

The Hit

When Daiquane is eighteen years old
and two months into his eleventh grade year

he is hit by two chabóns who drive with intention.
They drive a Toyota Celica, green like the trees, which

do not line the block, the trees that smell like summers
Diaquane watches on T.V. Even if there were trees

like along those downtown blocks with tulips at the roots, they would
just seem invisible against the place that he calls home.

The trees seem everywhere in his dreams.
In a recurring cycle of sleep, when he still

lived with his mother and could still feel the heat
of angry words on her breath

when she pulled the sheets over him at night,
so soon as he would close his eyes, he would climb the pines –

besotted by limbs like ladder rungs – up
toward some other dimension.

It is a desert of death when they are through. They have
hit him once to knock him to the ground –

heavy teenage trunk uprooted – rims aglitter in the lamplight,
and then turned around –

right wheels upon the curb in the sharp swing
back towards the fallen, to cruise over

his skull and away,
into the night,

dicks hard
with the ache of adrenaline.

Gray Matter

I finish reading Bessie's murder out loud
on the day I get assaulted at school.

There is a sudden hand-to-weave hair-fight
that descends upon the classroom

over an inadvertent brush-by
in the doorway over lip gloss

and then I try to talk one girl
off the ledge of this mania –

we are in a putrid corner of the hallway now –
my white arms out long

to lock her away from all of this
misdirected fury, and

her hands lunge into my chest
in perfect synchronicity, as if

quickly planting palms
to hop into Caturanga

and her hands are mine as I
lean deeper into a forward bend,

and my breasts
are the two spots on the mat

to which the hands
magnetize and stick

while a dewy, halcyonic mist
blurs action from cognition.

And it's not the falling back as much as
the way the flesh of my breasts inverts

under the heels of her Dorito-licked hands
and the furnace-minded charge of

that anger,

which meets me
through the muscle-jolt

of a girl who lacks
plain agency:

that makes my feet lose the floor
and topple.

I hear some communal
gasp; someone whispers

“She pushed *Emily*”
and their eyes say

I am more sacrosanct
than the girl who is

bleeding from her skull-skin
in the other room

or the other in front of me
who they can already barely see

anymore. This truculent breast-push
is the apogee of violence in my life –

Bigger’s hands slide
onto Mary’s rum-beat

breasts, his hands
touch Bessie’s breasts,

resigned. Her hands slam
mine, so that

she is Bigger and
I am Mary and Bessie

and I am Bigger, too, and she
is Mary and Bessie

and she
and I

just tumble into a cycle
of perpetual subjugation

that stretches across
a span of score in which

we are all perpetrators
because of what we are born into

and trapped by the prophesy
that contains each iota

of our
inevitable lives.

I'd Had A Long Day

1.

In the basement, the Haitian kid and the Jamaican kid
finally had it out for their countries. As beef patties
flew around the cafeteria like saucers,
the Haitian kid and the Jamaican kid
fused and rolled into the hallway.

The half-dressed throngs from the locker rooms
and sweaty jerseys from the gym spilled forth
by way of intuition and chatter; they
salivated for the primacy of action. The whole building
turned in and over itself; children sluiced down the stairwells
towards inevitable circumstance.

By the time the school safety agents
rounded up and lollied down
like a troop of Shakespearian boobies, enough time had passed
for the wheels to have stopped. And when they
neared the Haitian kid and the Jamaican kid, motion
was already invisible.

In the epicenter was a mess of stress, and the agents
stiffened up at the sight. One child dialed 9-1-1 on his cell, but
reception was poor in the basement
and his voice too still for the responder.

When the EMT crew did descend upon the spot,
the gym teacher stood up from holding in the blood
somewhere along the curve where neck meets shoulder,
where the scissors still stuck in. His clothes
looked like sheets of symmetrical inkblots. He looked –
in his sweatpants – as if he had just emerged
from messily painting a house.

After lockdown, after the coroner
packed the Jamaican kid into a bag and stole
out of the school in a whisper, and after the news cameras
snuck glances through the windows into
our emergency faculty meeting,
I found myself glazed on the train platform at Utica.

2.

Two young brothers and their younger sister walk past me.
Their sneakers blink red each time their feet hit the concrete, except
the sister's, which blink pink and silver glitter. We are all
near the end of the platform and the air is dank. I've had a long day,
and I think that to myself while rubbing my eyes
with my fingers as the kids walk by.

The boys stop on either side of their sister. They look like her bodyguards. They stand on the bumpy yellow strip, which is too close to the platform edge. They are not her bodyguards. She is little. I think she is good at math. They eye each other and then grab their sister, one brother at each of her arms. She is squirming, but they hold strong, inching closer to the rim. They start to hold her over.

