

Six Poems

Ian Williams

Where are you really from

1.

In the guessing game, the white man gets many guesses.
He may continue to guess even after the answer is
revealed. Could you be loved, he is guessing, and be
loved. If I answer correctly he wins. Say something. He
is team captain and sole player and horse and foxhound
and whistle and first person shooter to my birth. Say
something. It's a complicated pursuit. Could you be, could
you be, could you be loved?

2.

While a white man waits for me to answer he is searching
his inner Wikipedia for a fact or a current event about the
island or continent I am. Carnival, genocide, pirates, cruise
lines, a woman he used to work with, blood diamonds on
the soles of her shoes, a-wa a-wa. The list could be longer.
He knows a lot about where I am from whether I am from
there or not.

3.

I played tennis with a white man who would play my balls when they landed beyond the baseline and my faults as well as proof. There's a long wake across the ocean. Proof of. *I don't know anybody who's actually still racist. I don't know why we're even talking about it.* Because of you, I wanted to say while waiting to receive. *I'm totally team postracial.* He meant nothing by that which is not to say he meant well.

4.

Post that, at a church potluck I intervened for a friend: He's not going to tell you that, man. And the white man looked at me as if I were his phone and had lost reception. He explained a genocide to a Filipino woman. And my friend with the French name from an African country, who was born post conflict and had never been a child soldier, said—Next time I'll just say my name is George, George, George of the jungle. The Congo is so close anyway.

Where are you

from where are you know
no really where are you from here
no where are you really not of the world brought
no from where they are no from
where no where of the world even as I am not
where no where of the world even as I am not

Tu me manques

is how the French miss.
Backward. Like car wheels in commercials.
You me miss. Every possible word in the wrong
place. There are only three.

I had a
farm in Africa, no just a friend on the French-Swiss
border who argued the English *I miss you*
didn't make any sense. Had? How could you
meaning me miss you meaning him. Easy.
You he explained miss me because we are not together.
Who's missing? I wanted to know. You are. You are
gone somewhere from me. *La lune*. I cannot be missing
from myself. Ever. You are missing from me and here
he clamped a love handle and that causes me great
how do you say *l'angoisse*.

We are apart now
we never met actually we Skyped our whole
drosophilic friendship together. He made a joke once
when I asked for details (he had a postdoc
on breast cancer proteins) that he was in charge
of terminating the rats. By guillotine. That was the joke.
Then he spoke very quickly the real way—an injection
I think. How faint the tune. I could never tell
how tall he was or ask correctly how high
the moon.

As long as we're longing I had a
farm in Africa, no just another friend on the border
of Rwanda and the Congo who said *I miss you*
for *tu me manques* was a perfect and incorrect
translation. Just trust me. Everything makes sense
until you have to explain it. Have? You don't say
tu m'aimes for *I love you*. Correct. That is very true
but *surtout* because I don't love you. See the stars
How they shine for you. Wait, wait, wait. Not you,
not your words, not your feeling.

Why does everything have to be about race with
you people?

— — — — —
Leave yourself
— — — — —
behind for a minute in this poem

you are reading a poem and (I hate poems

like this but) in that poem a man has left

— — — — —
a note you have read that poem
— — — — —

before you were supposed to be shocked

by its audacity but you were nineteen

and more ~~strike~~ ~~struck~~ stricken by the cost

— — — — —
of the anthology than by that poem (stop

saying poem)

now you are say sixty (sixty)

and as you're downsizing you come across

the anthology with that poem is called this

is just to say (sixty) as I'm sure you've figured

out by now and you are the type who cares

more about the price of plums than plums

themselves so do you keep the anthology or not (don't

answer yet)

— — — you want to know what you wanted
to know at nineteen why couldn't someone tell you
straight up whether this poem is about more
than plums or not is it just to say this is to say
and or not you have lost your hair to grey
and menopause that was irrelevant forgive me
you are so sweet and so old
why should you
decide you will not forgive him for the note
or the poem it's hard isn't it to parse who you are
from who you ought to be to parse your creole
from the queen hard isn't it to recognize yourself
in that poem although he says *you* to the woman
in that poem in this poem you know he does not mean you
of course cannot even see you of course every poem (stop)
every poem (stop) everything you have ever read
has been addressed to someone beside you (stop)
there you go there you people go again
making everything about ~~yourself~~ yourselves
or should it be you

And Finished knowing—then—

I said we'd talk later—I wanted to
dance with somebody—to feel the *heat*
with somebody—I turned off the burner—
The microwave beeped—Don't you wanna dance
say you wanna dance don't you wanna dance—
I said, We'll talk later—

then my inbox filled
with ears underwater. then I noticed all the shoes
at my door were mine. then the slats of the bed
came loose and I plunged into teeth. then all
the onions turned black. then a loved one
unloved me online. with somebody who—me.
then the neighbour's unhooked landline
stitched through the wall—

Our eyes meet across yet another room

white white white white white white

white i white white white white

white white white white white white

white white white white white white

white white white white white white

white white white white white i