

JOY RUSSELL / Four Poems

On King George's Crowning

On King George's crowning, the interviewee
said they all got sweets and little goodies, and when
they come by boat, some come as stowaways. Once

they collect money for this woman's fare. Others
come, a fiver tight in their pockets, like my grandfather
when he escaped from the belly of the crown and never

spoke of it again. Others not bring overcoat—
no one told them how air moves vampires through
bone, erases memory matter. Some dress in suits

tropical style, as the ship moved its shaky
hand over the old surface of the sea. They arrive,
say 'I born Jamaican, I die Jamaican,' take a bite

of the sweet, hand to mouth, take the test
of motherland's history—bitter—replied, when asked if
they spoke the Queen's English; Enoch Powell's rivers

of blood forming a new oxygen, scarlet-marked
as they sliced through London fog; iris recording
life, how it is: Houses of Parliament, Big Ben

in the grey dank; a room, a galvanized tub to wash, emerge
baptized; the city soot, a new glove for the body; the signs
reading no Irish or blacks or dogs, not wanted but

take your money, just the same. Some, some,
carry hope like luggage, others not so sure-footed, others
not so childlike in believing all what this mother have to say.

Some bring formal names, leave pet ones behind,
whisper night bougainvillæa. How this country
cold, cold, cold through and through and no tea hot

enough to warm you, or hand friendly enough to pry
open the dark days, bring morning brightness. Some come,
stay, patience worn thin like paper, hearts

tough as old bread, and letters back home with every
copper earned from the Double Decker, brow wipe
of the sick, hammer of nail into two by four— if they

let you, if you not too dark for their liking.
Some, some, come long way, did bite
of the sweet. Motherless mother's milk.

Ol' Englan'
cryin' crocodile tear
for her lost chil'ren.

Vigil

Here, the body,
as sentence, conducts
a treading, never touching
the bottom, yet all
things submerge here.
The mouth of the city
speaks you in, its gesture
mapped on a grid of sorrow,
the old brick crumbling its own
fable day by day. You see, I came
to the city briefed in its ways, my
childhood resurrected by Lime Cordial,
Earl Grey and Salad Cream; the BBC;
a million coronations; a cacophony
of British marching bands; how
de say Queenie ate rat when
she come to Belize. Yes, I

came to know the tiny shifts

spoken by the eyes, the minute
violences of lips souring as milk.
I re-studied the thing that killed
the autumn trace of light
in my parents' generation.
I made weapons of my words,
watched the Thames,

daily, nightly, for clues.

What Comes Between

Careless.

Been forgetting names, entries
to the city, incapacitated recollections

of streets born to
ask *where are you from?*

this heart of amnesia
takes broken journeys to windows

marks faces as appearances
in momentary sun

makes map dissolve words primordial

what lingers is not fact
only detail of buildings, things said

before,
slippery
after.

Barrier Reef

Staghorn, elkhorn and brain coral expose sharp, boney remains. Colonies grow, breeding. Billions of singular polyps form a chorus over limestone skeletons, each one

mother birthing calcium carbonate; mouth, tentacle and gut perched on the brittle bed they cultivate: thin life veils the dead. Polyps swell towards nationhood

but wound when careless boat or swimmer knocks them— injure one, injure all. The soft coral rejects hardness for flexibility, holds limestone

secret inside its corpus, while its exterior drag shouts a flamboyance of reds, yellows and purples. Feathered fans of sabellidaes sway, patiently seeking hands

of Ziegfeld Girls, as Pleistocene coral cuts the shoreline of Ambergris Caye—an area big enough to bend it like Beckham. This Barrier Reef thrives a million years, far back as northern

glaciers that imprison water. Its length splinters into segments exiled by deep arteries where sacrificial plankton and oxygen are brought twice daily by the Caribbean blue, to feed hungry

polyps, the reef creatures, the old colonies that never die.