

THE STRING THAT GOES UNSEEN (excerpt)

by Tayla Richardson

Exhale

Find a corner, without sharp edges.

You have seen enough of those.

Leave the door ajar.

Creaking,
acknowledging every
entering soul, every intention.

Encourage a draft, to lift breath from the lungs.

Perhaps,
they too feel the air
thick with anticipation,
for healing
 fixing
 purging
 cleansing.

Position yourself: align and orientate.

A spine moulded by
muscles malfunctioned,
 curved
 collapsed
 crumpled.
Craving to be cradled.
Flesh that holds memory;
every tear
 pull
 break
 ingestion
 injection.

Link arms, interlace fingers.

Shadows build,
 Surrounding
 entwining
 binding.
Rhythmically swaying,
 hypnotic
 amniotic; a bubble that cushions
 any fall.

Collective hope envelopes me.

I breathe it in, nostril to belly.

Silence.

It hangs sacred.
Scanning for certainty in your face
we linger in this space
between words, fears and faith.
Dwelling where we the living
must learn to keep breathing.

Uncover. Grip tight.

Tied to the conduit,
meticulously placed so that it
may puncture with clarity.
Struck, so that energy may be
channeled through the winding canal
of strings, in theory, that go unseen.
Power harnessed
expanding the self to
the sum of all its parts.

And, release.

So that I may surrender.
Grasping, gasping.

Waiting Room

Lost in the echo between beats, silence
pulsating, pounding the inner ears. I linger in
this rhythmic pause, automatic, anatomic, inhospitable
to patience. Your marshmallow walls stare blankly, sickly
sticky, primed to dissolve me before you even lifted
your head from the page, the chart, the call.

Waiting waiting awaiting my number,
what was it again? Was that a ding, a creak
drowning in incessant beeps? We sink into the sea
of chairs, weighted with anticipation, peeling from vinyl
concaved from a longer than intended stay.
A specific gravity glues us to the floor
of this windowless dome
delusional of days.

Collectively pretending
we don't hear the whispered sobs
the frantic calls, that pierce the antiseptic air
like acid rain smothering mumbled sitcom repeats.
Give them a sense of normalcy, a distraction, give them
company, give them incessant instrumental music that itch
nerves already frayed. I fidget with the ache of stagnation.
Arms crossed comforting the lonely. Chins drooped
gazing at phones, at floors, at shoes; work boots,
high tops, Jimmy Choos. Lined up, like we
have our ducks in a row. When we all
know if you're here, your ducks
have flown the coop.

Flickering fluorescents hum
eyes burn, filtering mirages through
floaters. The same figure passes, for maybe the
fifth time. In a daze counting tiles, tracing lines, re-tracing steps
in a labyrinth of unmarked doors, longing for a sign marked *clarity*.

Stomach lurching, I can fast no longer. Water amplifies the craving
for salinity, misleading the parched, vending machines thrum
sweetly. Recirculating breath hungry for uncontaminated
air. Sliding doors unmask potential possibilities, the
ambiguity demands a stinging vulnerability.

I compartmentalise, dislocating the self
into parts expanding my reach, until fingertips graze
the corner of this page in hopes to one day turn it myself.
The chapter would read: *the before*. Before what I'm still unsure

The sender of stalks

has overlooked my name
labelled a vessel too fragile
to support life

mine or yours

to carry us beyond bodily
boundaries placed under
construction for a lifetime

to house a heart beyond my own

built for us from foundations
laid by generations
who could only imagine

what it would take to hold you

craving to cradle
not be the one cradled
unborn empty handed

yearning for the ungranted

atrophied arms contort
conform caress
crumpled blankets

laid bare

maybe just for a moment
they may be filled with more
than hopeful air

collective hopes

collate moments
in cells from
great grandmothers' child

enmeshed beyond

the elasticity of our skin
our flesh entwined
where do I end and you begin

the sender of stalks has overlooked my name

declared a risk
tracking disabled
returned to sender

Wake you

You roll in your sleep you know. Twisting the linen into a cocoon constructing sheets of armour, protection from something I never quite understood. Massive Attack radiates waves, crackled pulses reverberating our eardrums as we flirt with sleep, the rare overlap in our playlists. Teardrops seep, as tensions fall upon a day awash with emotion, ones we could not name. You, a classic side sleeper I your little spoon, reverting with the fading moon to my pillow-hugger, free-falling nature. Chilled feet clench, uncovered by unease. In REM our utopia streams rent free, flickering like old film reels, capturing promise in a box, presented on one knee. Shadows creep upon moon-lit walls, crossroads unveiled in a reflective light. Turbulence whips blackout drapes from their tightly drawn comfort. A season shift approaches. Still, I cannot wake you.

collective hush

an effortless effervescence
the contagious unison-ic chant
free speech melodic gasp
lyrics that catch in the throat
steel breath slacken jaws
a first guitar strum
from *my song*
vibrations
plucking spines
widened eyes
we gather in devotion
I dissolve into fibres
the self detached
slipping into
gaps
lingering
in the mind of a child
losing the narrative of me
the story of you
generosity
uncovered by another
whispering obscurities into
a ballooning mind expanding
to accomodate the new
goosebumps coating arms
a vastness glimpsed
never quite understood

Remembrall

crimson smoke floods the orb
cupped tentatively in my palm
taunting, *remember*

you have forgotten something.

neuronal threads seep
through fingertips
strands spilling slipping
short circuiting
hold

for rewiring

as I lose my chain of thought

and rewrite this

I promise I'm circling for an answer
to your ever so polite question;
how was your week?

you see my corneas glaze
as lines previously tugged
with ease
allude cramping hands
fibrous shadows drift
lonely into the chasm
shapeless static — blank

blank blank blink

amnesiac scars burn
language misfiring
evident by my vacant stare
up to the left above your head
that you misinterpret as needing
a good night sleep

not to be mistaken as unsocial
I'm the one clicking cameras
not to withdraw, to capture
in essence, the present
imprinting, engraving

mementos crowding out lost hours
souvenir stuffed draws
evidence categorised

gluing fractured fragments
into mosaic
a mixed tape of moments
momentous to mundane

crafted by the notoriously
unreliable narrator
we call *memory*

fated to erase skew judge
fragile ephemeral
essential
to we the storytellers
the meaning-makers

I forget who I was before now
what I used to know

they reassure me it's the norm
in my situation

but what about my mum
she too squeezes her cheeks
excavating her archive
burrowing for retrieval
.

tests inconclusive, come back
when you have forgotten
your daughters name

whilst gaps remain
pages lay splayed
others fill in
your blank spaces

colour me mindfully
colour me tenderly
colour me in truth
colour the smoke
white — this sphere clear