

Disrupted: A Lockdown Lyric

by Aimee Cass

I

She ran her hands along the wall. This was a method of locating herself in space. *I am not afraid of the dark. I am not afraid of the dark.* A storm had cut through and flattened the power lines. It left them without electricity and water, squinting into the rigid black. A cupboard in the kitchen was reserved for candles. There was a ritual to it; first her mother lit one central candle, which she and her sister then used to light smaller candles, moving carefully to place them at intersections throughout the house. This was a slow reclamation. *I am not afraid of the dark.* The rooms in which they conducted their lives were plunged into obscurity, the proportions of familiar objects distorted in the erratic flicker of candle flame. This was a corrosive event. *I am not afraid of the dark.*

Something had cut through her, but she did not have the language to name it. A sense of pause, of disruption, as if she was pressed firm against the edge of what she did not know. This was a splintering of faith. *I am not afraid of the dark.* She peered outside and saw, with jittery relief, that the rest of the village was also black and still. The usual hum of electricity--powering refrigerators, neon lights, bug zappers, hot water tanks--had made way for silence. There was a strange intimacy to it. A palpable sense of togetherness hung thick in the air. All routines were halted, petty arguments, household chores, television shows, all interrupted by this breaking of circuitry. It felt as if the entire village was huddled close, waiting, waiting, for the darkness to yield. This was a symphony, disrupted.

I am not afraid of the dark.

II

A redacted poem of 'Sydneyiders divided by Covid lockdown, united in confusion' by Michael McGowan and Elias Visontay, published in The Guardian on 25 June 2021, sourced from the Inner West Libraries collection.

lockdown extended
, as new
uncertainty reside s

that W e
would enter a long

home ing
; compassionate of 1 or
fewer.

The word s
run down the middle
outbreak: confusion.

unclear to live by interpretation.

Speaking on people not "significant" time.

If one must observe, observe the

concern that is confusing, we know This is happening.

scrambling to understand the boundary the

difference a matter of two cut away.

III

If I were to describe the texture of lockdown, I would say it is a viscous liquid, and that the damn stuff is everywhere. Marilynne Robinson wrote that: *light is constant, we just turn over in it*. I feel that I have not been turning over. That each morning I must peel yesterday off me, that old light is accumulating on my body, and it is heavy.

Like most people in lockdown, I go for a lot of walks. They seem to transform the topography of my local environment. It is a shift in emphasis, or perhaps a side effect of chronic understimulation. The way light bends itself around a branch is now a matter of monumental significance. The small beauties have turned sublime. It is for this reason that I consider mapping a route which maximises my exposure to flowers.

Vikram Seth said: *I sometimes seem to myself to wander around the world merely accumulating material for future nostalgias*. If nothing else comes from this, at least we are gathering stories. The privilege behind these statements is not lost on me. This is not forgiveness; it is blind optimism.

My mother's voice--scrambled and reassembled by satellite--erodes me: it begs that I do not get vaccinated. I grieve for the parent that believes their child is blindly choosing to die, rather than choosing to live. This is a heart-breaking distortion. But I am not here to argue over the nuanced subjectivity of truth. I do not apologise.

Lockdown is, in essence, a gaping disruption. Normalcy is subverted, obligations liquified, everything feels to be fundamentally different, yet it still all looks the same. I have been organising a list of my personal disruptions, points of breakage which made way for something new. There is solace to be found in pattern-making. Here is one:

I watched my best friend's daughter pulled from the birthing pool. Her skin was a burning pink, her eyes ghostly and glazed. She was here, but she had not yet arrived. Maybe it was empathy, maybe something else, but we were all there with her, emerging into the moment like we were being pulled out of ourselves. Disruption is a form of inversion. Sometimes it is the most beautiful thing that could happen.

I recently learned the word *tensegrity*. It was coined by Buckminster Fuller as a portmanteau of *tensional* and *integrity*. It has something to do with the structure of things. I take it, wrongly, to refer to strength of character in a high-stress environment. Does your personality wobble when you haven't left your room in five weeks? Work on your tensegrity. Alternatively, construct your own portmanteau.

I feel an alarming sensation of being super-imposed over countless versions myself. As if every moment is occurring at once, and the membranes which separate them are disintegrating. Is this another side effect of closing the pubs? Or perhaps it is that I lack input, and a writer must dissect everything. I apologise, as it makes for quite a mess.

To paraphrase Toni Morrison: *dying may be the meaning of life, and language may be the measure*. In this metaphor, I spill fragmented prose into the gloaming. In this metaphor, I stretch a word to the edge of the nonsensical, and call where it lands the end of the day. We all have our methods of keeping pace. This is mine.