mbembe

The portcullis opens onto

corridors and stack rooms. Urns

of corporate ash

.

In debt, a debtor, I sit at Table 5 near
a door open to the courtyard garden—

by birth a former employee.

I write the debris number C.2449 on the form

in pencil and wait for the ash in the half-light

ϟ

The iron Lodge U maroon
from—marronerons-nous? (Aimé Césaire

—its limewash facade blinding in March
light, delimits the city, as if Cabo | Caab | Kaap | the Cape

rises within its stone courtyard: The white facade repeats

itself citywide—the Houses
of Parliament, the High Court,

the Library—all of which fail to wall U in
. ᐸᔕᔕ | Lena, none of this is the city

if U are the center.

The Cape in yr lifetime almost ash.
The Cape in yr lifetime almost garden

again.

ᔖ

Weggelopene Slavinne

helena van de Caab 1725. in maart

Loclassis van rio de la goa 2 Jan: 1727.

hengüanes —— 2 d: d:

[ash transcript]

Monster rolle van soodanige Slaven, bandietten en Slavinnen, als in Weezen bevonden zijn, onder ult. febr. 5 1727 —

Weggelopene Slavinne

helena van de Caab 1725. in maart
Loelaffis van Rio de la Goa 2 Jan: 1727
Henguanes_____ 2 J:_____

Footnote—

In Dutch *monster* translates into both monster and muster.

weggelopene | runaway. In the city U begin it would be run-toward.

The list U almost last in the 1727 census. An inventory: the Company tallies the teaspoons in the Governor's house and the garden tools in the selfsame volume.

They cannot count U, helena | Lena | ⸗. U are not here.

In secret U write in lontara, the four-corned letters U learn in the ⸗ madrassa?

U maroon in March, 1725. Loelaffis and Henguanes follow U two years later.

Below the Lodge cellar, where U sleep in late summer—on the eve of marronage—

runs an iteration of Xamissa | ⸗ | ka-mi-sa

the streambed underground.

⸗

by whose hand are U itemized—yr absence
from the [1727] census—in these goose quill

curlicues? Whose blots the ink with sand? Each

yellow page framed in cardstock and stitched

into the torso-size

volume C.2449. Legible ash

.

Perhaps an ancestor of mine
Pieter Fourie a functionary

and minor son who does not
inherit the farm in the interior

who does not own
anyone and wants

to. The misspellings (cf. slavinne) the ornate script
the willingness to please—of the nascent
burgher his kin Huguenot 'refugees'

.

I inherit his fleshy cheekbones, his X
chromosomes, his shoe-size, his shoes

his benefits. Oupa, blotto

works for the Post Office, in a blankes- | whites-only
alleenlik position his entire—until

cirrhosis of the liver, as if the dry sand of Pieter Fourie still

trickles from the volume to suppress fire, to blot out

(alternate take)

I step from the crowd into
Shoe Archive on Main
for the SALE written in red
on dust-streaked glass.
Threshold: white-washed
pillars and an iron bell
hanging from the arch.
Displayed on pine boxes
the shoes I own
North Star takkies, tire-
tread sandals, Pepstores
schoolboy shoes, Hi-Tecs,
diachronic worn-out
and taped on the drywall
the yellowing placaat
—such penmanship—
forbidding the slaven | slavinnen
van de Caab to own
whatsoever shoes
in the city of excrement.
Through the shop glass
clouds of ash-edged
paper billow and float
in the heat—on fire, the
document storage
warehouse on Roeland St.
Heretofore unseen:
a piece of census again
or a ship's manifest
redacted with ash and
doubt. At the threshold
onto the arson street
the iron bell clinks
in the shop doorway.
I stumble and pause
to remove my Adidas
as if I had the right
even to yr blisters—

helena | Lena | ᏓᏂᏁ

in search of the city U begin

on foot I ask

permission of the ash

U own The southeaster

ᏄᏍᏗ

To begin again at the source of the city: The iron Lodge, windowless in yr time, helena

van de Caab. If yr last name were no longer Dutch-given, if U choose a name in the instant of marronage: Lena

van ᛗᛁᛃᛟ, of //am-mi asa | fresh water, Lena of silence,

ᚲᛃᛃ of —would yr first name be silence also, or

if my paper vigil outside the Lodge, in the late summer wind, were to beckon U to the air slit on the stairwell

U would signal to me—shut up—with an ashen finger to yr lips?

ᛊ

The ₽₵, a joint-stock LLC. Limited liability—

easier to find the [digital] line item
of yr name helena van de Caab 1725. in maart

than the names of the Heeren XVII
  Dutch board of directors, who profit from

.

Shareholders vote by a show of hands.

Here is my hand

open on the page

⚸