

One Year Later:

Pandemic Poems

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“a time that is not a time
in a place that is not a place
and on a day that is not a day”

-wiccan proverb

March, or "The Flood"

sometimes the high tide
sweeps in so quickly
I have to hold my head up with both hands
and even though the dark coffee flood threatens to
swallow me up
I just close my eyes and remember sunny days
I remember feeling so happy
so hot so dry that I would do anything for a drop of water
I try to remember that feeling as my feet are swept off the ground
soon there's only an inch or two of air
between the waterline and this home's great iris
so I take my deepest breath and sink down
force my eyes to open
they adjust to the sting quickly
they've seen enough salt in their lives
down here is the eye of the storm
the calmness the drift
the wracking waves and the terrible thunder
rock me like a baby
and I wonder if this is really
such a bad way to go.
There is no exit in sight
and I quickly find myself running out of air
the momentary calm that the waves gave me is suffocating,
my lungs catch on fire and I start to burn
and cold water turns my toes to stone
I'm trying to swim but my useless limb refuses to comply
no matter
soon, soon the grave cave of a home turns into open ocean
my furniture releases her schools of fish
and picture frame turns to kelp
by the time I leave this house
a hundred years have passed by me
this happy home is swallowed whole by the great white whale
and as I begin to escape its tangles
the sunlight burns my cave creature skin

it is a welcome pain.

Before I start that surface swim, I look down
to find that I have also changed
my neck scarred with new gills
and my fingers webbed to match my mermaid's tail
the flood has changed far more than just this city
its changed my bones, my blood
on some far-off island I see people waving to me
those refugees
I swim to them but as I take a breath of air
as my fingertips touch the sand shore and my skin kisses sunlight
all I feel is fire
my body rejects this place
I am no longer meant for earth
my lungs are scorched
my skin is blackened and crisped
the sand is gritty knife on my baby beluga skin
I sink back down into the waves
take in wet, shaky breaths
sneeze air out of my lungs
and try to revert to some semblance of normal.
Sadly I find that the flood has changed me beyond recognition
but this place I once called home is changed as well
and although I am totally new, I am still the same girl I was
I wonder
if both myself and my home have changed in equal measure
if we could still be compatible after all these years

April, or "Plato and I"

the flames of the fire
burn my back
they sear their strange patterns into my eyes
mirages of lovers, of liars
of all the beautiful things in the world
they're all up there

splayed across the cave wall
flashing against my sistene chapel eyelids
viciously flicking flames and shadows
like a jackson pollack, like a splattering of roadkill

plato and I
can't help but reach out
trying to feel the leaves of the trees
the taste of the wines
but the chains dig into my wrist and I cannot leave

to me, sunlight feels like fiery flames against my skin
as does moonlight
the cool drips of water feel like blisters
the black night feels like the sweat on my neck
it all feels of fire, fire, fire
all I know is fire, fire, fire
and there is no exit

May

This chapter of my life
ended far too early, considering
I find myself at the edge of moments
more frequently than ever
looking at my life and saying "this"
"this is the last time it will be like this again"
it's a melancholy feeling, the panic of living/leaving
of time passing by faster than I can write
and all my dreams fading faster than I can reach for the pen
I try desperately to immortalize this moment
all the moments
to bottle them up in hopes that a future me
will uncork them and find everything exactly where I left it.
But I am caught
tying my shoe as the rest of the universe hustles by me
down here, the days and nights pass me like
their shoes on sidewalk
down here, on one knee
the world spins faster
and it's all I can do to keep my eyes open
and try to remember this feeling for a future me.

June

I remember that June southern heat
that summer air so bittersweet
we met there Sunday hand in hand
to empty downtown no man's land

deadman's name on quivering lip
we marched along the solemn strip
another martyr on picket sign
aint no rest except in dying

and it was just so damn hot
as police cast their nets and caught
whole schools of fish on Poplar St.
oh I remember June southern heat

aint no justice, aint no peace
gun in hand, in marched police
that gas was like vinegar kiss
hard to see, and hard to miss

seared my skin and filled my lung
the busted lip and swollen tongue
flies festerin in summer heat
blood on the flag, and blood in the street

no land of the free, just land o' the beast
no home of the brave, just roam of police
aint no justice aint no peace
just the growing death toll
and the June summer heat

July

I find myself looking for my friends
in obituaries rather than text messages
my useless phone can't reach them in whatever
world traps them in and holds them down
I would hate them for it, but I do it myself.

the three of us made up something beautiful
something good and decent, unlike everything else on this
wretched piece of rock we called a home
I saw them, and they saw me in return
and we promised each other a swift return into the earth
before we lost any more of our innocence
we dug three graves for ourselves that night

I remember how she smells, how her old house smells
--clean but artificial,
I remember everything about her
long slick hair and black eyes like a raven
crooked teeth underneath her ceaseless scowl
we were lovers of another kind
I loved this girl, this ravenite girl before I loved the other

before the other loved her instead
she smelled like perfume and blood red silk
her hair, just as black but falling in waves of waves of stiff strands
I remember they cut their bangs at the same time
the mole on her lip twitching up into a smile as we talked
her brown face tilted towards the sun like a red flower
when that rosebud lover whispered to me
that she fell for someone
I hopelessly, recklessly begged the universe that it was me
but it was her instead-- the raven over me blocking out the sun
they crashed together before my eyes
and I was helpless to stop them, to say anything at all
the three of us stuck to each other like honey, like black tar.
Pandemics and matching tattoos aside, we were soulmates.

The ravenite, the rosebud, and me.

