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Five Poems: "Immunity," "What the Old Will Do," "Wonder Cures," "Road Shrines," and "Pain the Teacher"

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Cover Page Footnote

N/A

Immunity

Vile, welt begetting invaders, begone.
Sniffing for foreign odors,
the very humours of the body
assemble in their hatches,
smoke bombing regions.
Hyperimmunity stands on guard
mumbles cautions
over the fade and crackle of short wave radios.
Armies of sneezes load the neurotransmitters..
Legions of pollen rage, flushed from their haybins.
There is no soothing response, even for infant rats
in cages, smoothed by wet paintbrushes
forty-five minutes exactly, three times per day,
to mimic their loving mothers' licks.

What the Old Will Do

Sundown. A pale fat leg flung over the half-rail,
trying to get out.
Wants to go home.
Arms flail, reliving Normandy, Invasion.
You all are trying to kill me.

Green plastic mask askew,
spewing air to nowhere.

I can't get my air.

Fan blows straight to the face
napkins flying to the floor.
Shredded fluff, stuffing of diapers' paper innards float,
blue flimsy casing now formless on the bed.
Mattress motor huffs while inflating,
rasping in and out like wheezy breaths.
Heels already trend towards purple,
chill mottled splotches.
Sundown, unspoken howl.

On opposite sides of their cells, their walls,
one knocks, one answers.
Sundown, they seem to holler,
while yellow morphs into shadow,
telling time by darkenings.

In midnight yards the neighborhood dogs
bark and reply to confirm existence.
Winds from outside the unopened windows
still insinuate changes.

Wonder Cures

Sound of limbs cracking.
Yellowed leaves sag down.
So poor we didn't even know it.
Camphor, chamomile, concoctions.
Some keep cures in their brain:
turpentine, salt water, vapo-rub.
River route of escapees.
For swollen feet smear
horse salve;
tear brown bags in strips,
soak them in hot vinegar,
wrap around a bone.
Iodine works with just one drop,
but stings and stains,
blue-black like a bruise
Ants swarm to eyes
too weak to brush them off.
But that won't happen here.
Refugees are from somewhere else.
World itself is a crusty old sore.

Road Shrines

In fog, in the photo, an X, lit by bulbs:
Turn it askew, it becomes a flaming cross.
Squint, it is a small white cross,
size of someone's foot, rabbit in the grass.

I alter the photo a bit, frame it for email
with blood red background.
The text remains black, nearly unreadable
by lack of contrast.
We don't need to read it to know what it says.
The words are nearly memorized,
heard and seen nonstop for the last few days.
The letters are scratches, scars against stained dirt.

Here's how I sometimes tell it:
They're going down a road, a road
we're not on. We can see them.
They can see us, when they turn around
to look. We wave, they wave.
Sometimes they drift back a little,
but then they keep on going.

Clinging next to cliffs, in Attica,
small clay houses on stilts.
Maybe they contain a tiny saint, maybe a candle.
Maybe they mark a birth,
a miracle, or something else.

The mother, like us, watched for its take off.
Its slow graceful turns towards the runway:
improbable, unreal, that something so bloated could dance.

Peered into each lighted window
for a glimpse of her child.

We used to wait that way
until the very last sight of the dot in the distance,
then go to the car to drive away.
It is unbearable to think of what that mother saw,
that we did not.

Pain the Teacher

A trick you have finally learned:
You seem to be resting
but you are alert
with eyes closed,
braced

The trees know this too

At first hint of haunt,
once tame squirrels go rabid
nearly landing in a lap,
cackling about confetti,
bantering static electricity

Even the flowers sting:
Exuberant shouted mornings,
seeking equilibrium

A man who loved rain,
late dry summer
had his bed slid closer
to the open window

Soon rain surrounded,
the man was no more.

Expected, but unexpected,
but expected