FAITH PARÉ

Self-Portrait as No Man's Land

Everyone's drawing a border these days. All the walls breaching horizons / the glare of Westmount's iron gates looming from the sun / tourists gulping sangria to ignore the floundering Black specks off the shores of their resorts / the line willed to life between the handbag of a middle-aged blonde & I / her nails carving territory into what was once skin. Left that life on the curb / walked countless city blocks emptying into cul-de-sacs / backroads / field after field where cows give kinder looks than white folks do. Walked past burning cities, too tired for another revolution / woods where wind still dares to speak to trees bearing foreign names / seas lulling the bones of escapees before me. Time dripped away like sweat down my forehead. Each step peeled back the earth's rind till I reached a place of all white / ground & sky's divide erased / a blank page. Knees kissed the dirt / in terror / in thanks / no other soul but silence

& then, an ahem.

You again. Haven't met personally. Just many like him with his ledgers / jackboots / a face from 1492. He's quick, the flagpole plunged through my midriff. Too busy with paperwork for the smallness of my breaths. Some distant nation's flag whipped against the air. Its shadow shrouded my body. The blood beneath me expanded into a country. There it was / the edge of the world / receding behind my eyelids.

Testimony

I have no words, Officer. Blame my tongue, who stole each one in its scamper for escape when he begged mewhen your men with the gavel-bang voices hounded me. Yes, I remember bodies, their blur. Her temper already unravelling from bad wages & sore feet. Breakfast dishes he'd been told to wash still stacked in the sink. Shouts charging for him before she even reached his room. How I peered from the staircase a second too late-Officer. I just heard a hand thrash through air-breathlessnessthe teacup clatter of her bones-then the swell of quiet. My tongue tied

& tried unravelling. The crater left behind a scream that couldn't escape. A sudden smack of reds & blues—the law pounding on the door. Bodies blurred the roomswarmed-hollers-handcuffsunravelling the Black boy to his knees. They wanted to know what I had seen. She said remember how his fist sheathed into the red of her mouthhe said tell them it wasn't himof our lifelong flee from the thrash of her muleta tonguethey said who hurt who-I said when—at what point they didn't hear-just hissed like their radiostell us-can't you remember-who swung-who's wrongyou saw-but I blinked. I blinked. Truth lost within that dark bridge between.

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My bones knew who.
My eyes did not
Et he shattered—
a dish against drywall.
Don't you see, Officer?
There's a fist where
his heart used to be.
A second is still
charging through the house
of me.