

Crossing a City Highway

By Yusef Komunyakaa

The city at 3 a.m. is an ungodly mask
the approaching day hides behind
& from, the coyote nosing forth,
the muscles of something ahead,

& a fiery blaze of eighteen-wheelers
zoom out of the curved night trees,
along the rim of absolute chance.
A question hangs in the oily air.

She knows he will follow her scent
left in the poisoned grass & buzz
of chainsaws, if he can unweave
a circle of traps around the subdivision.

For a breathy moment, she stops
on the world's edge, & then quick as that
masters the stars & again slips the noose
& darts straight between sedans & SUVs.

Don't try to hide from her kind of blues
or the dead nomads who walked trails
now paved by wanderlust, an epoch
somewhere between tamed & wild.

If it were Monday instead of Sunday
the outcome may be different,
but she's now in Central Park
searching for a Seneca village

among painted stones & shrubs,
where she's never been, & lucky
she hasn't forgotten how to jig
& kill her way home.

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Yusef Komunyakaa's poems are rooted in his experiences as an African American growing up in rural Louisiana and his service in the Vietnam War. Influenced by the jazz music he loves as well as by people's everyday speech, his poetry has won a number of awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1994.