

A Little on the (Covered) Nose

in the nightmare
you forget something
and it kills you,
or kills someone you love.

you forget something and
this time it kills a stranger - better
than killing someone you love
but not in the realm of forgivable.

the next time a stranger forgets - better
than bearing the burden of murder,
but nothing in the realm of forgivable.
it always feels wrong, looking

for who bears the burden of murder
when the murder weapon is invisible.
it always feels wrong, looking
at 200,000 dead by September

when the murder weapon is so visible, so
far beyond you or strangers who forget.
200,000 dead by September -
where do so many bodies go?

far beyond you or strangers who can't forget,
in the waking nightmare
the bodies go unchecked by those who could
and it kills you.

This is a Quarantine Poem

Every day for 6 months I would only leave my apartment to walk my dog. Every day I would face the odious dark brown, beige, and watery brown

carpet pattern in the hallway to the elevator that didn't work half the time. Always just once a day, at some ridiculous hour like 2:37 AM

so I could avoid people, and because by then the stench of garlic or whatever my neighbors felt like inflicting on us had usually faded by then. The walks

would always encompass only the 15 foot stretch in front of my watery brown building, going around and around as many times as necessary for my dog

to relieve himself, then back inside to face the carpet, hoping the elevator was working and no one decided to take an almost 3 AM stroll, otherwise I'd be

forced on an 8-story climb. Every day, until one day I ran out of the \$5 bills I stashed in March to last precisely 6 months, so, when September impossibly

emerged, I needed an ATM again. See, in this janky watery brown building, you had to take a trip to the 15th floor and refill your laundry card with

\$5 bills exclusively, all in order to use the washers that, no matter how much disinfectant you sprayed them with, would always smell like someone

else. When running out of clean underwear became an imminent threat, I knew it was time to leave my apartment, face the odious patterned carpet and

the elevator with no dog in tow, no protection from a ridiculous hour because the closest ATM works 9 to 5. So, on a random September Tuesday

I ventured out past the 15 foot stretch, and as I stepped over the threshold where apartment complex ended and the outside world began,

I felt nothing. No profound shift, no revelation, no waves of sorrow for my losses, our losses, all the loss that had been multiplying over

and over 186 days. I felt nothing, because nothing had changed. The impossible New England weather, mixed in with a little bit of climate catastrophe,

brought on a sky too blue for mid-September, a breeze a little too
Spring and not enough Fall, the trees a little too in-between,

like if I closed my eyes and squeezed hard enough, the last 6 months
would be wiped from collective memory, and we'd be in March again.

In that moment, it could all be erased, like you forget a tattoo
on a body part that you can't see, or the way people forget

the crimes of George Bush Jr, and Sr., and all presidents before
and after them. After the 15 minutes to and from the ATM,

I returned to face the odious carpet pattern. The elevator was broken,
so I walked up 8 flights, this time carrying a year's worth of \$5 bills.

Lost In

There is no way to say “I miss you” in Portuguese,
there is only saudade.

An *it* that you possess for someone, something -
googling the city of your first childhood,
seeing the top result, a bridge built two years after
your flight. Finding photographs of streets
you once walked, taken by your mother
years before your birth. Saudade.

A bowling ball of longing wedged in the middle
of your chest, minuscule cracks pushed
into ribs, lungs flattening, heart lopsided, beating
for skies that you will never see.

Blank

In 6th grade I made my very first American Friend, which meant that unlike the first-second-or-third generation Miami Cubans I had become so accustomed to in the 2 years I'd been in the U.S., she was a blonde, blue-eyed, family-arrived-on-the-Mayflower, American. The first time I went to her house, we had green beans, mashed potatoes, pork, and some light-brown goop for lunch. As her mother set a plate before me, I anxiously whispered to American Friend: "Did your mom forget the rice?" I was raised right and couldn't bring myself to inquire about what I would, years later, learn was gravy. My good manners had limits though, and I simply couldn't stay quiet about the rice, I mean, who eats a meal without rice? She laughed, assuming I was joking, and dug in, smothering her pork in the brown stuff. After the incredibly disappointing lunch that left me pining for rice, beans, and a banana, American Friend directed me to their dishwasher, another concept that was entirely foreign to me ("So you leave your dirty plates inside this thing for a few days and let the machine wash it? It doesn't smell? The plates don't break inside?" / "Wait you've never seen a dishwasher before? Do they like, not have electricity in Brazil or something?"). I tuned out her questions, which were no longer foreign to me after two years, and instead focused on her refrigerator - we definitely had those in Brazil. Baby pictures of her and her older sister, a red, white, and blue magnet with the Pledge of Allegiance printed nearly illegibly, and a photo of her parents in their uniforms (her mother was a firefighter, her father a cop - so American it hurt). What interested me though, were those little word magnets that you can use to put together silly sentences. These dotted the fridge with phrases like I am bear, boy is yuck, and cool egg. On the right side of the fridge, below a "I Survived Everglades National Park" magnet with a huge gator on it, someone had put together something different, less silly:

I dreamed of my home
and as my love flew I cried joy

I tried to stitch those words together as American Friend babbled about the benefits of a dishwasher

dreamed of my home

home

All that came up was

Hometown?

I have never lived in a place that wasn't temporary.

I'm not speaking in the existential, everything is temporary sense,

but in the concrete I have moved 17 times in 22 years sense, so forgive me if I say that "Hometown?" is the worst possible quirky icebreaker, and

I have yet to come up with an answer that doesn't involve giving far too much to strangers who don't want to know I grew up in many places,

all of which I haven't seen in years and never will again.



I've gotten into the bad habit of collecting other people's

hometowns, or more specifically, the fascinating gems they harvest in all of that stillness. Like one of my friends

who lived his whole life in Indianapolis, or Indy, as he lovingly calls it, and often talks about the wonders of being in a place where you can have

3 McDonald's, 3 Wendy's, 2 Taco Bells, 2 Arby's, 2 Dairy Queens, a Burger King, a Hardee's (whatever that is), and a White Castle within 10 blocks of each other.

Or my friend from Phoenix, who sometimes sends me photos of the mountains he is surrounded by, and I always reply "That's fake," mostly joking but also

not fully convinced that mountains exist, as I've never been near one. He loves to go hiking in the desert and I tell him he is crazy for it. He always says:

"You would love it too, if you grew up here."



I could fall in love with any place.

When I visited San Francisco for the first time, I was certain I could spend the rest of my life there. I felt the same in

Atlanta, in Orlando, and even in Detroit, both times, first with my father and his now-wife, then years later

in a layover where I ate Qdoba for the first time.



For 18 years I lived only in relative summer -

very different summers, oceans away from each other, but still, summer. I am still not used to seasons, even after

years in New England, mostly because it feels like since moving out of summer, time has sped up. Like since

being propelled into seasons, time has been more intent on not stopping, on bringing me along for the whiplash.

I could be unhappy anywhere.