

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

for Crissy From The Creek



# Tangerine Tubman

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the twilight doesn't stay soft for long;  
it rings out, sings out to the credulous  
and reroutes the curiosity of incredibly  
furious men.

on the hidden paths (for the runaways who travel them),  
morning's falsetto is an unraveling ray; with their feet  
to the wind, they are often the most fleet at midnight.

branches have cracked; aching / bearing America's brunt  
balance, distributing the weight of Africa's face value / hearts  
heavy; their frothy-black hair swaying disconnected from this  
specious heaven: bodies flinched / straight as a shaft of light,  
identities breached by this contortion to truth, no matter which  
side of the limb your equilibrium gleans from / clinging to pride.

for 300 years those broken boughs have been a balancing act:  
a one-sided-avarice vs. the seeds of Kujichagulia

...

*"Harriet... did you hear me? I said I love you."*

*"Shhhh"*, she says; eyes smiling, parting the crepuscule;  
the topography of sky as blueprint for our relay run.  
for the leanest of moments coal eyes share discourse  
with the constellations, become as buckshot  
drawing a focused bead on the iridescence remaining...  
instincts straining, sieving sight from sound.

am I the fool for wanting with mouth waxing  
and actions waning?

I move to her side, the caress of a callused hand  
against the cicatrices of hips.

that's my answer: I am the fool.

100 feet off the plantation and every slave claims himself  
her protector / thinks he's the reason she's invincible.

*"Harriet? Minta... I... "*

her hand to my mouth is hard and cold and without callus  
(how is such a thing even possible?) and again I am shushed,

*"Mmmmp, mmmmp..."*

the plum of her palm a perfect muzzle, but what is it she muffles?  
my noise? or my nonsense?

from the underbrush, she rises slowly and assumes a position  
meant for soliloquy / the butt of her rifle serving as witness and  
pulpit; BlackMoses in full zenith, her esophagus striking flint,  
dark eyes with the depth of a Nile Delta / Harriet says to me,  
Minta says:

*"Do you think this little bit of dirt is the proper bed  
for us, new and raw, to be beautiful on?"*

her eyes quiver / seeing everything at once - the sun and  
the shadowlands; all the pain and all the promise.  
always 7 moves ahead of pitfall,  
she is the Master Strategist for Stolen Property.

Harriet Tubman stands a five foot tower floating above  
our temporary berth; diminutive but undaunted.

America's Black Moses.

if she were a White woman, then European bards with flute  
and lyre would admire her in song, would hauntingly laud  
her determination and her beauty. would frame her  
a lounging odalisque surrounded with suitor-kings  
and sable handmaidens. *statuesque*, the bards would sing,  
but she is not White with *'plums or peaches?'* as her daily plight.

here, colonial tongues will only wag the words  
best suited for cattle and American chattelhood;

at best, 'stoic' / maybe 'somewhat heroic', but  
most likely: 'of strong stock with good teeth and  
a stern jaw. suited for thrashing seed from chaff,  
but can bleed a calf and knows her way around  
the kitchen. you can trust her around your children  
and it is somewhat a fallacy, the slander  
of her "*not being worth a sixpence*"; because  
she is built, indeed, for many burdens.'

no.

if they only knew she was about freedom and love then  
they would hang her on the spot. they will never label her  
the 'fawn' or cast her in gouache and oil with gold corona  
embracing her crown / with morning's dew dampening  
the dark porcelain of her soft, midnight brow;  
she'll just be a single line entry  
in the slaver's long ledger - a wet nurse  
or loyal servant / a good cook - short words  
meant to unbrace any chance of Africa's  
defiant stance, but damn them that,

for my Harriet is *statuesque,*  
*nonetheless.*

but when did I become this salacious?  
does the prospect of freedom / this perchance at death  
make me so unafraid, wanting my desires unreserved?  
I'm ashamed not wanting this love to just be adrenaline,  
for Harriet's touch to not just be transient.  
who knew wrought-iron could be this tender?

where her hands (at least, to me) are soft - Harriet's eyes  
could kick-start a mule. and when she speaks, she is looking  
directly into the gourd of my spirit and within  
the spiraling pupils of her eyes I am swallowed  
whole in soul's entirety:

*"us people, ...us us-people, need  
an entire Earth beneath them and not just  
the grass-stain swatch patched in convenience  
for a wounded ass, not if we're to be the kind  
of love Our God intends. and it's not*

*that I don't trust you... I'm just tired.  
I manage time; never have I tamed it.  
understand - not just be aware of - my fear  
of alacrity (concerning 'love') - my kitchens  
are full of yeast and sweat and not, yet,  
enough cinnamon ...and hardly any cane;*

***and I will not  
bake my lover's  
bread in secret.***

*the woman I am must always be hard,  
guarded, and strong enough to keep bloodshed  
from the bedroom. Lord knows, this way of life  
offers us no easy staples for new love, not when  
it barely feeds itself. and as long as we are slaves  
we are at war: we are not ghosts. we, too,  
deserve something good. and for the free of us  
to chase 'more', some must embrace the phantasms;  
be as bridges for the chasms."*

a wrought spell her deepest whisper.

