

Audition for The Next Extinction

Every outfit looks worse than the last.

They tear through an entire wardrobe, before settling on the first one. White tee. Black man-jeans. Their hair isn't sitting right. Ugh. What was so full of life yesterday turned limp overnight. Whatever. Just go. Do this thing. Who cares? The point is to say it. Just *say it*. No time to eat. No time to unlace. Just hold those tongues and shove those man-feet in those man-shoes. Get gone.

They speed, but not intensely, lest they sweat up a storm.

The footpath is jarring. The traffic is jarring. Visibility is jarring. But they will get themselves there, if it's the last thing they do. And it may well be the last thing. It may well be. Never mind those random eyes. Those impromptu audiences. Blank them out. Ignore. Let them be the fiction. The narrative left on the shelf, unread. In ten-ish minutes they'll be standing in front of the eyes that do matter.

"You've got this, it's just who you are. You don't even need to act—" they tell themselves, but not too loud. They don't want to come across as a weirdo talking to no-one in public. *Just be. Just be. Just be. Just be. Just be. Just be . . .*

Traffic-light crossings are a nightmare. A cruelty. Performance art with no script. So visible. So obvious. Just standing around waiting. What are they supposed to do with their hands? Their legs? Their sixish-feet of vertical nonsense? Their hairy arms and kind-of-tits confusing the girl waiting at the lights with her mum.

Stuff it. Just cross. They could be gone tomorrow, for all they know. Anyway, none of these moments are the *real* moments. These are the nothing moments leading up to the real moments. They just have to get through all the little nothings, then they will arrive at the place they are meant to be. And they are *meant* to be there. Actually. It's a small miracle. A surprise at the eleventh hour.

There's the sign. Phew. Okay. Someone else is walking in. At least they're not the only late one. Still not a good look, but so much worse alone.

"Hi, uh, sorry, I'm here for the audition?"

"Just through there." She passes them each a piece of A4 paper. "You'll need to fill these out. Do you have pens?"

The paper is a shield. A crutch. A fiddle-toy. The paper is rolled in the corners between fingernails as they sit and wait. The paper is an interrogation. An opportunity to embellish. To conceal. To choose pasts, ethnicities, genders, pronouns. Just like that. Just like *that*.

They wish their pen would stop wobbling and changing between boxes. Why does every aspect of their life have to be riddled with inconsistency? Incongruity? Mis-match? Oh, well, this form is not the product. This is not what they are here to bring. This form is simply a means to an end. And now it's their turn to say what they mean to say. Speak the truth after all these years of toeing lines. But their knees are jelly. Their insides are immigrating to the outside. Bowels. Ventricles. Amygdala. But that's what it takes. Splay. Fray. Eviscerate. Stand with entrails dripping, and the words will follow.

"Thank you, you can start whenever you're ready."

I'm not, but:

the next extinction shines inside my cells
while we talk as though it is not already under our skin
beading our blood into rosaries of microplastics:
a future bounty for bio-pirates
all a-gleam
as though it is over there, some-distant-where:
a mirage
a horror, but not ours
not us
as though if I *don't* think,
therefore I am *not* polar-anaemic while
chunks of red-meat rot in the green bin
as though decay is not what we all bite-down on
after closing the lid

Did the others anticipate their extinction?

Could they sniff it out?

Sense its vibration wobble through their organelles

tingle through their teeth feelers

webs roots spikes tendrils axons spines

Unsettling eons of same-sames

over-and-overs

unders and throughs round-and-rounds rough and tumbles

were they frozen in fear?

The next extinction dumps oxygen in my capillaries
but it has forgotten what to do with my carbon dioxide
So we laugh through wheezes
ha! clumsy old thing
going to all that effort
only to upend the game!

In the next extinction, I will tattoo Earth onto the muscle of my heart
and send it through space like Noah's Ark
like morse code
like SMS
like whale song
like those high-frequencies played to discourage youth from loitering in public spaces
like the sound ice makes when it cracks
like the hiss of flames casting faeries from dead wood: their dresses rising purple and blue
like birds migrating
like sverdrups colliding

In the next extinction, I will pull apart my beat
observe my own rhythm, top to bottom
the *strange* the *charm* the *up* the *down*
then we'll dance

like everyone is watching
like it's all for them
painting our skin in fluro
until our hands glow in the dark
so we may thump and swirl and flex and flop and turn each other in circles
until our breasts sweat against our ribs
until our molecules excite
until our blastocysts latch
until our births give death new meaning

In the next extinction, I will know myself by another name
by another pulse
by another scent
by another blue
print

In the next extinction,
we will live in green rooms
acting out vague histories, choreographies, in future-present in-tenses
wondering whether anyone will get
what the meta is for . . .
Sorry
uh . . . wondering whether anyone will get what the meta is for . . .
what the meta is . . . uh . . . in the next extinction, we will live in green rooms
acting out . . . acting out . . .
wondering . . .

wondering . . .

wondering . . .

whether