

ON THESE STREETS, EVERY QUEER WOMAN IS ROADKILL

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No amount of air-conditioning can keep me in a car too long, my body repels the static, it has never known a standard of rest still enough to pass for something ladylike. I would always rather walk, even in this heat, even on these streets, walk till my soles blister and then walk some more yet until there is enough distance cleared between me and my final destination to cut myself a little loose. It's thirty degrees today, no clouds in the sky for miles and miles. Thirty degrees and still steadily going, going, the sun a spot so bright it burns me out of my own skin, shrivels me into a carcass so condensed all it would take is a lighter to set me to smoke. I often dream of fire and brimstone. No matter how far I run, the sermons follow, a crawling cruise behind my stumble but fast enough to keep me in sights, to flash me a warning light as it crushes someone less lucky under its wheels and backs up just to run over them again. They were found, I was told, in their car, doing what girls in love do. I wonder what they must have done when the men first came. I wonder what it would take to break a person so much, they would apologise for being hurt. I wonder, if they were on foot like me, would they have gotten away? And more importantly, would they have wanted to?

If it were me I would have run. Run from the rotan, its swishes and cracks against soft skin, run from the weight of a crowd's oppressive stare, run from that state, this country, as far as I could for as long

as I could. But it was not me they found in the car, even if it was me that cried for them. In this body no stamina, however impressive, can carry me as far as that. In this body I am not as strong as them, to stand when my name is called, to stay, to endure. I wonder if most of my anxiety is not just rehearsal for a day when it will be me caught under those spoked wheels, when I sink into the molten street gasping for breath. I wonder if the only oasis in this country is a reflection of a woman's face, and if the bodies by the roadside aren't just landmarks of men's violence.

In truth, I am not really running. I don't think any of us can. Not the lesbians in Terengganu, Nur Sajat and her children, Nisha Ayub and her portrait, nor all the gay and trans women found daily dead-named and written out of our own histories. Not the women who have heard so many iterations of venom they have turned it into a language, inward and outward till our fangs are flashing toward any predator that rolls our way. And maybe if you walk long enough, far enough, you just might shake the dogs behind you. Maybe you might slip through the interstate unseen, board a plane bound westward, make your daring getaway. But even standing here in this body, I feel too tired for that, and the heat is sapping what life left in my legs till I feel like nothing but a husk of myself, charred meat. Here is the baton, then, run for me like I ran for them. If nothing else, I pray you have the strength to turn and face your pursuers at the finish-line, spit every name that built you from the sole up and watch it drip off their faces. Honour every sister before you, all us wretched roadkill.