



Rob Cook

INAUGURAL POEM FOR NO ONE

We were a people once.
We had our own houses once,
and towns that were safe,
 and a means of ignoring the gluttonous dark,
and we had hope
 that the air would not devour us
the way our sinkholes
 and our fake medicines
 and our own schools devoured
 each thing our interior leaders instructed us to love.

We saw the great bland blocks of fleet-like store aisles
hulking closer and closer until they were almost inside of us
and another living tree was eliminated,
 and another fact-checked vegetable farm was eliminated,
 and another shop that sold freshly baked sunrises was eliminated.

We heard the dashboard veterans
of vinyl radio Vietnams promising a return
to the greatness of childhood.
We heard childhood was a great place,
the greatest of all places, but it was kept from us,
it was the thing our owners
(though we heard they felt tenderness toward something once)
took irreparably away from us.

And what the young ones have heard about
and dismissed for its fatal romanticism
and flaws of imagination
is indeed a fact:
We had autumns in which the leaves changed
 and fell and fed the soil
and stopped the earth from wandering,
and the red and yellowing ghosts
were like shirts
 the wind might have worn
when disturbing our post-sylvan orbit,
 but then we lost those autumns

and the days of windows
that had their own deer inside them
and every man went looking for those autumns
by attacking the summer-dark tribes to the east.

We did not get the stars right.
We met a wrong teacher once
and he set us on a wrong path.
We aimed for the star systems inside the earth.
Grubs and roots and worms and rocks
and ancient farms that look like the laws
and freedoms
that were never really here.

We were a people once.
We had certain places in our minds
that belonged to us,
and we had toes, and our own eyesight, sometimes,
and our own hearing, sometimes,
and arms and names and places to go.

We were a people once and then we fell into a non-sleep
after the factory-farmed families ran away
and the maxed-out colleges ran away
and the vitamin-fearing hospitals ran away
and the cities, available by subscription only, ran away
and the whole country roamed and fell
into the click-depths of the walking dead digital screens.
Now we can witness the fled malls and doctor's offices waving their arms
from the well-connected shallows of the sea.
And no, we will not correct the way we tell this.

We were a people once
and each night we carried the country
back to our homes
and made sure it had plates and plates of dinner to eat
and wells of water to drink
and a newly unfolded bed with hopes and dreams deep enough
to carry its cargo to the next day
that was always there, waiting,
an obedient non-creature,
ready, again, to colonize the galaxies of every living and almost living thing.

