

At Sea, By Atara Vogelstein, age 27

Floating
as a virus
floats
Earth overturned
its deadly roots
reaching out
in air thin
enough to break
turning lovers
into strangers
and strangers
into ghosts

scientists dig in sand
to reach China
arms thrusting through
the grainy weight
clawing fingertips
dry eyes
hands absent of triumph
as fists clench
fighting to break through
the blind comfort of whiteness
the sand gives shelter
housing ships of
enslaved people floating
forcing feet to touch ground
leaping from ships
that originated in England
and battered Africa
and the Caribbean
and the Native Americas
Everywhere sun touches this virus,
Racism
born of human insecurity
and the power hunger of men
taught and served by women
in kitchens and plantations
this virus
has been here
this virus is here

And now
picking up a rock
to toss into Atlantic

fleeing deadly virus
of corona
my privilege
to flee
to turn toward
or turn away
to protect
my white body
and white skin
my family's
white bodies
and white skin
this community
is not protected
from any virus

it has been here
in uglier forms
the government
has masked before
ugly ugly virus
we pretend not to know
what it does
how it invades
how it blocks
barriers masks walls
we pretend
underneath the guise of whiteness
masks covering grimace, smile
this community knows hatred

the virus is in Hitler
the virus is in Trump
the virus is in Swastika graffiti
the virus is in low income communities
the virus is in Rwanda
the virus is in prisons
the virus is in Berlin
the virus is in Johannesburg
the virus is in Vietnam
the virus is in police
the virus is in Alabama
the virus is in Baltimore
the virus is in neglect
the virus is in trauma
the virus is trauma

north south east west
carried by wind
breathed between humans
from bats butchered
from truth buried
from earth decaying
from human folly
2020 is awakening
a Renaissance
a necessary ugliness
baseless hatred
for which God punished
and punishes
earth rebels
humans protest
governments retaliate
families suffer
humans die

alone
many from this virus
have died alone
in hospitals
in houses
in shelters
in fields
on streets
the virus carries fear
and sadness

a virus breaks through cells
disrupts organisms upsets ecosystems
a virus unhinges unleashes
unmanageable anxiety fear
chained to a way of life
takes lives imprisons old cells

a virus
spreads
hurts
lethargy
exhaustion
sickness
all edges of the earth
feel this virus

and here
we feel it
we fear it
we fight it

we cling to loved ones
and run from them
we hide in cells
that do not change
human nature
does not change

it is in nature
where I feel safe
where particles floating
in the atmosphere belong
where streams and mountains
and rivers and dirt
are cleansing
healing
purpose

where love
abounds
within me
in shade
recovering
my senses
my footing
this world
tries to take
from me

I fight for it

my heart open
my body climbs in solitude
fighting to be free of fear
and free of masks
and free of virus
sick of indifference
and injustice
and human pollution
I refuse to tolerate
Climb with me, America! Climb!

restore the earth beneath us
the earth that holds us
the earth that saves us
the earth that buries us

I float through these ages
searching for an anchor
I am anchor
heavy weight defeat
mourning dead and dying
imprisoned by unjust virus

This is the world now
This is no novelty
This is how it's always been

I call on you, see it
even though it's scary
face it with your mask off
6 feet apart or 6 feet under

What are you protecting?

We all die from something
We kill black and brown bodies daily
We suppress and repress and depress
with our hands, our economy, our bodies

how do we recover from mass incarceration?

how do we teach children to love?

how do we learn from our own nature?

to live in community with oneself
is to love one's entire being

to live in community with others
is to embrace difference

threat forces apart
who can remain alive
who rejects the value of others' lives
no blood is redder to any virus

let us redeem ourselves from mass incarceration

let us once again show that Hitler did not win
let us eradicate this virus that lives within us

I run to the mountains for refuge
fleeing to fight, fleeing to feel

because I can
because I will float away
because I refuse

to as others storm streets
because they have to

What is community?

Is it checking in on that neighbor you do not love as yourself?

I become curious,

I drink the salty water

I gather the love outside of me