

# Parts of You, Parts of Me

by Britt A Willis

I saw someone today.  
Someone who looked like me.  
Their eyes, my eyes,  
their hands, my hands.  
All the bits the same but  
everything different.

Do you remember traveling to the center of the city, over and over, when trips still felt like journeys, when thirty minutes suspended in space could become the timeline of an entire existence - a birth, a birth, a birth, a death?

Along these journeys I collected souvenirs:

A chinstroke -  
caught between a loose thought and an active hunt,  
gazing in the distance as they tug on discovered bristles  
that must have been missed while shaving.  
Thoughtless thoughtfulness.

A walk -  
a stride that in open air confidently takes up Double the space their body needs,  
but slips  
and slides  
through crowds  
of others,  
some perfect malleability I can't stop longing for.

A laugh,  
full-bodied and generous,  
reaching every molecule in the train car,  
unbridled but somehow not obnoxious,  
a laugh people turn toward.  
I practice my chuckles in the shower  
so no one can hear them.

An awareness -

a person standing like a wooden ruler,  
at least a foot taller than me,

in a dress as long as me,

with a large bag they nonchalantly lift and maneuver to keep from hitting me  
as the train jostles us all.

I practice proper posture and do child's pose every morning

as if the stretching can lengthen my body further and further and further and...

A wince -

we make eye contact and they wince in pain, and wince again,

holding my gaze the whole time,

shaking their head when I gesture:

I am helpfully unhelpful.

I decide to stop hiding the pains of my body, my fatigue, my discomfort.

I decide to demand witnesses when I want them.

Well.

I try at least.

A hair tug -

not a self conscious tug.

An unconscious tug,

like the small pull might unravel whatever tangled thoughts they're mulling over,

draw a thread of notion from their head

A deliberateness -

after everyone in their group expresses thoughts on the conversation At Hand,

they turn to the one person who hasn't,

a person who takes

a

long

moment

of deliberate thought

before weighing in.

I start trying to weigh my thoughts before speaking and fail miserably, regularly.

A hand,

a hand resting on the back of someone else's neck,

clearly welcome but not at all delicate

AND

intensely unappreciated  
by the person in the row behind them,  
who seems generally unpleasant,  
but has a way of turning up their chin I still pocket for later.

A page turner,  
flipping the pages like an attack, like the force of flip could erase what has just been  
read.  
My next few books I try to read in this manner but my fingers keep sticking on artifacts,  
artifacts I also collect in this list of souvenirs, like

“This is something just for us...they will never be able to read it.”<sup>1</sup>

and

“She wondered if all... were torn between two impulses, a longing to throw  
modesty and reserve to the winds and confess everything, and an equal  
determination to conceal... forever, to be cool, aloof, utterly detached, to die  
rather than admit a thing so personal, so intimate.”<sup>2</sup>

and

“People are experts on their own lives, and have the right to self-determination.”<sup>3</sup>

and

“In this act of magical transformation  
I recognize myself again.”<sup>4</sup>

and

“I am that I am. I will become what I choose to become”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> from “Confessions of the Fox” by Jordy Rosenberg

<sup>2</sup> from “Frenchmen’s Creek” by Daphne du Maurier

<sup>3</sup> One of Southerners On New Ground’s stated Beliefs

<sup>4</sup> from “My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage”  
by Susan Stryker

<sup>5</sup> “I am that I am” was said by the preacher Public Universal Friend when people asked if the Friend was  
female or male. “I am that I am” is an English translation of a Jewish phrase in Exodus where Moses  
meets God in the burning bush and asks what he is to say when he is asked who has sent him. God  
responds with the phrase.

I'm not sure what is gained and what is lost by borrowing, receiving, taking these small pieces but leaving the whole - knowing I may never meet their owners again, may never meet some of them at all.

But I do know  
sometimes being me is like being bits of twenty people,  
or more -  
a hundred,  
a thousand -  
and these souvenirs are proof of that.

I am trying to build who I am, to discover me, through them.  
I know no other way to love myself.