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trance

after trauma
you walk with your eyes
dead-like in a forward direction

you tell the cashier
no bag, thanks
when she asks/ if you need one
for another 5 cents

you wanna ask her for bandages:
the back of your ankle
is red raw and peeling

you came for something else
but you ask anyway

she says no in confusion
and then asks: the flesh kind
and you say yes
the flesh kind
your raw feet already moving
toward the exit

outside the light stings
there are cars and cars
some stop
and wave you on
you stare at the cement
feel the forward whoosh of them
your hair flying behind you
trauma lives in spaces
you’re meant to forget
down a lone road/ no one knows
how to find without
an awful map
you can’t make

and now your feet are still again
red raw and stinging
they have taken you
to coffee, to sit down
to something cold already
and the server asks: milk and sugar
you say, just milk no sugar
and he asks again because you mumbled
so you say no sugar
cuz that is what you know you like
and no one knows where you are

you drink your coffee
make sure your feet
are still there
lift the bandages on your ankles
to see the pain

wait until your mind returns to your eyes
so they’re no longer dead
wait until they start to work again
till they lock you back in place
so your feet will move again
in some forward direction
we run in burning sands

Cuban people
sunburnt people
yelling un pastelito y un cafecito!

College students in community classes
stopping at the nearby McDonald’s
to pick up two apple pies for $1.99

Downtown streets honking, honking
while homeless men
patrol for kind eyes,
a hand slipped into a pocket

Rushing, rushing to work
Brickell kids looking sharp in crisp shirts
starched from the dry cleaner’s

Complacency washes over this place:
crash of waves
howl of hurricane winds

We run in burning sands
from things that some of us
can’t just outrun

Salt air, humidity
dried tears from when they took your father
sun on your forehead
sand in your bikini bottom
bitter grains on your tongue
I still miss the sweetness of his morning coffee—
it was instant coffee that he’d whisk with a little water
before adding milk and sugar
gas fumes smoky
skidding on asphalt
checkpoints that derailed our car
He tried to switch seats with the passenger
but the police officer saw his game
and pulled us over —
I couldn’t say
why, but then he was taken,
handcuffed in a business suit
while I looked away
Sudden rain
umbrella flipping over in the rain
soaking wet from the rain
Carpeted bus seats
that leave marks on my thighs
because we can no longer drive
I make it home,
kiss mami cheeks to say hi
so much honking from today
don’t know how to make it go away
don’t know how to run away
While tourists eat skirt steak,
chimichurri sauce between their teeth
ocean monsters

I’m running
all the time

the same bridge
along the same bay
that always waits
for me

where the wind whips
inside my brain when
certain hits hit
    pavement pavement pavement
    ankles and knees
my hair tied back tight
but already slipping out at my ears

like if I run fast enough
these thoughts won’t
    catch up
like people won’t be
gone anymore
like death itself
    can’t catch me
like he won’t have left
like my best friend
    won’t have died

I swear I see him
in the water looking up
at me, wondering how fast
    I’ll go
such patience in his eyes, like he knows
not fast enough, cuz I
can’t catch him anyway
    he just runs
through my fingers when finally I stop
at the bottom of the bridge
to dip my hand

if I swirl my wrist
he seems farther from me
like the ocean monsters have
    taken him —
if I were them
I’d take him too

welcome him into
the green algae and say
    make yourself at home here
that octopus is smarter
than all those upstairs,
she’ll reach out her tentacles
    and hold onto his fingers

they have him/ I know
and they’ll keep him
but still I wish I could
bring him up
    every now and then
lift him way above the water
like a sunset that takes over
    the sky
and hold him there
watch him fade to blue purple
    and orange
mijito

is a word we both liked
cuz it was ours

and I don’t mean ours
(cuz we never were)
but I mean ours
like a people

it is endearing
and we need endearing
cuz first, who doesn’t
but we do specifically

need softness where
anger stiffens our necks
a constant crack/ on our left side
whenever we turn to look
cuz we can’t figure out
how we got here

how we owe this much
how we need a lawyer for that
how our parents don’t have enough
how ICE cages children
why sometimes I curl on the couch
and grieve

lost loves that never were
and opportunities we didn’t take
because grief and loss are a state
we live in
and when they overtake us
I sometimes want to say
let them
take us

now I know us is not really *us*
(cuz we never were)
but I mean us
as a people

cuz we both see how many
mami words we need when
things don’t go our way
when that knot in our shoulder
tightens

