

Shanna Dodd; #1 of 3

A Day at the Office

He came once more to the old white door.

The light like an aura gray and milky.

I could see him through the panes of aged glass.

Wavering and surreal. Fresh lines carved

into the mask of his face

from the flood of these last days.

Days!

Days since last I'd seen him. Mask in hand,

He took a deep breath and fumbled the strings over his ears,

pressed the metal to the wide bridge of his nose until

all I could see were his eyes.

Cast downward,

counting the cracks in the concrete steps. He raised his face slowly.

His eyes were startling and deep-set. Dark pools

of sorrow, the whites yellowed and red-streaked.

He seemed almost luminous. His grasp tenuous. And yet

anchored, held by bags of grief like sand, roped to his chest.

Gravity had become superfluous.

He stepped up, staggering ever so slightly, from the weight

and opened the door.

I said, "Have a seat. You know the routine better than I do

now, I think."

He nodded and his cheeks stretched the mask upward in an awkward smile. He eased,

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disjointed, into the chair.

The quiet settled round us like ghosts whispering.

His father caught it first, he told me. Died within days.

His mother followed close behind. They'd been married
all their lives.

His baby brother fought it, held on for weeks,
till finally letting go.

"You know they're all alone up there?"

All he could do, he said, was sit at home
and hold his phone.

Watch the sun rise, watch it chase shadows, watch it set.

Imagine the cold blue rooms where his family lay.

The hiss of the machines
breathing.

Hoping, praying, that someone held their hand.

The familiar papers rattled as I placed them on the desk before him.

Last of the forms of ending

I wondered as he scratched his name on the line
who is left to sign their name for him.

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It was the year of our Lord two thousand and twenty

Graves sprung up, another and another

Fresh and flowerless

They lay unmarked and unmourned by those that would have loved them,

could have loved them,

while I held my place behind the old white door

waiting.