

On Death Row

The struggle for justice doesn't end with me
Troy Anthony Davis 1968-2011

I. Cell

I hold him in a stone embrace – he's here to die like all the rest. My cold heart holds no sentiment for grizzly souls, the bones that settle on my bench - and, no tenderness for warden, chaplain, deputy. They all scrape through my arteries - steel bars and white walled passageways and cells. The Georgia summers warm this air when sun streams through the cell's high window and particles of dust hang, light in humid glare. The stench those days is sweat not stuff they use to mask latrines. The ones who pass this way whisper, sob and kick their innocence, their protest to my unyielding walls. But this Troy Davis, he's different in that way. Broadcasts follow his appeals, his claim he didn't have a gun that night.

II. Lawyer

He knows we
are fighting for him

In his heart
God, let them win

with their words
and the tv

Words words words
then silence

appeal denied
that's it

no chaplain
no final meal - he fasts.

Just the short walk
to the room. The gurney.

III. Words

*I ask to my family and friends that you all
continue to pray,
that you all continue to forgive.
Continue to fight this fight.*

*For those about to take my life,
my God have mercy
on all of your souls.*

God bless you all,

IV. End

buzz of lights
metal taste
between my tongue and teeth
I lay my body,
rest my head
for the tightening
wrists, ankles, pelvis, chest,
I'm strapped
I breathe
light
faces
the last touch to my earthly skin
the stick
fire
ice.

Shepherd, Shepherd, Where are You?

—Arab Spring, 2011

I.

It was a season cracked open

II.

flowering honeysuckle
full fragrance of saffron,
mint, and thyme

a season of ripe pomegranates
and aubergines, olives,
and figs on shared borders.

III.

The people awakened, rose up,
raged at tyrants
garbed in uniforms and robes.

Gouty, engorged by their plunder
gated and guarded
they fell,

IV.

awash in their own blood.

V.

It was a time
of blinking characters
on my four walled screens.

Hawks perched, vigilant.
Shepherds slept.

VI.

I cocooned under a black sky.

VII.

We are your sheep,

VIII.

spinning,

choking

in our own dust storms,

IX.

a herd without water

or fruits of the pasture

or peace under the stars.

X.

Shepherd, oh shepherd?

XI.

I awaken, as

XII.

on morning thermals

the red-tailed hawk

lifts,

sounds his cry.

The Shepherd's Refrain: It Is Coming

—inspired by Greta Thunberg, United Nations, September 24, 2020

The girl perches,
her sight piercing
parched landscapes,
newly shaped shorelines,

fading islands,
ravaging storms,
scorching sun,
crackling nightfall.

It is a time of crossing
spectral bridges,
navigating
through shadows,

A time
when lesser birds fall
from the shroud,
once air.

Hawks cry.

Convertible

I can't tell you which American beauty it was—
top rolled back—
and it came with my brother in a pressed white T
I'd barely met him but instantly saw
the almond eyes with dark bags
our father called valises.

This ended my visit with our father, his mother, our sister
at their brick house with its front and back porches
its elm trees, shaded cushioned chairs and the hammock
I occupied in my white, brown, and blue
polka dot bikini, sipping the Tom Collins
my father poured for me as I considered
family and the smell of mothballs and Pledge.

My brother in his fine Fruit of the Loom
burst into the house with cheerleader gusto,
gathered me into that car like a kid from school,
generous with smiles and good-guy swagger,
he loaded me in luggage and linen suited formal
for flight in the seventies grinned sidelong at me
as he gunned across the Brooklyn Bridge.

He asked about my favorite subjects *I like English*
Pulling at my collar *poetry and fiction.*
I teach biology he said with a grin.
Kind of him to take me to the airport
—*no problem*—he might have said.
I really liked having a brother that hour that open car
a sibling sudden as the summer breeze.