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Example

in dominica, from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, captured runaway slaves were beheaded and hung from trees to serve as an example for other slaves.

The slaver thought I was finished
when he killed me, but he did not know
that where blood stops, spirit begins.

He did not know that in death I found freedom,
that when I closed my eyes in this world,
I awakened in a place with no time
and saw everything clearer than before.

Like the machete he used:
how its silver shined like
sun on a shark's back,
its quiet whoosh of sound
as the slaver swung and sliced
first the wind, then my neck.

That fast, I was dead,
and just as fast, I saw my head jump, then fall,
roll along the dust and stop.
I watched ants crawl into my nostrils,
lose themselves in the tangles of my hair.

Even dismembered,
my body rebellious.

The slaver needed three men to help him
tighten the rope around the bloody stump
that had been my neck. Even then, when they hoisted
me from the large fern, my corpse slipped from the noose
and fell on one of the spectators.

To prevent more escapes, they hung me with two ropes
under my arms and pinned my chest to the tree with bayonets.
They placed a sign at the foot of the tree and
wrote the letters with my blood: La Leçon.
The slavers forced the blacks to look at me and learn carefully.
And they did. More revolted, more ran.
When the only difference between death and life
is a white man's will,
there is neither death nor life.

My people looked at me and ran faster.
Some escaped, some took my place among the trees,
but we all widened freedom's birth canal,
our blood moistened the soil for its harvest.
The slaver did not know the power
of our blood and faith and spirit.
He wanted me, through death, to teach my people
a lesson about freedom.
And I did. I did.

