Poems from "Sentence"

Mark Anthony Cayanan
I hope to get by without knowing what we don’t
love: here is everything not clanging inside
our cupped hands: wife with her evening cries
children red from the sirens, a circle of conclusions told
to quiet down, a few coins to the side of the statistic
The dog-air roaming through tenements is a man
who builds his house in yours & leaves the key in
the knob The time he held his answer to your neck
he calls a joke What is this hollow that gleams in our eyelids
& worries skin off our lips? Whose heft catches
in my throat There’s a name outgrows the dots
on the map, shrouds with tarp the AM radio, & makes
stand on hind legs the stupid in me Brow to jaw, his face
gives mine meaning: every day I rehearse its
certainty, my love for his
in the ampules I keep as close as my liver Above all he loves
his might when in my veins slides his light & intercedes
We claim the space where light falls least, we wait
   for our conviction to match the hyperbole, the blessed
lie that thrashes in its cage of never-again, quiets down
   as it knows it’s alone, barks when it hungers
—don’t we understand it needs to be fed
   we who push you away every last minute, mouthing
we didn’t think this through, it hurts too much
   when all we maybe want is for you to be enraged, gift us

with the harm we’ve convinced ourselves we’re owed
   distilling more darkness out of darkness, out of
turning away with the hope of being rewarded for it
   out of not so much resentment or even sacrifice
     but something from you without a name & therefore
we’re irredeemable: don’t we deserve this affliction

the kind we’ve turned to
   for comfort & on days when there’s nothing else
but the noise we make & don’t hear enough of, pleasure?
What about the prayers we hold for no reason, prayers that when pressed against your ear recall the impassive traffic of the ocean What about the hero’s will that falls into the plot, his flight an ending you’ve hot-glued onto his back What about the stranger, his blood running true into the gutter, its nest of cellophane What about his wife with the blisters that keep leaking milk What about the man who demands you swallow his anger, what about his smirk once you do What about despair & how it glitters the street, & what about the pictures that fulfill your screen, their baggage of words & thrown-to wrath What about the visionary’s face of redemption, how does it hollow the way he stabs his resolve into ripe air, how does it trouble this news, what in it must you preserve when it’s not from your life Must this day be what cracks off my face What about, should it please you: revolution

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