

DEATH AWAKENS US

Norma Alarcón

Your death awakens us to migrancy.

Time, undisciplined, takes flight—moving sideways round, wild with infant pleasures, maneuvering into freeways ushering reliability. The pronouns and the verbs catapult disorder as we explode unmannered sentiments./ Will they return with the end of History? Resituate themselves among us who with nuclear fervor declare there is no problem we cannot solve. We advertise with electronic frenzy the dissolution of all ghosts who some believe clutch neurons where we cut and cut release./ Your death awakens us to poses photographed. The legacy of distanced family. Each pose a firework unfettered. It is time to believe that every breath was a gift for us who mourn. Time to bracket the abuse, betrayals, and rancors of obsessive passions./ There's time enough for picking bones as we live on to wait our turn. Childish as we are, we refuse./

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Don't forget the poor, says a cousin at the wake. Irascible longing shows missing teeth. Our forgiveness is the true gift wrested from your future that we offer now at the price of unforgetting. Ironies protect us from the uppercuts of unrequitedness. Looped tempers of our time, we wear them to the wake. They save us from compulsions to strike our heads against funereal walls./ Reclamations reweave the listenings of histories. We have no capital to venture, no cash for burial sites in gardens of remembrance—renters is all we are. Particles and waves tint out ironies and stock portfolios, as we map knowledges

in new age monasteries./ We lift our gaze to sobriety. A tangent line of flight shines through./

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Death awakens us in your own bed where your fluids were released with gasps. Miscalculations envelop you, in solitudes undreamed. If respect was all we ever had for giving, our hands overflow with presents unspoken./ Death awakens us to lacerating polaroids, torments of unforgiveness sewing our shroud long before our breath is taken. Can we dissolve the “un”? Can we embrace the bliss? Will we notice its arrival as other fellow mourners speak of Broadway, THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, long ticket lines, and missing luggage?/ Life of leisure’s recompense, your consort’s margin now and then. You were neither entrepreneur nor small-time vendor. In times of little ceremonies, a good suit and tie dignified.

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The world moved around us. Inversions were not in our vocabulary, just the hope of treasure chests, diamond rings, and brand new cars. You knew the roads to take you away and bring you back. Depending on the hour of your drunken vigil we heard rage or sorrow calling our attention to the sagging flesh./ Deskinned across the generations, insomniacs all, we assess our laundry list of wounds. Cherished by strangers and one son, we observe decorum and feed the bite of forgetting./

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Death awakens us to our divisive truths and your Rolex Christmas, your self-granted love round the wrist. Passing it around as if sipping from one cup, we recognize your migrancy, we recognize your hallucination to be a son of something. Unrecruited narratives unroll, presenting us like infants sulking and

we hustle to retrieve memorials from our arsenal./

Why did we ever think you promised more?/

II

We walk up to the coffin to see you one last time. Just once more.

Unembalmed across a sheet of glass, your head reposes. It is your face. The shrunk hands protect your belly. Honored member of the Lion's Club, the pin graces the lapel. The cross is gone./ The void releases us to freefall and a thousand parachutes are called to witness. Unforgetting among membranes we chase you through the stories told by others. Lick by lick we cut you up—a webbing drawn upon your forehead. Your back a book folding at the spine and our arms around ground zero./

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All promises disclose emptiness and on the street ahead sutures lie in wait to bridge the chasms. How do you expel the whistle that saturates the heart? The invasion mobilizes and solace flees our gravity like secrets strung across an alphabet of dust./ The fissures swallow up beginnings except the recollection of a first embrace. The debris of reverie spreads out among the tissues. We want to tell a story of pure moments, and the image of a face loosened by drink demanding entry propels a drop of the esophagus. Missed meetings and broken glass litter the path of reconciliation. With hand extended our feet shred./

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Your consort taught us to believe that sand is angel dust. As the wind lifts we pretend we are touched by satin wings. We fell into always with the mesmerism

of rainbows. You drank./ We made believe that we had mastery of our lives. It was a bet. We called for a red seven against the asphalt sky expecting the clarity of winning. Virtues wrought disjointed, imprisoned you and brought you falling home./ Speeding through the mirror of your eyes, track disconnections tumbled by. Your boiling cells draw out will-be's with the authority of fathers. Our tongues are at a loss, fish flaps out of water, seeking letters to sentence our bond./