...

the salted black scar is forced into the shape of the south's  
asphyxiating smile and I'm of little help. I offer no intimate  
sovereignty for our hopes and fears; the coon's cooing  
demeanor as our only open-faced defiance and, at end,  
all I can do is run for the hills, for what manner of man  
embraces a lifetime of sadness without the sternest  
persuasion / the threat of white damnation and death  
hanging o'er his head in all physical surreality?

with shoes torn and overrun, I remove a pebble;  
hands that crave the carving of soapstone into memory  
are too busy mending sack-cloth into an incomplete culture.  
what incessantly boils in this nebulous brine, from every corner  
of these cold colonies, is the bone marrow of our seasoned elders.

in its pickled prime, the fermented black skin  
is their perfect prize. its mineral ores battled for, bottled,  
and bartered over; sold to the highest bidder / fodder

for the south's spoiled, specious gods; their preciously  
mottled gods: their blotters throbbing with our flesh,  
robbing us, rubbing us away...

but what use is it to us now, rehashing this  
over-known history beneath heaven's open court:

after all this uncivil descent, has not  
the proper din justifiably been heard?

to the Gods of Fear: I say  
*fuck you, sir!*  
and I spit into their eyes.  
oh, how brazen I've become:  
the absquatulating anarchist.

...

this is what makes Lady Harriet  
an underived hero; at the first request  
of emergent heartbeat, goals are met  
without hesitation / the choice concluded,  
she propagates freedom:

our double-agent.  
sainted-prototype-suffragist.  
our perennial secret weapon.  
our Black Knight in Midnight's Armor.  
defense attorney against their cooing clucks;  
armed. straight-forward.  
steady ...and so very supple.

...

what fool would not follow  
such an unassuming beauty?  
I've saturated myself with her every keloid  
and sank kisses blistering into skin. my spirit  
inflated by her touch; my un-sated heart  
an over-demanding entity.

Mount Kenya is not this majestic / in that truth,  
Queen Mother Moses is unmatched and, truth be told,

Araminta is my Lord and Master.

...

*"Disaster brays and the hounds are near;  
so, hush now. or else I'll have to kill you."*

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the aura of desire is as dust for the shackled and the sly;  
but still, instead of being weary, I worry for her.

...

there is no time to waste measuring the merits  
debating 'rest' versus 'waiting'.  
a penumbral heaven might pinch us from eyes,  
but not our stench from hounds. it's a compromise  
of time / lounging in tenderness. we are as gazelles  
at the edge of water / crocodiles await / shackle-toothed  
dragons / snake-oil-salesmen with the piety of piranhas;  
their faith            *(pfft!)*            a pompous circumstance.

they alone have the luxury / appeasing hunger  
with patience. but us just casting beautiful doe-eyes  
will not prevent them / their dining upon us,  
so we journey forward, meeting with escape-colored others  
on the darkest side of John Brown's barn. Harriet assures us  
that 'freedom' will be followed to the letter, leaving  
no easy trail for the patewallers patrolling  
with unhallowed appetite:

*"Die free. Or die a fatality now & here in the shallow end  
of God's open grace; I'll be quick, yes, and merciful, but  
be not soothed for there is only scorn, an eternity of shame,  
and a nameless headstone in waiting. That is the rule  
for traveling the Under Road: no everlasting relics  
acknowledging your failed commutation. No willing return  
to a life in chains, no hesitation, no consolation...  
Yours will be a disjointed death and for  
the living to survive it must (until free) disavow."*

you might outrun the hounds, but never Harriet.  
test her resolve? there is firearm at her fingertips.  
we may be in fear, but we adhere. and to prevent us  
being represented to *Freedom* as a corpse, our conductor  
is necessarily cruel.

...

no matter what  
the manuals  
of our former masters say,  
you never grow accustomed to holocaust.  
the cat-o-nine-tails is not the savior  
they say it is, wedding us  
to complacent conversion;  
force any man to graze  
on slavery  
and he will always hate  
the very nature of the gravity  
that keeps upon him.

what a broken pathos  
those White people have  
barring us from our own  
exemplifying beauty.

but not even the fear of a dehumanization  
or the assurance of being hobbled by Harriet  
are negative enough portents  
to prevent my mind from rambling:

last night,

Harriet was my obeah,  
the quintessence of tangerine,  
my Fruit of Life  
in this transitory garden with adumbral fluids  
cascading / the embrocation of her dulcet rinds  
basting skin; her lenitive touch teasing  
in every sense. but what runaway stops,  
posing prose for romance? (a dead one!)  
and what solid wealth is a slave's token-tongue

promising a lifetime of liberty to a woman obsessed  
with defying the gallows while garnishing freedom  
to all who gather before her? what super-powers  
can a simple fool possess enough of to pull her away  
from the plight of her people?

I sigh,  
sagging raggedly into my own  
pitiful nature. who, if sane, expects  
a lilted love when running through  
a war zone?

