



Original Poetry by SarahMae and Xinef Afriam



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By The Umbrella Stage Company**

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Movement 1

Early spring or late winter
daffodil and tulip bulbs underground
under-snow, pulsing a promise of spring

if only we still believed in oracles
who would surely say, these flowers
were destined for funerals and graves.

My friend Miriam tells me
that she and her boyfriend
are mid-breakup when news of the pandemic breaks.
It's too much, too uncertain to add a breakup
to the mix, so they stay together
for three more weeks

until we all realize whoever we are with
will be the only people we see,
well past when the flowers bloom,

or that we will run out of toilet paper
and whoever we live with has to be okay
with that. But at first, she reminds me,
we think it will only last a month,
maybe three.

We don't know yet that we will need to hold
so much upheaval in our arms and rock it
like a terrible roaring baby
we have created, gestated, birthed, and regretted.

We don't see that we will have to learn
how to wear loss like a second skin: my job,
my home, my mother, my grandmother, my step-
father, my sister, my friend, my cousin, my sense of self
built on all of these.

Would we have believed an oracle
who prophesied us with our faces masked
storming the streets for our lives?
Or the body bags, the headstones, urns
and engravings? The mob of little dashes

in between life events, those two
certainties, those known quantities: being born
and death?

Would we have listened
as that oracle told us our neighbors
would be children in cages
with no one to feel their hot forehead
with one hand, and spoon soup
into their mouths with the other?

Or saw the hospitals full to bursting,
so many people living our greatest collective fear: dying alone.

Sweet words of friendship and belonging
turned cold in our mouth
and the grief heavy in our lungs
like trees hung with snow

There are no maps but there are myths
of times like this

Movement 2

Wake up, wake up, wake up
I say to every sidewalk turned gurney then grave
Wake up and say your own name
So we can stop begging people to
Say it when they don't even know it
Don't even, won't even learn to pronounce it
Say it yourself before it ends up in stone
Or gold plated on an urn

Wake up wake up wake up
Your mother needs to hear your voice
Do not be relegated to the last voicemail you left
Your life shall not end in beep
Please - cling to the life still left in your lungs
Say your name, say your name, say your own damn name
Give us no reason to march
Backs arched
along the streets you once walked,
The street on which you were shot
Wake up because they win in our lives as they do in our dreams
They are the reason our nightmares are filled with ineffable screams
No—don't close your eyes
This is not the place where you lie
Wake up—please—wake up—we need to see you rise
Rise like the tide—be wide—take up space—be alive

The opposite of live is not die
It is to be forgotten
Or your name left a lie
They say there are two deaths
One for the body
And one for the mind

Whoever remembers you last
Holds the weight of your past
And through remembrance—your existence—
But what if they're indifferent?
So then not only can we die twice—we can be killed twice
So we say your name so that no one can get away with this

Wake up, wake up, wake up
Aren't you tired of hiding? Of sleeping? Of lying?
Aren't you tired of being tired?
Tired of running from the fire
This heat will not get you through the winter
Whether in gun barrels, torch tips, or crossed lawns,
I wish to see you wake up, raise arms, stretch and yawn
But I know this civil unrest has made us all so tired

So fine—you rest and I'll rise
Let my lifted voice sing to you in lullabies
Let each foot that patters in stride
With the life that matters
Be the echo to the heartbeat that faintly still speaks
If you must bleed—let our boiling blood pump through your veins
Let our screams that proclaim your name remain
The refrain:
Wake up, wake up, wake up
No, not you—you rest now.

Wake up all of you who still have hearts left to beat
Be the drums that send earthquakes through the streets
Wake up, wake up, wake up
For they kill us while we sleep
And walk, and drive, and buy, and sell, and call, and—hell,
they kill us because we have the audacity to breathe
Alongside the free

Because do not lie—you can see still the tan lines of our chains
And like a ghost limb that is felt beyond amputation
We feel the iron weight of a slave-built nation
One where you still feel safer when we're incarcerated or incapacitated,
Wake up to yourself,
smell the drunkenness
Of your own roses
Because you built the bed we lie on
You cast the bullets from a shackle's iron

Wake up and stay awoken
You have been chosen to be a heart that stays open
You cannot turn off the television when this reality is our vision
But it is only your mission

To meet this life with revision
So wake up—be with me
If you see me on the street, don't leave
Walk me home
Bring me to bed, tuck me in
Let the civilly unrested sleep
As an ally—this is your unrest to keep,
So wake up, wake up, wake up

Movement 3

Our dog does not know why
he cannot play with his doggie friends
or why there is a big sign at the dog park gate
that says CLOSED, or what it means

He doesn't know why we are home
When we used to be gone for long hours, doesn't know
where we went or why it stopped

his best friend is a giant stuffed dog named Carmichael
who wears pajamas just like his humans do now,
all our nice clean smelling clothes stacked
high in drawers.

But he knows we need him
to comfort us more than ever and can sense
the anxiety in our throats
as we call him away from the neighbor's dog.
He knows that when he needs food we will brave
the outside world to go retrieve it, and treats too,
and toys, and

he doesn't even mind the masks that make us look
different, half hidden, because to him we smell the same
and that's all that matters. He forces us outside
when we get too still, and gets us in the car
for scenic drives so he can fall asleep at the wheel.

He begs to be picked up and held like a cat
when we cry or get worried or sad
and falls asleep in the square of sunlight
from the window that otherwise
feels dark. The dog is patient,

he knows how to pause, to pay attention,
to shift perspective. He knows how to flip
onto his back for a new outlook and belly rubs,
and in doing so teaches us how to meet a world
that has turned upsidedown.

Who centers us when the world is in crisis?
This deer-legged, dainty footed, sharp toothed
mutt who weighs less than twenty pounds
and causes such a ruckus when we try to groom
him that Ruckus becomes
his middle name. He grounds us in the act of loving.

We have each other, too, our friends
in little moving boxes on our screens, our family's
disembodied voices carried through invisible
signals in the air to our ear. We have the verb "Zoom"
taking on a new meaning, all of us zooming
room to room, building backdrops
and wall-scapes and perfect angles
with angelic lighting

but there he is through it all,
sighing deeply, dreaming with his tongue out,
at peace in the eye of the storm.

Movement 4

SM: We have arrived here with questions.

Xi: What now? What next?

SM: After the storm, the revolution, the lightning, the sleep,
what bulbs, what seeds will survive?
And what will we plant new, what
perennials will we tend year after year?

Xi: Which song sings the loudest
that once went unheard, now unearthed
through this process of rebirth?

SM: Have we all become Oracles, seeing
what we used to ignore?
Was our world working for us before?
And who of us was it working for?

Xi: Will we only have our vigils left, our light
lasting through the night? Our loss, hungry
for a place to rest? Our bodies drained
like wilted flowers?

SM: Or will we rise up in a mighty chorus
like new buds bursting toward sun,
weaving a new mythos
of revelation, reemergence and remembrance?

Xi: Can we learn to love like a mountain stands?

SM: Can we learn to live like a river moves?

Xi: Can we feel joy like tree tops dancing in wind?

SM: Like new green leaves, can we begin again?