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Imaging the slide of dreams where memory shadows the filaments of longing, we did not know you were just an ordinary guy. Charm masquerades as wisdom and purity aging war against us. You had a christian claim upon us./ Your breath itself turned to choking collars. We incinerate your fatherhood and call out your homeless name, a skin wrapping up the bones. You hyperventilate through the incisors at dawn as the edge of last night's high recedes into the crypt again. Picnics on Sunday at the park showering atonement./

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You promised us a home and had no skin to wrap us with. The fullness of unforgetting clings to our scraped bones. Can we want again what we have never tasted? We go on shopping sprees, now and then pick up a kiss on urban streets and darkened theaters./ Every decade we sliced off a bit of fatherly flesh and you drank./ Johnny Walker whispers hailed Sputniks without bomb shelters./ You waited so long to make us remember all at once. The offer of recollection taunts us, like cornered animals we seek oblivion's galaxy, but you have moved in through the tips of our fingers as we caressed the glass over your confined face./

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NORMA ALARCÓN

Credit cards were foreign languages. Our only claim to coins was proper documents. Who was superfluous? The men who let you in, or you? There were times when we ate ourselves from the inside out, chewing on our jaws. We were unleashed by lacerations, one day at a time./ We feared your breath and your returns. Children of a make-up artist and an alcoholic, who paid for consuming passions on delivery. Endless rounds of fat, sex, sugar, liquor, and cocaine medicated our days. There is nothing to keep and nothing to let go, but unforgetting, our legacy./

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Upon first breath and first embrace you worked your way under our skin and never took us in. There is no home, you said. There is only migrancy. How else do you find out you are no one?/ Every night we hoped to see the shattering smile. How can we destroy such an invasion? Our lives were mortgaged to your smile and joy. We surrendered until night quieted the cells, darkness veiled the screen of thought, and sleep cleansed us for another round./

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Protecting your vision from the glaring light you wore sunglasses. Sliding across the green metallic surface we spoke to ourselves more perfectly than ever, every phoneme a gnaw of disappointment. We follow the curve of your lips as you speak./ We cling to biological mother tongues as if they could deliver us the grammar to route intrusions that turn us outside in. The motor of a power saw spins an aura of safety, and there's respite from addictions. The butterfly lands where the thumbnail disappears into the flesh. We travel home on the crescendo./

Why did we ever think you promised more?/

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The lyricism of drinking songs indulged you. As long as there were gleaming motors in the horizon you moved on from job to job, learning, learning. Looking upon your silenced face and hands, we feel at peace with unforgetting./ We look into the grave deepened by each decade. Survivors who had promised to meet you at century's ends offer carnations./ We were an unfulfilling presence. Tomorrow would be different. Each would take to tasks of washing shirts, ironing dresses, wrestling breakfast clutter, and goodbyes. Each of us delivered to our daily round of deliria unshared, untimely as your death./

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The poesy obsolete, long deferred, has seized our day and waiting was an art your consort taught us as we crawled. Her unperfumed dread permeated all our rooms. We listened for the scratching keys, by turn on turn. Nights spreading one upon another, we heard her say, he arrived./ A black curtain descended to protect us from their heaving scripts—the loosening of all bindings, screams, and accusations. The terrors of the night unending unless you slept, unless you had her blind, unless we shivered up our own release./

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Drawn upon our nerves, the body will not let go of cobwebs even as we rearrange our alphabets. No tinker toy, time controls us and refuses its dismissal, “I am not a language. I am a registrar, a punk, and a dancer. Your relentless stalker and lover. Upon first breath you drew me in, and I will hold you.”/ We clutch our homelessness and yet we say take us with you as if you were not already dead. We rant, return to us a time unburdened by slurred turbulence. We rant, return time itself to us as you slam the door and dig for gravity./

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NORMA ALARCÓN

Verbiage is all we are to you who died long before embalmment was denied to cut the cost of burial. Each to each we clutch our supplement rather than become engorged by the weight of our daily outlay like so many down payments on a future that will render us obsolete./ Upon marriage your obsolescence threatened you, a spider bite swelling day by day. We say you swallow up the stars, as if forever was a possibility. A wedding photo reveals a face we never saw again. We would have never recognized you if that were all we had./

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Your consort's daily bliss of gaze upon the clouds after she sent you off to cycled management of bills is returned to us with a bit of added flesh, a bit of color in her hair, and a new face on the horizon to ward off microseconds. She will outlive you and learn to say, "solitude is mean counselor."/ Following your scent we took to streets, not knowing we would come to know your doubles./

What ever made us think you promised more?