

At The Corner of 20th and Bridges

By Phoebe Kate Foster

In this low slung
sad slouch of housing,
the shades are always
drawn and the blinds
shut tight to thwart the sun's
untoward attempts to breach
broken, jaundiced panes
with light. The bricks
fighting to hold these heaps
together bear scars and deep
wounds, as if from bullets
in a battle the news
doesn't bother to report.
The slots on the mailboxes
have no names: there's
no good news expected,
no deliveries welcome here.

What are the stories of these souls
with forsaken identities, forgotten
and festering in dark foxholes
behind flimsy barricades of
cracked plastic and filthy cloth?

The occupants may be
silent, but the bricks
cry out.

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(what we choose to keep, what we choose to lose)

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there was something bad
about the sky that day
as it loomed over the city
like the un-scoured lid
of a dirty pan. it pressed down
on me as I walked (to where?
from where?) along a street
for some reason i should
not have been on.

(something's happened)
because i should
be in class, not
wandering lost,
heart in the gutter,
eyes toward the sky,
snow in my hair,
soaked to the skin,
not knowing
how I got there
with no recollected
beginning,
no foreseeable
end.

and now
here it is again
outside the room
where I find myself
today: that same
unloving, unyielding sky
pushing on window panes
instead of my eyes,
the same sense of unnamable bad
(what has slipped my mind
this time? what don't
i want to know?)

it doesn't matter
in the end, because

(like before)
i will too soon
remember this,
then forget it
again.

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RSVP Not Necessary

By Phoebe Kate Foster

It's funny,
she thought,
how birthdays
change.
Like everything else,
they can't
be trusted.

When she was a kid,
they were full of wonder.
Would there be cowboys or clowns,
carousels or pony rides or
a man with magic in his hat
and hands?

When she was older,
each had a special meaning:
now I'm a teenager,
now I'm Sweet Sixteen,
now I can buy smokes,
now I can order a drink,
now I can vote.

For awhile, they were wild cards
randomly pulled from a crazy deck.
She didn't know how they'd go or
who she'd be with or where she'd be
for the celebration of her birth.
They were a surprise package
oddly shaped and haphazardly,
but invitingly, wrapped
in mystery.

Then, for a long time,
birthdays became like pages
in a familiar book:
the same bouquet of flowers,
the same bistro for dinner,
the same face across the table
wishing her many more
and presenting another tasteful token
in an impeccably and suitably

impressive box. And though
it did lack a certain
Je ne sais qua, there was
a mesmerizing charm about
reassuring and utterly
meaningless rites
in the safe asylum
of the securely humdrum.

It's different now.
Birthdays are like leaves
from a forlorn, winter-fated,
cold-clad tree, falling fast
outside the window of her life,
flying past her eyes:
so few left,
all alike and
one of them—
surprise!—
will be the last.

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