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Fear Wakes

me, startles with a squeeze of my toes at 3 AM,
reminds me of my small frame and growing
weakness. Once, I balanced on one on leg,
the other stretched straight, grasped that foot
with both hands, leg parallel to the ground. I
curled my head to my knee, and held it, held it,
strength mingled with confidence in a body
less than half a century old. Flexible, I could
touch my palms flat at my feet. There lived
another me, taut and toned. In bookstores, I spoke
to crowds about recurrent dreams and nightmares,
taught without fear of seeming foolish, weak.
At 2 AM, rain against the window wakes me.
Which oak tree might fall on the house? What
prowler might know the way in. Who watches?
Small old woman slowed by painful knees
and an ankle with a capricious crick? I'm not
holding yoga poses, not frozen in a false smile,
or wearing a painted face. Flexible invisibility.
No one wants to hurt me. No TV or pricy car
to steal. No rejected lovers in this state to seek
revenge for their lonely, horny state. Too old
to stir incels, too quiet to rouse bulky rednecks.
I lie low, stay inside, and feed another stray.

I Make the Mistake

to look at my nephew's social media posts,
felt my body tighten, my breath stop.
Warnings of forced vaccinations for a virus
he says doesn't exist, declarations that no virus
exists or causes a disease, not HIV or hepatitis
or measles. He says Coronavirus has never been
isolated or its genome mapped, PCR tests a fraud,
case numbers for Covid inflated to make money,
hospitals not nearly full, the pandemic planned.
Wasn't he a liberal journalist? Why does he
repeat the talking points of the far right?
It's hard to wake up on a January Wednesday
with hope for justice and fairness when
we're living in a post-truth era. The president
(How can he be president again?) lies whenever
he speaks, quotes QAnon and 4Chan, presses
the Georgia Secretary of State to commit
election fraud. He's desperate to hold onto
power because he's soon to be indicted, crimes
legion, empathy absent. Those he insulted
and defamed step up to support and defend him.
Pence still looks pensive. At 6 AM, it's dark
in central Virginia. I woke coughing with dry
mouth. My humidifier's on the fritz. But I
have power, water, a thousand entertainments
to distract myself, if only I could be distracted.
I haven't spoken to my nephew since he called
in February 2009 when he phoned late, woke me
with the news that his younger brother had been
arrested for molesting and photographing little
girls, now serving twenty years in a Florida prison.
In my dream, no one in a crowd wears a mask.
We don't need masks! We're Papists!