

Manchile

Is escape dem-a farr
musk rose blooms
the tight room with its oils, drying clothes
stale mask of nivea cream
the skin dying of sweat
the mattress drying of rot
she will not open the window
for fear of intruders
yesterday the girl raped in the toilet of the carib cinema
by four
fourteen year old you'
yesterday the girl raped comin' home from school
yesterday the girl raped in her home, in her own bed
and all of her dolours taken
the room stifles the forehead
as the necchi sings
if she had had a child, it would have been a girl
sleeping
or a boy sucking his thumb, pushing his soles through
the hole
in the blanket
you want out de light?
the breasts small and familiar
coconut oil as she stands close
the rayon slip-on thin as skin now
luminous with flesh
black span of darkness
your bridge to her world
and she arching, glowing closer, closer
curving as the world curves
as the evening curves
the wind like a soft fresh of showers
her almond of silence

she enters your soul
 displacing your anger, the days' useless lumber
 she lets it explore you
 converting you prone to columbus,
 some eyeless african sailor,
 and brings you home hero,
 circled with flowers, confetti of love blinding you

but she is locked still in her island
 your key will click, responsive to its prick
 of heat; the gear will shift, its metal tendons scraping
 wheels tearing the gravel as darkness explodes in the engine,
 the owls of the lights blinking on at the gate-
 way an lard how it hot
 how a greasy
 an de pickney dress-dem to done
 an de long track a night tick tickin tick tickin
 machine pedal an clatterin on
 and de clock stuck at 1.35 1.35 1.35 1.35

see how me yeyes cahn prop open even
 an de rent to pay
 an anoder one comin tomarrow
 an who will remember dem ancient a days dat i walkin
 to school
 walkers wood, ocho rios
 how me pranalang down to camperdown town
 an de man want i sleep wid im
 an me got me exam
 an de man seh mek i go wid im
 do' me yeye never stann mek me look pan im
 but what you go do when yuh belly gane slack
 and you young gifted an black?

im drive away now
 in im company car
 in im see-through shirt
 an im rolex

while i sittin down here wid dis fine toot' comb
 tryin to scratch out de lies dat a tell
 cause a girl got to learn not to get too ole
 not to let it look dat she belly gone cole
 for dese men who is here tonight
 an tomarrow dem gane. . . .

Edward Kamau Brathwaite

Bread

Slowly the white dream wrestles to life
 hands shaping the salt and the foreign cornfields
 the cold flesh kneaded by fingers
 is ready for the charcoal, for the black wife
 of heat, the years of green sleeping in the volcano.
 the dream becomes tougher, settling into its shape
 like a bullfrog. suns rise and electrons
 touch it. walls melt into brown, moving to crisp and crackle
 breathing edge of the knife of the oven.
 noise of the shop, noise of the farmer, market.
 on this slab of lord, on this table with its oil-skin cloth
 on this altar of the bone, this sacrifice
 of isaac: warm dead, warm merchandise, more than worn
 merchandise: life
 itself: the dream of the soil itself
 flesh of the god you break, peace to your lips, strife

of the multitudes who howl all day for its saviour
who need its crumbs as fish, flickering through their green
element, need a wide glassy wisdom
to keep their groans alive

and this loaf here, life
now halted, more and more water add-
itive, the dream less clear, the soil more distant,
its prayer of table, bless of lips, more hard to reach
with penn-

ies: the knife
that should have cut
it, the hands that should have broken open its victory
of crusts

at your throat: balaam watching with red leak-

ing eyes: the rats

finding only this young empty husk: sharp-
ening their ratchets: your wife
going out on the streets, searching, searching

her feet tapp/ing, the lights of the motor-
cars watching watching, round-
ing the shape of her gir-
dle, her back naked

rolled into night into night without morning
rolled into dread into dread without dream
rolled into life into life without vision.

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