

We're Not There

For Janet and her daughters

An injured spirit lingered in our town
last night.

The air was thick-
He cast a cold pallor
over our ground.

The next morning,
we woke
to our first hard frost.

No one noticed the silver puddles of blood
that he left
except for our third graders,
who went splashing through them in rubber boots,
screaming.

He took with him
our town clerk
our pharmacist
and a young father.

We pretended the spirit was
heart failure,
stroke,
alcohol.

But we knew better.
Our bodies recognized
the taste
of this spirit's fetid breath;
our bones itched
as he scraped
at our cornerstones.

People gathered in the streets,
just to cry.

They didn't notice the spirit
passing by.

Air too thick to-

We're not there.

Instead, at school, miles away.

A friend from home messaged us:

I feel like electricity is surging through the air.

My mother calls:

*The Island can't handle
another tragedy this year.*

We're all gone, but the spirit
demanded intercessions anyway:
tears thick as-

We mourned that day like doom,
like 9/11 or JFK.

Did the town fathers meet
to ask of each other
what happened?

Did they sense the spirit
in the thick air-?

Did they put away
the gavel,
the bible,
and call on the old gods instead,
buried for centuries in granite tombs?

Did the spirit sit among them
listening to his trial?

Or did he pass beyond,
going first through your home,
leaving
that stained fray of linoleum,
that creak in the stair,
that whimper from your sleeping brother?

We still speak of it.

Not yesterday, but today,
an injured spirit was here.

Letter to my Unborn Daughter #2
The Last Glacier

He will be the last of them,
of his kind.

He will come heaving
and panting for breath,
icicles formed
on the tip of his beard.

His coat,
intact for many hundreds of years
will be in tatters.

“Fetch hot water!”
she will shout, and you will wait,
acid fear on your tongue,
while the flow from the sink
warms on your fingertips.
But when you return,
she and I will be bent over
his naked form,
shaking our heads.
It will be too late.
You will let the glass
fall and shatter on the floor,
but the rest of the city
won’t hear it.
You will feel guilty,
but it wasn’t your fault.

Patriotism

They came to make a map
of my bedroom.

Two men, bearded, solemn,
with rolled up drafting paper
and thick black markers.

“You can stay seated on the bed”
one told me, carefully sidestepping
a pile of my laundry.

Both pulled out tape measures;
they measured everything:
the average width of my books,
the circumference of the bare lightbulb
jutting from the wall,
even the width between my feet,
toes kneading the blue carpet.

Then they set about drawing,
boxes and squiggles abstracting
the solids of my life,
turning the djembe I carried
from Uganda
into a circle,
the windows etched exes on the wall.

They used a labeling language
I could not discern.

I had to pee,
but one told me if I left,
they would have to start
all over again.

Finally, hours later,
they put the markers down,
rolled up their papers,
and shook my hand.

They said the drawings
would go to the Library of Congress
and be indexed with

the rest of my rooms.
They called me a patriot,
a citizen of the highest regard.
Then they left,
and their footprints
faded into the abstract square
of my carpet,
labeled 'F7' in the secret manual
all these men carry.

Peacetime

Four men appeared
from the war.

“Where should we meet?”
they asked.

“You will come to me
in a long, thin room,”

I responded,
thinking of the hallway
in the Rotary.

“Will our mothers be there?”
they asked.

“No, they died, each,
of heart failure,
when they heard the news.”

A man in Maine
has been beating a drum
continuously
for four years.
He says it is the heartbeat
of the Earth.
He has disciples who take turns
on the drum
in four hour shifts.
He is squandering
his inheritance.

I hear they may move
to a smaller house.

I wonder how they will drum
in the car;
if they go over a bump,
and the rhythm is interrupted,
will the Earth wink out of existence?

They must have
a contingency plan.

The end of His days

And every ozone sundown burned a braver creation

-Christian Wiman

Revelations settles
on the shoulders
of the blooming congregation.

Little eyes expecting
endings, wondering
at my cassock, at my
collar. Fear,
dear to my heart,
is in their little eyes.

For fear of what?
I let my brain
glide noiselessly
through the waterveins
of this bleeding Earth.

There, is hidden in smog,
destruction; fires
in homes of sand and stone

gut the lonely
mothers;
wives ask
another god

for his tongue
back. I rake
my fingers
through my brain,

explaining a discarded
Book to be the blame,
blood-spilled and hand
prints all over the margins.

Man's thoughts smolder
of creation, embryos
swimming through rivers
of caution-tape into
a mother's waiting delta.

God turns bright red
and America's Lazarus, dead
again,
(he was Kennedy,
he was Lincoln)
pretends
that his infinite
devotion to the notion
of one nation,
under God,
can raise him up.

My boat is drifting
through dusk.
My lambs are waiting
for slaughter,
for new life.

I ask
the third grader
what God wants
us to confess.

She, blest, imparts
intimately a
wisdom far beyond

her years.
I hear angels sing
praises: her God is near-

the end of His days.