Now I find myself alone, on a night with no stars,
winter having taken over my small home
pushing the birds, ravens and crows and pigeons alike,
south in hopes of evading the cold that surrounds me
my rose bushes are overcome by the snow
turned into brambles and brambles of thorns
I stand before three empty graves
wondering which of us ought to lay down first

August, or "No Exit"

I've already written about this
in fact
I'm beginning to find it to be a central theme
in these poems

my nighthawks
my snowglobe opus
this concrete cell
holds me in and there is no exit

I press my hands against the walls
trying to find some lever
some secret switch
that can lead me out of here

or perhaps just to somewhere with fresh air
instead of this recycled bullshit I'm sucking in
I can't think here!
I'm stuck in this world, this life

and there is no exit in this life
no suicide, no means of eloping or running away
there is no exit, no exit
how am I supposed to go on like this?
It just isn't living
spending my life in search of an exit
that I know damn well isn't there

September

this is hard for me
I hope you know that
when I close my eyes this awful feeling
rushes over me like rain against a windshield
like I'm a monster, a beast
and there is no exit
no escape in sight
all my poems reek of you
the way that next-day werewolf
still can't manage to clean the blood from under his nails
the night sky is obscured for one second and I can breathe
but it's not enough to escape this life no, not even close.
I thought I knew better
hell, I thought I knew anything at all
but I don't, no I really don't
damn no exit, no exit...

at times, I feel this cacophony of words
crawl up my throat
I vomit them onto the page like a ketchup bottle
like a nightmare
I can't help but write
it's that or die
it's that or think, remember
hands, hands on me
the moon behind the clouds
peeks out at me oh god
the claws, the hands, the blood

October, or "Bear-Trap"

"what's wrong?" they ask me "where does it hurt?"
how am I to explain
that this black inky mud has swallowed me whole
it wraps itself around me like honey stuck to a spoon
like wet sheets suctioned against my submerged body
I thrash against this feeling that encircles me like a second skin
I desperately try to scrub it off of me or cut a hole to breathe
I try to run from it, but it always catches up
at night I lie like a fish inhaling air that I cannot breathe
flailing like the bird caught in the net
the fly stuck in the web
this feeling gloms onto me, my thrashing rips my skin
perhaps it pulls off one of my six legs or my white feathers
regardless, it's clear that the tarpits themselves do not kill me
but the escape
I could survive here if I tried
but like the bumblebee, I would rather rip out my own guts
like the fox I'd rather gnaw off my own leg
they flock to me as I scream out
looking for wounds they cannot see
not knowing I cry out not for what has happened but what will
the black bear panics when he is trapped
because he knows the hunter draws near
I suppose both him and I could live here if we tried,
but it's not the beartrap,
not the web, not the sting or the fishhook,
not the net, or the snare, or the flames that suffocate me
it's the smoke.

November, or "the crow"

she flies haphazardly
one breath at a time
pumping oxygen into her tiny lungs
blood into her dark mouse-heart
even from the distance they can tell
something's wrong
the dip and fall without cadence
the drip and dive and pained stretch of wing
the heaviness of her dance
and the slow drip of blood down her leg
the red breadcrumbs behind her make a simple trail to follow
as she goes and goes
she shakes her murky head
trying to clear whatever strange mist clouds her vision
obscures the path ahead
almost there
she moves jerkily
like some cruel puppet
pulled taut and then slack again
from side to side
spilling like a black glass of wine against the pavement
she searches for something
anything to give her a reprieve in these last few moments
but nothing comes to her, regardless
the pain between her black shoulders
is masked only by the fear of what comes next
of falling down, down, down
of plummeting to the empty depths of the world

December, or the man in the red sweater

I find myself
utterly alone here
in a world with no flowers
on a day with no clouds
I feel my feet lift off the ground
the tug of two dogsled leashes
against my frozen coat
the tug, the pull, the loneliness all consume me
and not the mortal kind
that begs for a smile or a kiss
but the kind behind glass doors
the feeling of never being seen
never in my whole life
not by anyone, ever
I am truly alone here

January, or "Monday"

once again
it is Monday
I guess you could say I survived the weekend

more likely, the weekend is survived by me
really, I see this as a disappointment
to myself and to others.

I'm tired of wasting my life
waiting to die
this isn't living, this isn't living

I didn't do my homework
why would I? I thought I'd be dead by now
or home at least

so in essence, dead
but once again I find myself alive
barely

on a Monday
alive for now,
but still alive

February, or "Plato's Allegory of the Cave"

I find myself here.

In the same place I've always been.

Chained like Prometheus against the rock
the flames of my fires crawling up my ceaseless back.

People come and go through the cave,
some linger at the entrance, others dare to enter so far
they can see the glow of the fire.

None go so far as to see me.

I see their shadows though.

The shadows of their lives, of their emotions and their loves.

When I was a child, I used to wonder why the flickering images
never matched the descriptions I'd heard.

Later I would learn that the moon I see is not a moon,
that the only real feeling I've ever known
has been the fire that licks against my neck.

I've learned to stop fighting against the chains,
and sometimes if I squint, I can convince myself that the shadow
in front of me is a moon, or a lover, or a flicker of hope.

The voices, they beckon me out of the cave
they offer me gifts of delicacies, of treasures and great beauties.

How could they know they all look of shadow to me?

That they all feel like fire against my back?

That they all taste like smoke and ash and burning flesh?

I cling to the hope that one day I come across a key-bearer

or perhaps that I break these chains that hold me

and I can taste real moonlight.

But perhaps there is no exit.