

Olivier Vanderaa

## Escape

Is it the verb that hurts?  
do we burn when looking at fire burning?  
do we consume ourselves under the Lybian sun  
under the threat of smugglers  
with the hope of escaping?

when I wander through these deserts of death  
is it my shadow that crosses borders  
or I who stayed behind  
in a grave  
or under the rubble?

what roads does the mask of Evil take?  
who wears it, and why?  
and how to shirk it?  
why all these detours and our reroutings?  
all these obstacles they erect,  
those walls of barbed wires?  
why get to know the world on the run?  
in the name of what are we so unwelcome?  
what crimes would we indeed carry with us  
we, who are searched & robbed  
throughout the journey?

& that dry coolness on the road  
that heart still beating  
under the fear  
in motion by a miracle  
one thinks of soothing words  
do we free ourselves when singing of freedom?  
No one knows  
this is because we think it'll be there  
at the end of the journey  
obstinate reason to move on  
that's all

## A Prayer for Hell

I'm writing on a train  
where I'm locked up  
I'm writing to tell you I learned how to stop breathing  
to trick their detectors  
in these convoys of hardship  
I learned how to choke  
singularly  
me who just aspired to inspire  
that fresh wind of freedom

I'm writing it aloud  
that place where I'm living now  
is hell  
the acid-gnawn golden brown portion  
without the golden reach  
hell for the living  
& even for desert dogs  
wasteland  
dump  
cemetery  
hell camp

I'm writing to you like crying out loud  
I learned to resist  
the blows of their fury  
I take the brunt  
until the body  
still preserved from the terror of the journey  
is now branded for life by their police brutes  
I'm writing to you so that you know  
if I don't pull through

I'm writing to you like yelling  
I learned to die silently  
electrocuted by a pantograph  
caught under an axletree  
knocked over by a train

& I'm addressing to you  
my prayers of tears  
my prayers of fire  
from here from my inferno  
I'm writing to you from the motorway  
where my brothers of misfortune are mowed down  
where one doesn't die by chance nor fate  
but to try the border crossing one more time  
one time too much  
my mum had told me  
not to ever overdo it  
I know  
I know

Samrawit  
my sister in exile my minor sister died yesterday  
the day before, it was a brother  
& another brother  
& then another  
& then...  
there is in Calais a graveyard  
crowded with those  
our governments forced each of their step  
that brought them there  
they were brothers  
in humanity  
in comfort  
they are forever exiled from our earth

so what,  
is this what you call freeing yourself from your chains?

## They Do not know The Hands

they do not know the hands  
nor the affable signs  
of those whose fate they decide on  
of those who own tomorrow  
as cavalcade of light  
they easily park in the graveyard  
they ditch the sociable and the dream  
they avoid confronting  
the true race of time  
where it happens  
and why the field yields plenty  
they trap themselves in elected arrogance  
they're heady with power and sad espousals  
they toy with the corpses and the common good  
they dismantle  
they dictate  
their choices & our dead  
the destruction of the imagination  
they do not know the hands  
when there's only ashes  
they're lashing out at dust

they do not know the hands  
the mark of the true heroes  
who venture at the shapeless,  
elusive, but much too tangible edges  
of our barbaric & enclosed world  
those who'll always have the same hope  
seasoned  
daring  
I take in their suffering  
& that shame too  
their hands sometimes get slashed  
on the razor barbed wire  
that dreadful mirror of indignity that is handed to them  
they have to reconquer the image  
but the print will always be recognizable  
they are identities  
more human than you are  
they spread kindness despite the baiting  
& the vexing confinement  
on your nightmare's dump

they do not know the hands  
they'd rather their henchmen  
tie them in their backs  
tattoo them with permanent marker  
just to brand them  
like in the good ol' days of horror  
they do not know the hands  
back to dishonour  
they think that these hands  
will not travel  
will not greet  
will not smile  
will not wave hands  
will not find room  
among all those other waving hands  
that say: "welcome!"

they do not know the hands  
nor their own memory  
I, I do know  
dad was also a refugee  
and I remember it  
it is so  
it is sacred  
his hands  
I wish  
I could kiss them once again