I say *us* cuz
I was used to feeling things/ alone
and when you said
   I like the word *mijito*
and I said
   me too
we became more us/

finally seeing ourselves
in each other
wait

make yourself smaller, they said
well, they didn’t really say it

lower your voice when you speak indoors
in restaurants, in stores, they said
except they didn’t really say it

but their voices consumed/ the air, the room
cuz we had to know/ what they were saying

fit in your space, your booth
your home, they said
except they didn’t really say it

except one time/ one said:
could you wait so that the two women behind you can go?

what he didn’t say was:
so that the two white women behind you can go?

and you, caught off guard [it’s not your fault], said:
*um, okay, I guess, I don’t . . . I’m not*

great! he said
and you watched them go

in that moment of waiting you wondered
why your time means less or
why the white women’s time means more
than your waiting
so you’re waiting
and your waiting
climbs toward your throat
you wanna scream/ jump up and down in place
you wanna say, but don’t:

*why did you ask me that?*

the man at the door smiles as he watches you/ wait
watches you but doesn’t see you
float away above yourself/ to wait

until: *your turn.*

you twist the words and think: *your turn.*

your turn was two white women ago
your turn, you think/ will be when you don’t need
to float again/ to stay grounded on this earth

when you don’t need to shrink yourself
to fit through doors like these
talking numbers

why is it that 3 out of 4
3 out of 4
Black men (+ boys —
the same when it’s convenient)
are gone
locked up meaning gone

my friend told me that at 16
he was sent to Rikers
that he became a number
at 16, an OT (old timer) at 17

he said it didn’t matter
how he spoke, who he was
the judge just said:
that’s where you go

I told him that makes me angry
you were 16

he said: I went in for 9 months
then 2 days after getting out
went back in
was at the wrong place/ wrong time
this time for 2 months

3 out of 4
I didn’t know that my friend of 8 years
was 1: he hadn’t in 8 years
told me that at 16
he was gone
his mother didn’t visit
gave him a typed-up letter
via his father
who had to pay 15 thousand in bail
the second time

my friend asked:
have the police stopped you?

I am not 3 out of 4
the way he is

I told him:
I am another kind of number
[A170894178]

that I worry I’ll be forced to leave
for a while had stopped worrying
but now it had come back
told him I am scared/ again
asked if he was scared
of going back too

he said: not this time
now I can afford lawyers
I can do something

but I could feel the shake in his grip
matching mine

we are not the same.

but we both see each other
stay angry for each other
i swear there was a river

If I pick one up bit by bit maybe I can start to make sense of the whole of the things we were supposed to do of the plans we had made I don’t know if anything can be put back together when we came we got off and walked down and somehow made a life and we walked and we walked and then somewhere along the way we decided to stay because place grounds you and lives are formed and somehow you find you can’t leave this new place you try calling home but the language isn’t yours and the people are not yours and then your sense of yours becomes fragmented I swear it made sense somewhere sometime at least that’s what they told me when they narrated their lives before coming how they had known what to do but then you come and there isn’t the river that guides you my father was confident when he went back that he would find his way told the cab driver to make a right make a left make another left I swear that’s where my home is but he went in circles and then he went in zigs and zags until sharp corners injured my father and eventually he got out of the car to make sense of things and that’s when he saw that time just keeps going so he got back in the car and told the driver I don’t know where the river is and the driver told him the river dried up and my father fell except he didn’t fall but somewhere in his mind something fell and broke in pieces and he feigned putting them
in a puzzle box to hold while he told the driver can you help me can you tell me where I live and the driver said of course and led the way and my father saw that home wasn’t back where he came from whatever that means as if you can come from one place and hold that place cuz daddy forgot except he didn’t forget it was the river that dried up. it was the river that dried up. it was the river that dried up.
we carry it

We carry the dead on our feet
carry them everywhere we go
we pass pigeon remains
lifeless bodies every day
more smashed down
cuz cars, feet, and I
have walked on top

We carry the dead on our feet
leave our shoes by the door
attempting to keep that dirt
at the boundary of our homes
but it creeps in, gets carried
through our hallways
into our living rooms
where it gets trapped
in our rugs and later
crawls into our beds,
wanting to rest alongside us

We carry it in us
this thing we’re afraid
to name for our children
when they are the ones
that can, without monitoring
their tongues, like we have grown
accustomed to doing
terrified to admit
that we carry it in our hearts
that grief makes its way upward
from the tips of our toes
but gets stuck in our grip
as our hands go on scrubbing away
remnants of soil, ash, decay
denying, denying, denying

We carry this death
carry it everywhere we go
carry it within ourselves
too heavy to share,
a sand bag waiting to
burst open and empty its
glitter over everything