



Abstract

The three poems in this short suite fixate on the horrors and aggressions that exist in a lower middle-class function and the aftermath that threatens everybody in the wake of helplessness. Anger doesn't always begin with a war cry or a raised fist as it often begins as observation, before it becomes retrospection, and then, release.

Keywords

Pandemic,
COVID-19,
community,
physical,
isolation

BEFORE CONTACT

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FEET LIKE CANDLES

Beneath the dim there is the two of us
perched on a familiar darkness. I want

to tell him that everything will be fine,
that outside is still the roar of a permanent

city, honed to its edges by cars fast enough
to be identified as breath. But he is dying

a slow decay, a death so slow sometimes
when the pain in his abdomen spikes,

he flounders and squirms as if trying to yank
death toward him. In the rare times he is

lucid, he would tell me anecdotes of his
life at sea, how the waves followed him

even in dreams, always the usual urgency
of swaying. Now, he is beside me,

feet glued like candles, and the only
thing that follows him in his dreams

is the first wink of the morning encased
in walls. I can't give him the outside,

only the corners of this house. Only
my shoulder, the bone of it; 64 years' worth

of weight and departure now the pressure
unfettered as I guide him up the stairs.

When a shrieking fact suddenly breaks
the tailored silence, what do you tell

a man who wants to die? If the road
is now impossible, then the sea is a rumor.

I say, see, you have this bed and your
Swiss Army Knives, you have the end

of this room all the way to the kitchen
that has that lightbulb you no longer

have the youth to change, but it's okay,
you have our eyes, the direction in them;

you have the Indian mangoes plucked
from the neighbors, the straight wailing

of alarms, and the loving warning that
your life is now only possible indoors.

AN INTERVIEW WITH COVID-19: A TRANSCRIPT

Do you know why we're here?

Human ... curiosity. Although I ... would've arrived ... regardless because of the mere ... fact of here. Copper. Stale breath. Your own glistening fears ... crystallized into ... breath lodged inside your throat ... I have to be where I am ... unwelcomed ... There is no otherwise.

How much of your origin can you understand?

The past is black. Certain enough to ignore. My ... idea of a body is... something that stops without meaning ... to. Intimacy is the only ... solid thing I know. Hovering, always hovering ... gets tiring. Even bodiless ... I ache for form ... Daily, infection ... makes me into ... man's image. His memories become mine ... and mine are tossed to ... the event of the symptoms ... which is to say ... my mannerisms ... Oh sorry ... his ...

Can you explain what grief is to me?

The end of a body ... nerves approaching final ... pain is my regular condition ... Once, a voice told a body to struggle ... fistfuls of fists ... aimless in the pursuit of me. Using the memory of the body, I ... uproot this: during medieval times people ... rang bells at the apexes ... of churches to impede the graze of storms. Noise as defense, wilfull ... release of the inside. A scream comes at me ... that comes from me and yet I remain ...

I suppose ... that's why being ... a bell-ringer had been a useless, treacherous occupation.

Name three people you killed.

Thirty percent of the brain is water ... everything else floats ... Right by the shallows are ... the letters A floating flat, and two feet across it is L ... then blank water ... then a protruding side of... a letter ... Stretching for miles are the flanks, backsides ... and beams of letters actually ... I do not have ... the language to salvage even a single coherence.

Do you believe in a higher power?

The way I ... understand height ... is it's the supreme ... absence of ground. I don't know if I move or not ... or if the world does it for me. I ... die every day ... that's my power: greedy resurrection ... Rip a throat out ... to see if the voice still spews its travel and if I ... am still its sad destination ... You believe anything I touch ... rails ... dips of your lover's abdomen, the stealth of discoveries. And isn't that the power you humans are all so crazy about?

CONTACT

Aimless anger is a wail, a noise
scattered across the ages. A face then
is a state of being. Consider the blind
fist of a man, and his purpose,
the blindest part of him. Now,
pillage his barangay, make corruption
the pillar of his bones so after a week
without food, rumbling will be
his sole condition. Tell the war
there is no need for the ultimate villain,
tell it that outside the flesh of remembering,
we are what we have always been:
a memory too old to discover.
If I will define myself using my country,
then I am a prayer growing unkind
just like that man whose fist
is now wind; and by wind, I mean
he is everywhere, and everything,
even the teenager who's standing in
line outside a drugstore. He catches
my eyes, the contour of them, and nothing
else. The guard doesn't let him in,
because he doesn't have a face shield,
and when he turns, he knocks over a trash can.
It doesn't matter who is at fault;
what politician will come next or what
love is left. There is what we can touch,
and the rest is contact.