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
ey 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

ey 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