Back Cover: What Guy in the Subway

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what guy in the subway

The odour reaches me first—
pungent with neglect
like flower scum dried up in a dusty vase.
Acrid urine mixes
with a musky skin scent
and the earthy loam crescent under his nails.
His hood envelops his head like a duffle bag:
only his fleshy lips protrude.

He shuffles in broken-down sneakers,
shaggy-laced and open,
ankles like a child skater’s on the ice
for the first time.
The slope of him tilts like a mound
of dirty laundry ready for
a grime-balled sock to tumble off the top …

Then the laugh:
Ironic, such a smooth, TV-commercial guffaw,
the belly-laugh of a joke, coming from
such a stark and humourless vision.
This ridiculously robust laugh
echoes in the subway corridor
and echoes in the subway corridor
in its hilarity.
If you close your eyes it seems
Like the PA system,
the man not there at all —
or if you open them

— Kate Marshall Flaherty
Lay Spiritan