How to Draw an Invisible Man

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And then when Ralph Ellison’s corpse burst open, I discovered his body had been hoarding all these years a luscious slush, a sludge of arterial words, the raw and unsaid pages with their plots and propositions, with their arcs of intention and babbling, with their mumbling streams and false starts and their love and misanthropic thrusts, tendons of syntax unraveled from his bones and intestinal cavities, the froth of singing, stinging, stinking ink, reams of script fraught with the demons, demagogues and demigods of democracy, demographies of vague landscapes, passages describing muddy river bottoms and elaborate protagonists crawling through a foliage greener than money in America before America thought to release anyone from its dream, the water-logged monologues one who is unseen speaks burst suddenly from Ralph Ellison’s body and because I mean to live
transparently, I am here, bear with me,
describing the contents: the fictions envisioned
by Emerson and immigrants, the dogmas,
aboriginal progeny, scholastic recriminations,
dementia, jubilee, hubris in Ralph Ellison,
Duke Ellington’s shadow, a paragraph
on the feathered headdress of Marcus Garvey,
some of it was pornography, some of it alluded
to Negros who believe educating black kids
means teaching them to help white people feel
comfortable, some of it outlined the perks
of invisibility, how we are obliged to eschew
the zoo, the farm animals, it had something
to do with captivity, flayed in the clinical light
the notes printed on the underside of his flesh
were reversed but readable mirrored in the metal
of the medical table and I wanted to print it all
properly in a posthumous book in the name
of prosperity and proof the genius we believed
he’d wasted had been waiting all these years
for a simple death sentence to break free.