

haunts

SARA LYNNE PUOTINEN

to the dead, we're the ghosts.

—Ed Bok Lee

i.

Listen to
bells on

the other
side ring

out sound that
spreads from

hard center
to soft

edge, phantom
drips drop

on limestone
buried

deep in a
ravine,

faint footsteps
behind.

Feel air cool
as a

dark shadow
passes.

Hear a voice
whisper:

Nobody.
Yet some

bodies have
left a

residue,
the trace

of a trail
for you

to follow.

ii.

Returns,

retreads, a
frequent

habit, the
same route

on repeat,
rubbing

grass bare to
dirt dust.

Disinterred,
dug up.

I hover,
hanging

out, having
nowhere

else to be.
Wanting

connection,
to make

contact with
the past

feet that stepped
down on

this same spot,
adding

lines to a
poem

that began
before

my mother
was born

and grew up
just four

miles as the
crow flies

across the
river,

before my
grandpa

helped build the
stone walls

still standing
nearby,

and before
this land

was stolen

to start

two cities.

iii.

Loosen

threads that guide.

Worry

stitches, rip

seams, seek

space unplaced.

A break

in the trees.

Not here –

there. Close to

the rim.

On the edge,

near an

opening,

next to

an exit.

Ever

ready to

ghost it,

to flare and

flicker,

register

only

as shadow,
flashing

as what else
could be

possible.

iv.

Restless,

unleashed on
asphalt

barely still
asphalt

reverting
to dirt,

orbiting
the gorge,

seeking some
stable

ground, better
words, to

be more than
almost.

Only blur –
fizzing

up out in-
to air,

onto ground,
released

from forms roads
the need

to move with
haste or

purpose. I
study

the terrain,
gather

moments. Each
loop – from

gravel to
dirt to

paved path, through
ruts cracks,

past gullies
seeps and

steep slopes – adds
substance,

makes me more
solid,

tightens the
tether,

but never
enough

to stop the

looping.

v.

I go to
the gorge

to find the
soft space

between beats,
before

one foot strikes,
after

the other
lifts off.

When I float.
I pass

through time's tight
ticks to

moments so
brief they're

like shudders,
but so

generous
they might

fit every-
thing left

behind by
progress.

Here rhythms
suspend.

Held up by
motion,

the air I
pass through.

Now rhythms
loosen,

spread out, slow.
This space –

no dream, a
shift in

perspective,
where what

was edge is
centered

and what was
centered

fades away.

vi.

Pass through

limestone walls,
fences.

Occupy
place not

meant for you.

Claim a
plot and plant
yourself.
Don't return,
never
leave. Linger
as buzz
beneath, the
constant
hum in an
ear, the
pain in a
neck, a
boulder too
big to
lift, too much
trouble
to move. No
shadowed
smudge or quick
flash, but
presence, here
always,
enduring.
What is
a ghost but
part of

the past lodged
within.

Remaining –
not from

stubbornness
but for

survival.

vii.

Eavesdrop

on the words
scattered

by wind and
careless

voices. Not
concerned

with manners,
no need

to be nice.
Feel the

disconnect
between

you, the path,
other

people. Free,
off the

hook, unseen,
able

to listen
in, to

overhear
and not

be judged, to
invent

dialogue,
give it

another
ending,

turn it all
into

a better
story.

viii.

I try to
sync up

my steps to
the geese

as they keep
in tight

formation
with their

frequent honks,
but their

reckless beats
resist

and my feet
cannot

follow. Then
it's slow

drips down stone
my breath

can't match, taps
from a

woodpecker's
knock that

outpace my
heart. I

settle in-
to a

rhythm: 3
then 2.

First counting
foot strikes,

then chanting
small prayers.

I beat out
meaning

until what's
left are

syllables,
then sounds,

then something
new, or

old, returned.
Let me

learn to dwell
in these

rhythms. Let
my feet

do more than
move me

forward. Let
my beats

bring me back
to the

other side.

ix.

Signs – Maps

Monuments
Markers –

claims on the
land, a

possessing
with loud

You are heres

that ring

out. Proper
names placed

in firm ground.
Meanwhile

softer forms,
quiet

submissions
of proof,

whisper *You*
aren't here

alone: tamped
down grass,

a gutted
fence with

chain links pried
open,

stones stacked on
boulders,

a black glove
draped on

a tree branch,
faint paths

criss-crossing
the woods,

graffiti.
More than

evidence,
these slight

signs do not
declare,

but call me
to join

the endless
work of

witnessing.
Making

room for what
remains

outside the
Known, the

official
story.

x.
I want her
with me

on my run,
and she

is almost,
but not

quite, and not
often.

I've heard her
call my

name through a
coxswain's

horn, the soft
Sara

rising from
the gorge,

felt her tap
in the

tassel's tug
as wind

knocked against
my cap,

seen the flash
of her

face in a
runner's

greeting, the
blur of

her body
in a

shadow's cast.
Every

summer I
wait for

winter, the
leaves to

leave, the veil
to lift,

the other
side to

be revealed.
I try

to squint hard
enough

to see her
childhood

home – just four
miles east –

and wonder,
does her

ghost ever
return

to haunt it?

xi.

Find us

everyday,
around,

acquainted
with each

crack curve bump
vista,

familiar.

Not known

by name or
by face

but gesture:
the wild

swing of an
arm, the

gangly gait
of legs

too long, the
vigor

of a *good*
morning,

the placement
of plaques

on a bench,
flowers

near the cross-
walk, white

bikes by the
bridge—the

Regulars.
We're not

from here, this
isn't

our land, few
of us

stay all the
time, but

we visit
enough

to belong,
to praise

this place, to
practice

devotion.

xii.

Echoes.

Bells bounce off
boulders,

bridges, time,
singing

familiar
tunes from

the other
shore. We

are not those
bells but

their excess,
reverb,

sounds after
the sound

that surround.

Buzzing

persisting

trying

to pass on

songs of

joy love grief

anger

that began

before

we were here,

before

we believed

we were

all there was,

before

we were ghosts.