

“A Call for Help to the Catching Spy Agency”

A pink plastic badge held in my chubby ten-year-old hand.  
Fourth graders on the imaginary prowl,  
stalking the school like miniature Sherlocks.  
Running down the hall,  
On a recon mission to the fifth grade classroom.  
Giggling as we found the “bad guys.”  
We’d made our own crime-fighting agency,  
Luke even had badges printed: Property of the CSA.  
One afternoon Ms. DeRuiter  
set up a fake crime scene for us to solve,  
We took our job very seriously –  
those badges never left our belt loop.  
We were twelve little kids who thought we  
could save the world.

Six years later and I’m sitting on my ass in the dark.  
Jeans against public-school floor, waiting for something  
to break the worried whispery silence.  
Hands trembling, gripping the plastic chair.  
We used to look for bad guys at our school but  
it’s not a game anymore.  
Thundering feet upstairs sends shivers down our spines.  
and maybe it was nothing  
this time  
But there will always be a  
next time.  
And then it hits me:  
that in a few hours we could be  
just another sad headline that I would’ve ignored –  
will we become just a piece of data?  
We were kids who grew up knowing we could die  
and the world wouldn’t blink twice.  
Hearing those names again and again,  
trying to remember all the things we have  
to care about. All the people we *must remember*  
we must *keep them alive*.

A decade later and we’re all grown up.

Spread out – like seeds of a tree  
that bloomed when the wind was blowing.  
After everything we've seen,  
disease will be growing even in the smallest of our rings:  
We never knew a world before  
everyone was dangerous.  
Tragedy was our 1<sup>st</sup> birthday present  
and it will be our 20<sup>th</sup>,  
and we can't even celebrate it in person.  
Resorting to a staticky, distanced party  
And still the tragedies happen,  
Of course they do.  
but our arms hang empty, and it makes it  
that much harder.  
After everything the world took from us, now even  
our comfort, our embraces, our touching hands  
have been stolen.  
People ask me to care and I marvel  
at how much I am still able to give.

When I look at the faded piece of pink plastic,  
I think of kids who knew to be scared at the airport,  
I think of teenagers who wore orange shirts to protests  
I think of college students faced with  
mountains of injustice and two little hands.  
Do they remember the kids  
they used to be?  
Back in fourth grade when the world  
didn't seem quite so dark.  
Though we're spread across the map,  
I want to believe that if  
I gave the call,  
The twelve agents would rally with me,  
put their worn out badges  
back on their belts, and try to  
save the world  
again.

“Plea”

Do you think if I went out back and stood,  
Where the clean green lawn meets the wood  
And whispered softly in the night air  
*I'm not afraid and I know you're there.*

If I wished hard enough, do you think  
The fae would steal me away with a wink?  
And take me up with them to the sky  
That blue abyss where fairies fly?

I've had enough of the human planet,  
I'm ready to eat the pomegranate.  
When they ask my name, I'll tell them straight  
and accept my role as a foundling playmate.

I'll swim in a puddle and dance on the moon  
My dress is a gossamer cocoon.  
At the end of the day when I've had my fill  
I'll go to sleep in a daffodil.

Will the fairies come? My wish was earnest,  
But the waiting leads me to despair.  
I'll have to finish my mortal quest  
If they leave my Earth-bound body here.

“Backwards Question Mark”

I told them, my back against the wooden  
dock, staring, eyes wide in the lack of light,  
if aliens came for me, I told them,  
I would pick up and gladly go tonight.

Above us was that vast inviting sky.  
Around us, the sweatshirt-and-flip-flops of  
late spring. We searched for constellations. High  
above us we found Leo. How I love

the idea of escaping there. I stopped  
and asked do you ever flip the universe  
in your head? We are not lying on top  
of earth but hanging off the bottom. Curse

gravity for not letting me embark  
into the crystal backwards question mark.

