

AN ABSENCE OF LUNGS

(a poem, a song)

*Erika Hodges*

We would have  
liked to be  
brief... That a  
poem, a song,  
would suffice.  
We wished  
it would be  
enough to write  
“revolution” on  
a wall for the  
street to catch  
fire.

- To Our Friends, *The Invisible Committee*

To imagine a skyline is to consider

the shatter  
a fissure that cauterizes  
the crackdown, the bent  
up megaphone at the base  
of my skull

*the boros  
inside out*

To imagine a city is to remember  
disaster        the site of red sun  
a heat that sells your life  
back to you, a subscription  
service for the hold out

a splitting  
skin, pomegranates, each nodule  
a version of life  
self-contained        tethered

by a fleshy inedible center of bitter  
whiteness

Rotten fruit—

the sky

landing        at the top  
of our throats

To remember a landscape is to arrive  
at a stoplight and allow it  
to cycle through several times until you are ready

to walk

*to write on the walls*

To walk in a city is to imagine  
what it might be if this line was just sky  
nothing else just sky  
curves no lines, a soft  
convex where the poverty lives  
a blurry convergence

a separation of cities, an easy  
forgetting, buttered macaroni  
nine days straight, then nothing  
on the tenth, the hunger following  
you around the gas station,  
the counter man too, just as many  
threadworms, parasites, a city inside  
you—following, a whole street  
parade of starvation and feeding,  
following you but turning to  
concrete when you speak,  
this ignites rage in you which makes

warmth,

so you stay

alive

I stay alive and introduce myself to the city  
I'm unrecognizable, with a new shirt and a \$12 burrito

To fight is to sink into a city  
becoming like the city, intricate  
and mostly interior, tho seemingly  
a destination spot, as a means  
of survival

they are screaming murder at us,  
they are using chemicals and guns,

we laugh,  
we embrace

and are alive  
to keep alive

The city says,  
*up here*

*come out*

*stay alive*

then turns to concrete

To breathe is to look up from the city  
see the swarm that is the city  
not fall into the city  
but still be of the city  
                    that is such a swarm

To be as honest as possible  
                    since the music has not yet  
come

*I am not invincible,  
                    don't touch me*

To look up is to text you  
to ask "How was your day?" as a way to gauge  
what this city might be doing  
in other parts that are not my city  
but your city and as much as we can  
it is our city, a fight that is  
not with each other

but with the architects

*we wished it would be enough*

To leave the city, if we all did it  
one day at once, is to disassemble  
a city and to make it a world  
for anything, a leopard habitat,  
an outdoor library, the poems written  
on vines, you connect  
the lines by brushing your skin  
against them, a new city always  
comes after, what if this time

it does not

To disassemble is to keep walking until you  
know the city and your mother calls  
she asks about the sugar factory that her house  
was flush up against, you say

*no ma, this is not the same city but I know  
the factory, or, I remember*

To call is a bee line, a way around  
the disintegrating subway, to get to an inaccessible part  
of the city, of myself and sometimes  
I answer and sometimes I cry,

*let me be lonely*

To cry is  
*to catch fire*

to wail, to burn, to weep, to blaze, to dry heave, to sob  
to become ash and drift in the wind, except  
those who have seen ash know  
that it does not drift; it takes flight

lifting from your palm  
quickly away from you before you can take it back

*bye dad, I love you*

To become is to imagine a city  
brand new, built up all at once  
glistening, fallen, soaked sneakers  
making sure we all got home

unfollowed

what came next was not recorded

the event has passed

the memories evaporate  
from the pavement,  
bring in the bulldozers  
while we mourn our losses

To imagine a sky with no line.