

Lajablesse in Oakland

1

is who you tink
dat man tryin to film?

You seen it, it grainy-grainy
an far like a home porno.

He see a pretty dark skin gyul
in a long skinny skirt
twitchin she twitch
an he grin an he say
“tape rollin.”
is only later
like he release from a spell
he realize a man was being beat
by police.
he never know
wha happn to de piece o tape
wit de piece o tail.

2

is not a cloven hoof
is a club foot.

Dat piece o ting
call heself a man
one night I holdin me face
an de fire in me head
come out through me mouth —
I cuss he slow, an when I finish
I say I gwine leave he.

He stan up watchin me
an when I finish he turn roun
an slash wit de machete.
Leave? He lean into me face.
Laughin. Leave now.

I had to bind me own foot.

He didn hardly come by after dat.
I suppose since I couldn get around to cook much or anyting else.

But when me foot heal, I go an stan up in de road where he mus pass
me comin back from de rumshop or whichever jamette he keepin
house wit now.

Is train tracks on de one side an forest on de odder an who runnin in
forest after dark.

I dress nice an pretty, an even wit de club foot I a prize because in dose
months me face done recover from takin licks. I want him to see I is
still a woman. A desirable woman. A woman who could still stan up. A
woman who was gwine to kill he. Only I ain thought too much bout
de killing part. I ain bring no machete, not even a big stick or skillet.
But den all thinkin was to stop because I see he.

An as he get closer an he know it me I start walkin. Not good because
I not too use to de club foot yet. An I smile, for I know if ever will
could do anyting, my will gwine to kill dis man. An I limpin an he lips
begin to tremble like fryin pork an

Lord how he frighten!

An I limp in an is de forest to one side, de train tracks on de odder an me dead center wit death on my mind. Suddenly so he freeze turn an leap. Tryin to jump de freight! It go so fast, I not really sure wha happn. But as he catch up on a car an look home free one minute, de nex he dangling by a foot, screamin like a goat bein killed slowly.

How de conductor didn hear me don know, because everyone in de parish dat night wonderin wha obeah ting cause a goat neck to be slit so slow dat it scream so long. But he soon stop an as people piece togedder de body dey piece togedder a story of wha happn.

I limp up to de rum shop an walk in among all dose men, some o dem no better dan de one mash up by de train tracks, an their silence hol me up. I down six shot o rum — Hubert never ask for payment yet — an walk out straight same way. From dat night, no man speak to me.

They call me lajablesse. Devil woman. De woman dem too bad talk me in de street. But when night fall dey come try maco me wit sweet tamarind an cloth no one will sell me in de store. Bless, dey say, for den dey say I am blessed, Bless dis man does treat me bad, bad. You cyan do him someting for me — ?

What I gwine say? Me ain have no money, dey treat me like I is kill priest in town, I say I go see wha I could do. Is allyou own fear an longin an hate dat is give me power. Is allyou make me a real lajablesse.

You know, is really Sou who bind me foot. I couldn have done it. I shame to say it, but I was scared o she — you know what they say. But dark as it was I see she had no wings, an her skin was intact an dark as mine.

3

Of course I had to leave dat town. Anywhere I go now I only passin through — an I don see Sou for a long time. Is so how I reach Oakland, for I find dat men does do evil all over, an since I could travel I could see bout evil anywhere. You know I ain have but one power. Dat is de power to make man see himself. Dat sweetman mashup on de train tracks — is not me who kill him! He reach up on de train an as he turn to laugh in me face, he see himself. An what he see so ugly, it frighten him so, he lose his grip an baps! all finish.

An de man in Oakland. He not a good man, mind, he not good atall. But he don deserve beatin in de street like a dog. An when I see de cokey-eye man wit a video, me tink TECHNOLOGY. Now dere is a way to get a whole heap a people to see demselves. An it could use to get retribution in dis world as well as sen some folks into de nex. I not anybody special. I is just your retribution.

So I go all over. An I always lookin fine, because men an women always tryin to sweet me up, tryin to see wha dey could get from me, wha dey could get me to do. An de more dey look at me, de more dey see demself.

Is one other power I have. Let's call it de Still Here power. De here change an change an change again, but I still here.

An dat is all I really want to say, dat I not dead yet.

Stranger in the Dark

Eyes slithering down
chest eyes seizing
neck eyes spying
legs looks saying
not woman but
fe-male meaning
one who can be fucked.

Roll the curlers under.
Keep them close to the scalp.
Curlicue, curly yew. Scalped.
Close to and don't brush, just run
your fingers through.