

Comet

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Abstract:

Comet was born from the author's Fulbright year living and walking in South Africa in the first year of President Nelson Mandela's term in office. The poem takes on race from the uncomfortable perspective of a Jewish, working class, white woman.

Keywords: South Africa

Comet—

On the sidewalk of early morning,
hot breeze in January because
well, it's the Southern Hemisphere—

I haven't yet learned that white women
don't walk, don't admire the poinsettias
the size of katsura trees, won't be caught

dead on avenues except in private cars.
And so I am an anomaly, foreigner written
on my breasts, along my forehead

until halfway up the Newlands Road,
a woman in stilettos, castanets just past me—
Good morning, my lady, her shoulders rock

quick beats in a most un-South African way.
She owns the pavement, the intersection,
and every street. The broadest smile

from any world stamps me approvingly.
Her gold skin a semi-conductor of light,
an explosion as if she? As if she knows

something I might need to know.
Now decades on my mind's eye
watches the bus pull away as she hurries

her hips, late, into a drama of thick dust
and laundry, towards a quartet of children,
not hers, for a miniscule salary in a racist play

played out in a diamond country—
knowledge that enters me like a comet—
the tail iridizing, hot and planetary.