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running: run now, run long, hard, and fast,  
run quickly, run sickly, run in quiet. now run.

this simple notion, this mad dash, this motion  
towards salvation is all there is of Africa  
on either side of their Mason-Dixon.

we struggle fair and, if lucky, we die clean.  
stopping to care for the open wound or to cry  
for the soul can cost you the skin on your back;  
your split-open head a falling apple from the tree  
of you-shoulda-rested-once-you-was-free-nigger!

it is seldom sought for or seen,  
but Harriet's smile is my psalm.  
even if I must die, I will not be alarmed:

*"I love you, Harriet; Harriet,  
I know you hear me."*

her returning gaze could light gunpowder;  
all of my emotional wounds  
are immediately cauter'ed;  
my esophagus is soldered shut.  
my tongue in mortar,  
my mouth in rivets.

it's not the thirst that kills you  
during droughts. when the heavens break

and the waters come, it's the drinking  
too much, too soon that gets you.  
well,  
this thought, this threat  
of a wild Black Woman singlehandedly  
ruining southern commerce is of itself  
a cold precipitation / Harriet Tubman,  
all unto herself, is a hurricane walking.

*“It’s easier to death-defy,  
believing there is portent  
to a woman’s becoming;  
seeing yourself as blueprint  
for an asphyxiated heritage;  
seeing us-black: you, I, and all,  
as the recombinant lyricism  
for God’s lost lineage.  
It’s not natural for man and woman  
to linger on this Earth, grounded  
as stolen property, dumbfounded,  
- not by natural circumstance -  
but by this force-bred obstruction  
to a love our own and to Heaven’s  
own rose-hued romanticism.*

*Freedom without the breath of love  
is a feckless endeavor and I have no desire  
to die bravely ‘the martyr’, not before I die  
in full  
‘a woman’; the helpmate  
to a man hungry not just for life,  
but for living.”*

...

at the river's edge, we wade the shallows;  
we board barely-a-boat and sit low.  
Harriet stays on the bank, changing charades,  
assuming the serene, surrendered shape.  
the Whites call her ‘colored’, but  
we know her as Queen Chameleon,  
Champeen Driver of Verdant Sleds

(and I as My Siren Sage.)

I done heard about the men who  
go down drowning, trying to run on water like  
a Mississippi miracle, these momentary-messiahs  
go down slow, drapetomaniacs to the core. better  
that before drowning in tears, their hands and feet  
sheared as an overseer's preventive cure.  
anti-emancipation mendicants come to heal us  
of our "habitually unnatural relapses" / dreaming  
ourselves free. but obituaries will still say  
you died a slave. less obituary and more as  
a loss of property with massa's insurance claim slip  
extending from your toe. in the Bible, Moses parted  
the waters, never does it say he swam a sea for freedom  
until choking, in the end, on desperation in mid-stroke,  
a midstream melody. it hasn't yet come down to that  
for Harriet; this freedom-chase hasn't failed her yet.

in fact, the Titanic itself will surrender  
to disaster 329 days before Harriet succumbs.  
(if only the White Star Line  
had hired her as captain!)  
Harriet: the sovereign tip  
of freedom's iceberg.

...

on the river's bank, barely seconds are shared  
for softness, but passions are again optimal;  
for a moment, absolutisms dissolve and lips tremble  
in the want to say more. there is treble;  
for the first time there is falsetto in my faith...  
the ripples of water beckon laughter, but  
my ankles seize; there is an anvil in my chest  
and it's then that I realize that this is not  
a freedom worth having...  
not when excluding her.  
my mind arches into fire / my heart, erratic!!!  
yet Queen Harriet remains a hummingbird.  
in rags and shorn cloth she is soothing  
and regal. and I want her. Oh!

*“Lover you must never mourn;  
not when we are so close to valor,  
to victory. We, Black,  
embody myth and movement.  
One day, God made a plan for us;  
and on this day, we bade Him another.  
my mother named me Araminta;  
it’s a name shared with a character  
from a play called ‘The Confederacy’,  
- an old-timey show written long ago.  
just... no... you must remember Minta  
just as she’ll remember you.*

*I am shepherding the dark  
and making for us a manger, a mansion;  
us, as daydreaming playwrights  
for a new, untethered era. “*

*and at the river’s edge, her  
lips nudge mine in the open.*

*“Remember now / this feel,  
this firmament hand-in-hand; for the time  
will come when us as two is less than us as one,  
the aches on my insides ascending to my face -  
my heart, happening. I’ll come racing, for you,  
towards you, needing embrace; the two of us  
stealing away beneath the sun, spiritually  
healed with no physical need to ever again  
conceal our fires / our Freedom, Infinite.”*



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS II:

- a) for You. for Some of Yall. and for SummerYall.
- b) Two Heavens Enter... Only ONE Can Remain.  
also known as, "*Desecrating A Fiery Cross*"

SHOUT OUTS, SOUR GRAPES, AND LAST-SECOND SHOTS AT TO:

My ArchNemesis, ESQ.

*- Thanks, man.*

A POUND OF DIRT / WELCOME TO SIGH-FI / & NON-ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

it's not like we all share muses. we don't even all share the same fuse.  
ruses & bruises. it's all so damn confusing... not that either of us must care.

and yet, here we both are...

*...now what?*