

F. Jordan Carnice

## Water is All That We Can Remember

Our sleep is confident and long  
in this country, even if the walls  
of our houses feel like embers  
no matter the hour. It is so deep that  
the world could plunge into a quiet  
that will bother the stones and trees—

*What are they dreaming now?*

*What are they thinking?*

Soon, stalks in fields  
will bow in servitude to no one  
and fishes will consider a new ocean  
that they will never find. Each day  
becomes a kind of pulling back,  
either of the soul or of the seed  
that is stuck in sick dirt,  
one that is now questioning  
its commitment to break free.

We will eventually wake up to another  
cycle of surviving, as if we have not  
moved enough from one corner  
to another crumbling corner, as if we  
have not convinced ourselves yet  
that a world that is way too quiet  
is not always a peaceful world.

But prayers are everything in this country  
because regret is our validation that we  
have learned. We continue to pray  
for droughts and plagues to never  
return, for food to fill our plates,  
and for a halt of the eventual ordinariness  
of wildfires, the dwindling of deers,

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the flowerpeckers and the black shamas.  
And in the future, because water  
is all that we can remember the next time  
we wake up, we will ask each other,  
*Have you ever touched a melting ice?*  
We will attempt at an answer  
by examining the wreckage around  
us and say, *this is it.*  
This is it.

Note: An early version of the poem first appeared in *Agwat-Hilom* (National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2021)