

"In the Middle of the Burning," and "This that We Have"

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In the Middle of the Burning

notice now pictures of awful things on top our head
the freight that barricades this view, how enough
how the law batter down the dogged tide we make
the world shoring its dark scars between seasons
as though to hold it together only by a flame
is here a voice to please enough the blunt
borderlessness of this grief turning our heads to rubble
the lunacy of nothing so limning as death in the streets
in these vibrating hours where the corners talk back
need I simply run my tongue along the granite sky and live

to know how lost the millionth life somewhere today
the swift shape of roads new names combust, the sum
of anthems flooding the world with the eye's sudden and narrow
saltwater and streets ziplined with screams at the pitch of cooking pots
then tear gas, then pepper spray, then militarized lies unzipping
body bags, oh, our many many there, our alive and just born,
and that is how to say let's fuck it up, we the beat and we the loud
tuning forks and the help arriving empty-handed
propping the hot news of new times on our head

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days like these pleat whatever the hollow year must offer
between the not-yet-dead and those just waking up
it will not be the vanished thing that we remember
it will be what we exchanged close to midnight
like smugglers high-wiring the city, hoarding the thoughts
of ours we interrupted midway to discovering the velocity
of the burning world below
of our language in the lateness of our stuck and reckless love

where the forces who claim they love us
level our lives to crust—the centuries-wide dance
of swapped shackles for knees
their batons and miscellany
thrown at our whole lives demanding our mothers
raise from their separate rooms, separate graves, today
to save who and me? I open the book to a naked page
where nothing clatter my heart, what head
what teeth cling to broadside, roll alias after
alias with a pen at their dull tribunes and shrines
imagine our heirlooms of shot nerves make a life
given to placards and synergies and elegies, but more

last things: where letters here where snow in May
where the millennium unstitches the quartered earth
in June, how many today to the viral fire
the frosted rich and their forts, but not
the fulsome rage of my people unpeaced
mute boots with somber looks appear
a fearsome autumn ending spring, though we still hear

I dare not sing

another song to dig a hole this time for the lineages
of magnolias where the offspring bring a hand to cover
our mouth, our heaping lives, who sit who burn who drop
three feet to the tar, who eat and demolish the thing
that takes our head, the thing that is no more
the place that never was except a burning learned

just once and not again when the darker working's race

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ourselves from the quadrupling intoxication
sudden, inconsolable as anything the elephant's stolen tusk

the frozen plane below must crack like cymbals
in this knowledge but who can hear
what we do not the fevered incantations of the dew
 way up here
the chorus tonight [we know by now] is the gurgling of seahorses
& the starfish giving up their placentas
to the wideness of the sea just as the barking dog a country away
enters its cracked femur into the log marked for saving this world

more intimate now to us
is the flammable language of maps
the silence we admire in the birth of things the effusive doctrine of birds

above us, such incandescence we move
 with the desiccated graces and stones and roses
 the lines we inherit
the error of floating houses

do we petition the summoners of our preventable catastrophes
 whoever claims to cleanse the village
without picking sides is not believed
until the tongue pulls us together
 in the middle of repetitions the shared sutures dissolving in our eye

amid our flight, our voices splotch the distance
our resplendent songs blackening

like a hurricane refusing a boat to wreck
the wounded map we dance upon
we danced it here

to the plantations at the sea's beginning bend
 tell everyone the matter
is not the self which we have always had nor the caves
that in their damp and dark, know themselves
but the maps we'd move the world to make

like healers,

"In the Middle of the Burning," and "This that We Have"

& crickets, to disorient the cartographer's loftiness
down to bush and flock to sunsets that hide
the lengths and breadths
we come back to; papered

with no even sense of the invisible
even empty as clay pots
we want the repaired century

nested, stained and carried in our heads then loosed to the tall grasses
where frenetic servants' visions

are ledgers of our semblances a clearing
the timbre for our reunions

look, *call the year anything* we should bring
bring a place to point to when we arrive

