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Condemned to Serenity What Will I Make of It

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Laurie Richie

This is the era destined to the intermittence of a language unburdened of words and dispossessed, the silent halt of that to which without obligation one must nonetheless answer. (Blanchot from The Writing of the Disaster)

~

Fifty-seven years ago the wind wove
its metallic threaded copy-right tapestry
around my newborn skin.

Do you believe in fate?

In youth, beauty-marks were the trademark
constellations, the omens we traced and counted
on summer afternoons, like Scrooges computing
our booty we were a small tribe of little girls still
with perfect petalled pudendum under clean white
cotton undies studying with scrutiny the map
of our destinies revealed by the moles on shoulders
and arms while the sun, that golden schoolmarm,
kept watch as if paid to keep us from harm, we were
sequestered in the tranquility of our designated suburban block.

The wind and sun made its permanent mark:

a welt of auspiciousness on my heart, a scarred aorta
seen on any x-ray, would prove my destiny: condemned
to serenity what will I make of it as the world falls apart,
as birds sing in a noisy chorus in my yard as once again,
I'm cloistered safe now in a summer of middle-age and
affluence—is it a prison or a song to be shared with the
aching world, the way our little-girl melodies once
unknowingly rose up over the top of our neighborhood
and floated to the Detroit slums, to the cemeteries
of all our Jews and rested in the air, wafted over
limp lynched black bodies hanging from moss-shrouded
trees and bridges somewhere in the South, spun round
the millions of emaciated corpses being hauled away in China
to hide Mao's colossal failure as a farmer, curled over
mountains to the victims of Stalin's terror and we didn't
have a clue our voices would carry because
we were unaware air could not be partitioned
or that voices don't fade but hang forever
in space; didn't know the Big-Bang roar

was still ringing all around us in microwave
reverberations like some rescuer's echoing
call, but were clueless as any kid raised-up post-war
and spoon-fed the fables of inherent freedom and,
freckles and all, we knew to fight against war—
then decades later I find myself again wed
to serenity. And now what will I make of it in this
tumultuous world but to believe these lyrics
will rise high enough to sustain us all.