

Something In the Way of Things (In Town)

The Roots

In town
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In townSomething in the way of things
Something that will quit and won't start
Something you know but can't stand
Can't know, get along with like death
Riding on top of the car
Peering through the windshield for his cue
Something entirely fictitious and true
That creeps across your path hallowing your evil ways
Like they were yourself, passing yourself not smilingThe dead guy you saw me talking to is your boss
I tried to put a spell on him but his spirit is illiterate
I know things you know and nothing you don't know
Except I saw something in the way of things
Something grinning at me and I wanted to know, was it funny?
Was it so funny it followed me down the street
Greeting everybody like the good humor man
And they got the taste of good humor but no ice cream
It was like thatMe talking across people into the houses
And not seeing the beings crowding around me
With ice picks, you could see them
But they looked like important Negroes on the way to your funeral
Looked like important juggaboos on the way to your auction
And let them chant the number
And use an ivory pointer to count your teeth
Remember Steppen Fetchit
Remember Steppen Fetchit how we laughed
An all your Sunday school images giving flesh and giggling
With the ice pick high off his head
Made you laugh anywayI can see something in the way of ourselves
I can see something in the way of ourselves
That's why I say the things I do, you know it
But it's something else to you, like that job
This morning when you got there and it was quiet
And the machines were yearning soft behind you
Yearning for that nigga to come and give up his life
Standin' there bein' dissed and broke and troubledMy mistake is I kept sayin', "That was proof
God didn't exist"
And you told me, "Nah, it was proof that the devil do"

But still it's like I see something, I hear things
I saw words in the white boy's lying rag
Said he was gonna die poor and frustrated
That them dreams walk which you 'cross town
He's gonna die from over work There's garbage on the street that's tellin' you, you ain't shit
And you almost believe it
Broke and mistaken all the time
You know some of the words but they ain't the right ones
Your cable back on but ain't nothin' you can see
But I see something in the way of things
Something to make us stumble
Something get us drunk from noise and addicted to sadness
I see something and feel something stalking us
Like and ugly thing floating at our back calling us names
You see it and hear it too But you say, "It got a right to exist
Just like you and if God made it but then we got to argue"
And the light gon' come down around us
Even though we remember where the mic is
Remember the Negro squinting at us through the cage
You've seen what I see too?
The smile that ain't a smile but teeth flying against our necks
You see something too but can't call it's name "Ain't it too bad" y'all said
Ain't it too bad, such a nice boy always kind to his mother
Always say good morning to everybody on his way to work
But that last time before he got locked up and hurt, real bad
I seen him walkin' toward his house and he wasn't smiling
And he didn't even say hello
But I knew he'd seen something, something in the way of things
That it worked on him like it do in will
And he kept marching faster and faster away from us
And never even muttered a word
Then the next day he was gone You wanna know, what? You wanna know what I'm talkin' about
Sayin', "I've seen something in the way of things
And how the boys face looked that day"
Just before they took him away
There is in that face and remember now
Remember all them other faces
And all the many places you've seen him
Or the sister with his child wandering up the street
Remember what you've seen in your own mirror
And didn't for a second recognize the face, your own face
Straining to get out from behind the glass Open your mouth like you was gon' say somethin'
Close your eyes and remember what you saw
And what it made you feel like
Now, don't you see something else

Something cold and ugly
Not invisible but blended with the shadow
Criss-crossing the old man, squatting by the drug store
At the corner with his head resting uneasily on his folded arms
And the boy that smiled and the girl he went with And in my eyes too, a waving craziness
Splitting them into the jet stream of a black bird with his ass on fire
Or the solemn notness of where we go to know we gonna be happy
I seen something, I seen something
And you seen it too, you seen it too
You just can't call it's name

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