Her feet are trying for the edge, pointing down and straining back. I've had enough today. I muster up the teacher voice. "Excuse me, gentlemen," I say. "Put her down. Right. Now. Don't think I won't ride home with you and tell your mother what just went on."

They are back on the platform now, all feet on concrete. I say, "Stand by the wall." Their sister slides towards me. The older of the brothers pulls her back by the handle of her Dora knapsack.

"Young man!" My voice is shrill like my mother when we climbed too high in the pine trees. "Do not touch her again." "Whatchu gonna do bout it?" I am red as that puddle near the gym now.

"Come here and stand with me," I say to her. "My name is Emily." The younger brother is looking down at his shoes now. The other one goes on, "Miss Emily, see – we Bloods. My boy Pumpkin gonna fuck you up. We gonna ride the train and follow *you* home."

He holds up a machine gun made of the air and chouk- chouk - chouk - chouk – chouk's me with the fantastic spray of his imagination.

After the gunfire subsides, I look him in the eyes. "I know what I'm gonna do with you," I say. I gently put my tote bag on the ground. "Fuck off already lady," he whines.

We are only a foot apart. He is small, around seven. I lunge in, lift him hard under the armpits, and walk him to the platform edge.

I can feel the grooves of the yellow strip beneath my feet like root-knolls on a trail. I can feel rushes of blood surge into my elbows as his weight tests my arms, outstretched.

I can feel the humid breeze from the tunnel
hit my wicked face as nearing headlights
expose the rusty tracks below us.

To Ms. Olds

When I am writing in my room
I leaf through a womb of yours
crawl into the purplish bruise
and hope my thoughts turn lucid,
that this femininity waxes meaningful,
that I am bleeding ovaries, that
I talk to my children in dreams
where I am running through ferns,
to discover them inside me someday,
that I had sex, too, and practiced
speaking of this pastoral body.
I find some space of yours
in a splash of blood; your sister
peed on you – my sister's head hit
the coffee table spinning
and I was soaked. It seemed like
pomegranates exploded into rain
and she was dripping. I laughed
at my father when he cried and sat
with my mother over *her* cottage cheese
and disorders, watched her slam a feeble
fist into the glass atop the kitchen table
because I wouldn't use a fork
to eat my sushi. I am a part
of this Freudian demeanor – the long hair
down my spine like man-o-war tendrils
ready to shock or choke any toucher,
the glasses that keep me one wall
from my meeting Baudrillard –
this poetry is a matrix of movers
and your speaker is some
anthropomorphic women
trapped on the page like
the woman in the yellow
hedges of insomnia, crazed
she didn't have the audacity to jump.

February 29th

It was early. I was standing
on the platform at 72nd street

waiting for the 1 train to arrive. I was
reading about meeting the things

that scare you. The book was
blue with a black trim

and the first page had a pleasurable texture
and was patterned in an interlocking chain

that made it look like wrapping paper
one might use

to wrap a bottle of scotch
for a grandfather

or journal for a
nascent father.

The train flew in
and a man standing

too close to the platform edge let himself
fall in front of it. He twisted

to lie back against
the face of the train for a moment

so he could hold a new perspective
and then tumbled under

as the train lurched into
the stillness of the emergency.

All the women on the platform
started screaming. I

started screaming. I started screaming
from some place inside

that doesn't even discern
the why of it. I felt

a shock of silver
shoot down

through my organs
as if my body set off a flash

and my memory
snapped a picture of the feeling

to store in the place that
registers the viscerals.

I kept looking around hoping
to see someone I knew to share

in the fear of it all
and when nobody registered

I hugged my book against
my breast so tightly that

my fingers were cold
when I released. I heard

the conductor's voice
over the loud speaker indicate

that there were delays on
the 1 train and that

the express train,
whose doors were open

across the platform,
would run local. I walked into

an almost empty car
and a woman with sunglasses on

and green hospital scrubs
hugged me into her arms

and rubbed my back. She
sat me down. She kept

repeating "It's okay. Calm
down. It's okay." The train

was there as
a sitting room. His

body seemed
to collapse

into the moment of its death
as if it knew relief

was coming. There was

no fear in his posture, nor

steadfastness in his spine. He
fell like a limp fish. His coat

was olive and beige and
his blue jeans looked flaccid like water.

I did not look into the woman's eyes
who consoled me. I did not ask

her name. I said "I need to go up
to the street," and I walked

towards the stairs. I had been waiting
at the end of the platform

for the back of the train
so had to walk

the length of the suicide
in order to exit. People

were crowded around where
the man was under the train wheels

trying to peer into his life.
All of the people exited the train.

They wore blank expressions
through the doors and did not know

the reason for the abrupt end
to their journey. Nobody was

in control. Some new commuters
were walking onto the platform.

The express train left. I walked
onto the street and called Matt

right away. I was sobbing and hiccupping
among the suits. I told him

I loved him and then
walked the 12 blocks up to work.

