

Just Supposing

Suppose some promised catastrophe you seldom succumb to imagining
has, just now, stopped still not happening.

Suppose that last stark threshold, the one they've said all along (OK but for real this
time) we must never blunder beyond,
is already joining all those others we've left behind.

Suppose, were this a movie (which don't worry it won't be), this moment'd be that cut
between
the taut close-up on a bright zero closing out the countdown
and a silent wide shot across the impact zone.

Suppose that whether this news leaves you resigned or frantic, complicit or confessed,
distraught, defiant, or bitter,
does not (and not once did and now as it has turned out never will) matter.

Suppose the coming days will make our folly's (though that won't be the name they use
for it) inheritors envious
of (and this should really tell you something) us.

Suppose venality plus inertia. Suppose we'll worry about it then, or we've made mistakes
before.

Then suppose terror and remorse. Suppose the anguish of irredeemable loss. Suppose
blame. Suppose despair.

You can also suppose (though I don't recommend it) how we just missed (so close!)
some nicer, non-nemesis-ridden, future.

Now suppose, as a kind of relief though not really but whatever,
how there won't be time for all that once it (i.e. catastrophe) gets here.

Suppose at least we won't have to talk about it ever again. That's something.
Suppose they're all wrong. (Told you so!) But they're not all wrong.

And finally, yes finally, suppose (if you dare) what it'll feel like then
to know how they (meaning we) knew now that, even as their (our) last chance to prevent
it (i.e. catastrophe) is *juuuust* about gone,
they (we) are too busy to do more than wait for someone to hurry up already and find a
fucking solution,
entertaining them(our)selves meanwhile with enough post-apocalyptic bullshit (but isn't
some of it pretty cool?) to obscure how they (we) will surely deserve the curses of
every coming generation,
which will not, however, reverberate all that long
because of, you know, oblivion.

Elsewhere Altogether

Like a walltop's fangs of glass, defunct casinos gleam
round our Great Inland Sea's waterless shore;
hazard-suited scavengers roam its ochre dunes
where indigene ruins pock in the alkali air.

In the distant South's permafrost wastes, the Rectified
are enduring the purge of cold. Pardon is rare.
By ancient custom, each newborn male receives
their macabre handicrafts of horn and fur.

Friezes show the Poet-Kings, dynasts of the Seed Age,
sternly wielding the wasp-stingered scourge of shame
against our still barbarous tribe. Though their line died out
and codices burned, superstition still blots their names.

Sheer alpine valleys and far East Gulf archipelagoes
shelter the austere remnants of the Old Creed.
None but priests can hymn its glyphs. Night roofs the haunted rites
of the once-hunted. Their least myths thrive like weeds.

Shrewd candidates know that, to this nation, wisdom sounds
like the bitter ramblings of mad billionaires;
justice, like the damp smack of meat on cement; and courage,
like garbled place-names from a dozen current wars.

Razor-wired ziggurats down our capital's boulevards
canalize the crunching melees of protest and police.
Embassies rise from slumlands. Floodlamps scrub fenced-off squares.
Old women swathe cenotaphs in heraldic wreaths.

Morning Commute with Revenant

You know how it is: going in to work,
Who looks anything? You're late, it's cold,
hot, raining, no buses *again*, whatever.
You're long past fighting this fast-forward blur,
pure A-to-B time, better numbed than bored.

But then the street-views you sluice through slow and lock:
some old warehouse abutting a blacktop lot.
Why here? Don't say a bird.
You do and this is *over*.
No birds, no clouds, nothing with petals or fur.
What then? Don't expect much:
high up this soot-caked chainlink fence
that nets, for no one else, blank swaths of sky,
there juts forth a sawn-off sumac branch,
em dash black and cocked at ten-to-three.

See it first, since you must, as a quenched torch,
a club hanging half-swung,
or someone's bony forearm thrust through the mesh,
lopped at wrist and elbow, and left as a warning.
Fine. But you're not one to confuse
fancied-up musings with the truth:
one hapless stick is all the chainsaw left
the day someone decided
this tree—a weed that wedged upwards from
the cracks its seed happened among,
that rose against the traffic-ravaged air,
that pierced that fence and knuckled this pavement up—
had to come down.
Rough cobblestones plug the square yard
where its raw stump once weathered anvil-hard;
no doubt the sheared-off roots still grip
deep undertiers of pipe and stone.

A passing siren's wave-crest flushes you
back in the churning surf of city noise,

but by now it's too late:
you've gone and glimpsed that voided silhouette,
you've heard, in its tousling leaves' soundless hiss,
another of those random sidewalk elegies
work alone can dismiss.
And not because it isn't true,
because it is.

Talking Past Each Other

*This was promised in our stars
Nothing taught you trust like force
These are ours and that is yours
Talking only makes it worse*

Whatever you take from us, you soon leave gutted
Hacking away the whorls our dead palms printed.

*God's own sword can work no crime
You were shiftless till we came
Do not step across that line
We still mispronounce your names*

Like flesh chewing on a lodged arrow's barbs,
Your memory calluses tightly around our loss.

*All we mean you contradict
Like claims like and that's a fact
One look at you makes us sick
Get out now and don't come back*

Our riddance still promises you peace, as if
The goad of your fierce unrest were not our grief.