

One Fine Philadelphia Morning

In a mansion on Walnut
our black heroine awakes.

Our black heroine awakes.
Knowing she's alone, sleeps more.

Knowing she's alone, ignores
the antique doorbell ringing

in a mansion on Walnut.

*

The antique doorbell ringing,
the downstairs phone's eruptions,

the downstairs phone's disruptions
do not disturb our heroine.

Our heroine is not perturbed.
Friendless in this new city—

The antique doorbell ceases.

*

Friendless in this new city—
The staircase sighs. A door creaks.

The staircase sighs. A door creaks.
Arthritic trick of the wind;

just the wind's arthritic tricks?
Our heroine sighs "hello."

Friendless in this new city—

*

Our heroine rises, "Hello?"
Peers down the railing's cascade.

Peering down the dark cascade:
sees the thief. She's not alone!

Does the man see her? She's stone!
His back to her, he tiptoes.

Our heroine stifles "Help"

*

His back to her, he tiptoes,
down, down with a small black case.

Down, down with a small black case.
Dispatcher picks up. Whisper.

Dispatcher picks up. Whisper.
"Ma'am, speak up. I can't hear you."

"Ma'am, speak up. I can't hear you.
Is the suspect a black male?"

His back to her, she tiptoes.

*

"Is the suspect a black male?"
dispatches old souls dusting,

old black souls dusting the rails—
of her grad school studio.

In her grad school studio:
DuBois and Ellison march.

"Is the suspect a black male?"

*

DuBois and Ellison watch:
The phone. A cop's loaded gun.

A cop's loaded gun. Her phone...
"Yes, he's black." Her tears are black.

"Yes, he's black." Her tears are black.
Aren't all our heroine's brothers?

DuBois's and Ellison's march.

*

When Last—

after Kamau Brathwaite

(i)

here I am reduced
to a mutter of ash
a harrow of bone
a dream of meningitis

where I cannot hum home
I cannot shell peas
I cannot quarantine money

my ambition was a thistle in my crown
a vague map a vaulted ceiling
bright fruit in my pocket we blanketed seas

I bundled up my wife & my children
“my authority was foot-stamp upon the ground”
I nailed green stars to our palms

here I am reduced
to a siege of forgiveness
a flag in my widow’s eye
before the shelter of coma
the triumphant corn

in the quiet
in the absence
I transform

(ii)

here I am

a churning sail
without trunk-mast
without dug-out boat
a muttering sheet
steering a cot

no plantain
no fufu
in my mortar's gap

here I am

a sea-wall slap
a wailing slip at my window
you daughter-in-law
you granddaughter
my grandson
you bury my son
in a Canada plot
cremate him like a Hindi djin
you creosote
you nutmeg dung
I cough you back
don't stand in my yard
under my guinnep tree
don't flood my door
clinging to me
don't conjure his face in my porch-lamp's skirt
I cough you back

(iii)

here I am leaping
precipice wail of banana leaves
whole mountains cut on the bias
cutlass waves & coco debris
I run home

here I am bracketing
breadfruit & guinnep gossip
& porch-lamp blare
to stand in galvanize prayer
in a hail of Mami Mary's mourning

here I am pell-mell
in a hurricane curse
her black purse brandished
to bruise bone
peel rind
disown my father's face from mine

here I am
a ginger lily awaiting a gap in the iron

a bent stalk

a loneliness
a loneliness
a loneliness

father gone
grandmother has shut her door

Undressing The River

Slow, salt-fired

Abandon the beach—
that oppositional miracle of hot, black sand, the volcano's sputum of sparkling shit—

to the cruise ship.
Pick your way.

Rewind music to its source.
What the trees drop

Mountain kiaso: mango, copra, banana dung
Your feet could stagger through

and get caught? Be stuck here forever:
Two nodes on the island's primordial web.

Spot her? The cow (tamarind brown). Horns!
She spots you. Grow very still.

It is said:
Columbus' men from their vantage lost at sea took one look and declared Waitukubuli,
“a crumpled heap of paper,”

clutch a sheaf of land, squish it into one's fist then toss it on a sea-faring table.
Et voilá: the impasse: “Dominica.”

Leave the riverbank to her: the logos of what trembles underfoot.

*not the gutted estates, not the airport tarmac stocked for export, not the wait for IMF
and EU subsidies*

Step back into the river.
Back onto the rocks—some jagged as the day the volcano dropped 'em

And walk

Lost Planet

It is music for exile... for symptoms of migration. It is the languishing. Pick through your belongings. Decide what to take.

My face? That photo? Granny's recipe for *braf*? Black cake? Greencard (tick.) The heart's a camera. Click. Picture 'an ancient muse of exile.' Name her "Harriet" for symptoms of migra—

Shun the cornfields, the free town ashore the Great Lake with two black families, first bike, plenty friends? Now stick to what belongs. Decide what to fake.

