

Seven Trumpets for the Living & the Dead (the Awful Naming of Things)

*And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.
Revelation 8:2*

i They call this judgment day,
the day twisting to meet its end
& we all fall down, like toy soldiers
& we all fall subject to the awful naming of things.
This one virus.
This one war.
This one not really one at all.

The trumpet-thundered sky,
bed sheets rip in the middle of the night,
entire bodies set ablaze
& then we die.
This we once called home.

ii There was Jim.
Jim who dreamt of his father fishing,
lover of the sea as all good Portuguese fishermen are.
& in his dream the second trumpet not like music
to his ears, more like the siren of a hurricane warning
spotting a nor'easter, lava in its eye.

The vision started as cloud
& his father with the imagination of a child.
One moment castle.
One moment crater
hurling itself into the sea
smashing into ship & fish & his father
with a force strong enough to leave nothing but a mountain
of bones & wooden beams hanging like stalactites from the sky.
This is the dream he dreamt each day.

This is the closest he ever came to telling his father the truth.

iii As a young man living in an old man's body
the young old man bends with the weight of a tree in winter,
too weak to even crush the snow.
*But for a dead man
earth & sand are clean water, the poet poets.*

& so he was drinking when the third trumpet split
the sky, spat out a star as if to regurgitate

the meal it could no longer hold.
The worm inside him the only living thing.

iv As a child I poked a hole in a piece of paper
& held it to the ground & watched the sun recreate itself
before my eyes.
The eclipse came minutes later.
The boy & I cheering loudly as if for the home team.
We muffled the sound of the fourth trumpet,
sun-shattered
moon-shattered
& the stars
light snuffed out like a match.

The eyes of that boy next to me lit up like forest fire.
The sky is trying to tell us something, he said,
& I imagined the softness of his curly hair
the scent of it under my nose as he looked for the crescent moon.
The blond on his neck like velvet.

We were a perfect, incendiary match.

v Perhaps it will be like this.
There will be the sound of a herald announcing something grand—
a summer sale in winter
a cure for the immedicable
the birth of yet another twin or savior
& the trumpet will sing a victory song
(only it won't be a victory)
& the sky will send forth a key
& it will open the earth like a crypt
& it will open the earth like a furnace
& it will open the earth like a giant bee hive
& our savior, there, planning the sting.

vi Reading Amichai I ask, *Is all this sorrow?*
So much land taken up to bury our dead.
So much love wasted.
Love, both problem & solution.
Cause & effect.

In this graveyard, the bodies below my feet call out
& I hear the trumpet & see the fire,
smoke & sulfur of their words leaking out
steam-like & plague-ridden.

Yes, this is sorrow,
this awful naming of things.

vii They call this Memorial Day.
A child walks among streets strewn with litter
carrying a lily for the dead.
Sunrise after the last day of battle.

We are supposed to rejoice in this.
We are supposed to welcome our new home,
relish the rewards of servanthood,
remember our history
not as an open wound
but as a healed scar.

We are supposed to remember that underneath our broken flesh
some great joy is hiding.