



A QUARANTINED LENT

I IN THE BEGINNING

lent – i don't know what it is exactly though i grew up catholic. i think it is the period when christ is dead before he is risen, a space of reflection and abstinence though i have never given anything up for it. people give up pleasures like soda and chocolate. meat on fridays. i recently learned about ramadan. imagine not drinking or eating from sun up to sun down. jesus fasted in the desert for forty days and nights. cuaresma.

quarantine – enforced isolation in order to not spread disease. not martial law, yet. and this one will be televised. the plague of justinian in 541 ce during the byzantine empire killed 30 to 50 million people, about half the world's population. 800 years later the black death arrived in europe and 200 million in 4 years died. the term comes from this time period when people starting thinking maybe proximity was part of the problem and started keeping sailors in isolation for 40 days. cuarenta.

lent – i just googled it. christ is not dead, but tempted by the devil for 40 days in the desert. once upon a time devotees did fast all day and eat only a simple vegetarian meal in the evening. you can still feast twice a day outside of the sun's presence during ramadan. in both though foregoing physical pleasure forces you to focus on your spiritual state.

quarantine – how life creates new words, the language of living in constant flux and the rules by which i can connect tongue, palate, brain or keyboard, fingertips, brain – all those guttural noises and squiggly lines – now include six feet of separation. when the walls of our houses and the screens of our devices become our pages, what do we do? do we wish they were padded, or are we glad we're home? are you safe, or trapped? do you feel returned to some womb, or are you screaming to get out?

lent – a time of preparation for baptism and penance for sinners. is this pandemic an act of god against the sins of humanity? is it nature recoiling in rage at our gluttony and slovenly ways? is it the toppling over of a capitalist ponzi scheme? i wonder how the buddhist see this. there are pictures of wildlife returning to spaces emptied by humans.

quarantine – my friend says she is trying to keep her agoraphobia at bay. i say i am trying to remind myself that this is not my real life, that i am not going to be allowed to live slowly, that i will need to put on make-up monday morning and face the camera and smile.

II IS NOW

quarantine – i'm doing away with capitalization. and i'm going to spell amerikkka the way it should be spelled. i won't go all finnegan's wake on you though. i was never convinced feigning schizophrenia counted as art, all these privileged white people trying to decipher some privileged white man's ramblings to his daughter or from his daughter. sometimes the things that make me white surprise me. james joyce. shepard's pie.

lent – as a young teenager i believed i was going to hell because i could not keep the fourth commandment. in the same way some animals feel barometric pressure in their bones before natural disasters, i knew there was something rotten in denmark. confession could not help me either. transgressions are only forgiven if they are repented and i was not sorry. though i could easily dismiss salvation, it would take me another two decades to deconstruct sin.

quarantine – some estimate that 90% of the indigenous population of the western hemisphere died of diseases brought by the europeans when they came to the americas. some call this the american plague of the

16th century. some call it genocide.

lent – the catholic priest who gave the first televised mass during the quarantine died. i didn't know who he was and i didn't watch the mass. years ago, i remember reading about a couple honeymooning at a tropical location who were washed away by a tremendous wave as they walked hand in hand on the beach at sunset. i would like to catalog all the beautiful deaths that happen naturally and call it poetry.

III AND FOREVER SHALL BE

quarantine – my mother if she were still alive would not understand what was happening. she lived alone in the house i grew up in, isolated by physical pain and memory loss. our frequent visits retaining less significance than the pounding feet of my children in the upstairs bedroom which caused her to ask, what the hell are the boys doing upstairs? her boys rambunctious teenagers always.

lent – we've become numb, our emotions as glazed as our eyes. makeshift morgues in the streets in the countries that have the resources to build them. in the ones that don't, the corpses lay in the streets. for most of us, though, we are still experiencing this moment in history through rose colored lenses meant to keep the blue glare of our screens from damaging our eyes.

quarantine – civilization is on the brink of collapse. no jobs, no money, long lines of desperation. another depression, more severe than even the great depression. we are safer resuming our old lives than trying to build a new one they say. which is what abusive partners say. your life would be worse without me than with me.

lent – fasting purges the body of toxins and damaged cells. it decreases inflammation. eating aligned with the circadian rhythm boosts overall health. like mother used to say, eating at night causes nightmares. obesity, a product of a capitalist system that depletes food of nutrients and people of meaning, appears to be a factor in the fatality of the virus. the body needs to rest.

quarantine – the entire world shut down. it was agreed that war was non-essential. though some countries and states are squabbling over medical resources, many are sharing medical personnel and equipment. only the wall street people are looting the coffers. we ordinary people are working to feed one another, to educate the children, to keep the hospitals running, to keep the roof over our heads and the lights on.

lent – in the ideal world where all our imperfections are benign and all our intentions are realized, there are forty entries, each testimony to wisdom and creativity, profound reflection and renewed spiritual commitment, each witness to forty days in the desert, temptation defeated. we exit better than before, stronger than before, more united to god and one another than before.

—Yon Hui Bell

BIO

Yon Hui Bell, a local educator, activist & writer, believes the personal is political & true change comes from careful examination of that interplay. Mother of 3, she is committed to a world that takes care of all its children so they grow to be healthy adults and mindful citizens. A Quarantined Lent first appeared in SAC's Multicultural Conference Journal.

