

Ant faith

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Published on the occasion of the exhibition

Not knowing yet - possibly not knowing ever,

Pylon Art & Culture, June 2023

TUESDAYS WERE THE BEST.

Every Tuesday, we stood at the edges of our shadows and watched them grow from our feet. We watched them stretch against the ground until they faded into the night.

Someday, we will live in different cities, you said.

For now, we walk these streets together.

Somehow, we both make it to the future. I am sitting here looking back through those younger-eyes, wanting to write you a story so that we can walk those streets together once again. And as I write things in the dark, a sweet secret is slowly being revealed to me. The secret of ants moving in specific directions pushed by Something that does not have a shape, not even a name.

Here you are, walking the streets beside me once again. The sound of our heels going takka takka on the cobblestones and our perfumes mingling into one divine, familiar smell (you of oud, I of coconut). As we walk the streets we notice the city we had once known begin to vanish. The Indian restaurant around the corner has just served its last mango lassi. The kebab shop underneath what had once been your bedroom is now gone. We walk to the restaurant where a few years back we had eaten countless falafels, and a man had offered us baklava, and the baklava had made you sick.

Two Carbonaras?

Yes, and some fresh lemonade please.

We don't make fresh lemonade on Tuesdays.

We sit near the window fidgeting uncomfortably in our chairs and measuring the time that has passed. I try to keep my face composed. I light a cigarette to look pretty and feminine.

How is whatshername? Oh you know, they are all getting married and having babies.

And you? Do you like teaching at the university? What are you reading? What are you dreaming? I think I am going to get a tiramisu. Do you want to share one? Remember the little boys that poked holes in your bike seat?

They have become grown men.

My cigarette is gone now. You get up to go to the toilet and I watch you from behind as you walk. I watch your body moving underneath your dress. I watch your loose long hair that has started to gray just the way you wanted it to. I look at you with amazement, thinking: how mysterious she is! How delicate and yet strong. Then, I hear you calling my name from the toilet and I run to you. In this story we travel to meet each other, only to be separated by a broken door lock. We sit on the floor with our backs leaning against opposite sides of the door. At first, we sit in silence. I bite my nails and try to understand what brought us to this exact moment. I keep thinking of things to talk about but the words vanish the moment I open my mouth. Suddenly, I am reminded of the freedom from logic that we had once granted one another; the art of risk-free thinking that had always led us down those vulnerable paths. And having been reminded of how fun this once was, I feel my tongue tremble, preparing to utter the things that would have been left unsaid, were it not for the door between us.

It's easier talking to you like this, I say.

When we could see each other, I couldn't keep myself from being the woman you would have liked me to be, but I want to be honest. I still don't know what I am doing with my life. I'm beginning to think I might never know. And from the other side of the door, in a low voice, comes the answer that puts us both at ease.

Me too.

And now, on both sides of the door, we begin to fall apart. And our faces appear more intense but are nonetheless beautiful because they are real. When you move, the locked door rattles and I am reminded of your body and your gray hairs. I feel our proximity becoming closeness. The other day, my father was sitting at home right in front of me. My brother was on the deck of a ship. On the phone, my father had told my brother, Yes, those are the straits of Messina. I thought it was beautiful how he saw the straits of Messina opening up in front of him. In the same spirit now, I ask you to paint me a picture of what you see.

I see a really narrow room with light blue tiles. The door and the walls are covered with stickers and scribbles, you know, the classic Berlin toilet. There is a tiny window to my right and I can see the branches of a tree and a little patch of gray sky. I can see them through the glass, darkly.

Is it raining?

Yes.

When it rains, I can stop thinking about life. I read a book. Sometimes I forget about reading. I go to the window and raise my neck. When it rains, I don't want to understand the world, I want the world to understand me. We find ourselves waiting for something that won't come: a rainbow, the smell of soil when it rains, a sky that does not resemble a ceiling. When will someone let you out of this toilet?

From behind the door you tell me, *Nothing can be understood in its entirety all at once. Only a little, and then, only little by little.*

But wait! Look! On the light blue tiles you see a line of ants moving. And if you look again, you will see, the ants are passing through the cracks of the locked door. On my side of the door I can see the line of ants moving too.

Have you ever wondered how ants always seem to know where they are going and what they are doing?

*You say, **Ants feel an urge to carry things in specific directions. They break into buildings, squeeze through cracks in walls and slip behind baseboards, moldings, and countertops to find what they must find.***

What is it that tells ants where to go? Do ants have faith? When did we last act on our ant faith? Often, in the past, I have tried to have faith in Something and I was reluctant to call this Something “God”. Because this name (his name) implies a presence, a reality, rather than simply an exigency within which we live; a never-satisfied exigency of totality and absoluteness. And now, seeing the ants, seeing their faith carry them through the locked door, seeing them carry the weight without knowing... I am starting to think that you and I should lose our sight in order to learn something about Something else. Through the crack beneath the door I pass you a marker. And now, with your eyes no longer looking but seeing, you are scanning the walls, tile by tile, finding a place to inscribe a little piece of wisdom.

*You write, **We are trying to be people to whom nothing is lost and the ants inspire us to lift objects much heavier than our own bodies.***

To write is seeing undone. In the joy of this realization I feel ready to see your face again. And when the door is finally opened, I see the branches through the tiny window and the light blue tiles appear as you had described them. The rain has stopped. On our way out of the restaurant we stand once more on the edges of our shadows and think about what would become of the next day. Then, on the surface of a puddle we read the answer to our question like ants: *Tomorrow*