Too black? Not black enough? Shake the definition tree. Move south. Guard exhibits at the Frick & join the pan-African suitcase museum of exiles. For symptoms of migra' (an ocean's tendency to wander back in time) dull aches, forgetful flags, joyous bursts of heroic rhetoric for a music that doesn't exist—enter the 125th St. symphony of migratory selves. Dear Brethren, The Future Might Be Long, so decide what to take.

Refuge

Dear disappeared town, the flowers
at my window remind someone of you. Say
“petunias.” Hear *Betunia*—town of his father’s birth.
Mornings, my man leaps from my bed to brew mint-
cardamom tea. Hear *sea*. Dear *B*, his father’s
found a way to grow fig-trees in Newark, NJ.
In winter, you are safe, burlap-cocooned,
a smuggled-secret in his garage.
No hungry warblers. No sudden frosts.
Nor the Atlantic weight that can slow.

Nor the Atlantic weight that slows
an eighty-year old Palestinian man walking
through Manhattan in search of olive oil.
He scours bright shelves of the city. *Home*
is a map salvaged purely from memory
and the beveled light in his hands.
Olive oil as smoke. Olive oil as wine.
Olive oil as desert mosque. Which orchard.
Which school. Which mother. Which son.
Dear son, come summer, he will lift.

Dear sun, come summer, he will lift
the trees and place them under your ardor,
darning that lost farm with this cramped
garden, for there's only one celestial arbor
we all live under. He will become master-
seamstress, desert bee, oh, pollinating one.
For here lies his secret to the ripening of figs
in Newark, NJ: Prick each fig, every one,
with a needle, dipped in olive-oil.
A man crows, brings me tea and smoke.

My man crows, brings me tea and smoke—
purple fruit from the chain-link garden.
I graze each coppery plum. Say “home.”
Hear *Chile, Brazil, Iceland and Jordan.*
Seek the invisible navel. The mouth
is a bulldozer? No, our smoke-velvet lips
warble “witness,” join in the map-maker’s prayer:
This orchard. This school. This mother. This son.

This fig. This room. No one can say gone is gone.
Not the disappeared town, not the flowers.

Bessie's Hymn

The door, I've been
shouldering

is ajar—a spoon of light, a threshold
of honey—

a cataract, a riot, a trumpet
of honey. To pass through it now is to get wet

with fire or rain, is to be a BAM Hippopotamus woman 880BC
walking the sunken garden, an Amphora of Honey on Her Head.

The sun's eye winks. Sterling Brown warbles and Honey oozes, opulently yolks
apiary riches (((amber dollops))) into wild black air.

and all the birds sing bass

I am paddling up a river of honey

to stand in a field, a child on my hip.
There is no field. There is no child. Yes?

I am abuzz. In this honey-buckwheat field, a child
on both hips. Honey hands tug at my hair.

MEN I RAN WITH (subtitled) "All the wrong ones."

One to ©Scrabble
One to contend in Wolof & French
One to scratch Adelbergh whiskey from his sand blonde beard.

An envelope opens. 2 frail petals tumble out. The peony
in full bloom Monday, washed away in last night's rain.

Even I want to lick the slate clean. Waggle: "Orpheus
was here. He came back for me. He held my hand and led"
and all the birds sing bass
But now I see. The Hand

I've been holding all this wild is my own:
a laying on of skirts
petals on the Avatar's crown!
My Banished ones come back inside me to be born
Tuesday through a doorway only honey, honey, honey.

In the dream, Oshun is pulling
Book after Book from my shelf. They all have my name on them.
“You’ve been Busy”

She says and the honey spills from her eyes. She is smiling.
“You are ready.” “You know how to die.”

Homecoming

White-gloved and perched on the rear hood of the chrome-hubbed convertible gleaming white in the Lake Huron sun, I am one of three girls chosen to be Vestal virgins to the altar of white, Diana's maidens to the Homecoming Queen. Our white-stocking'd legs and polished white shoes brood statuesque over the rear red leather. Our white eye-let shivering. Our white ribbons flagging. Our white-gloved hands waving and waving and waving to the white faces lining the tree-lined streets lining this small Scottish town.

But the hand inside my glove is brown and the face peeping from the white-ruffled neck of my summer white dress is a beautiful hazelnut brown. This is my hometown. My legs: two severe batons majorette the hot red leather. Even after the crowds thin out and the breeze off the lake picks up. Even after the bagpipes' keen moan fades. Out past the protestant oaks, out past the immigrants' bell-less church with its small brick frame, its gravel driveway, out towards the cornfields, when only Lake Huron with its lull of tall grasses and only the perennial pines wave back, I am still waving.

