

2020

Dear Piles of No from All the Usual Suspects

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Recommended Citation

Dougherty, Sean Thomas (2020) "Dear Piles of No from All the Usual Suspects," *Birmingham Poetry Review*. Vol. 47, Article 45.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/bpr/vol47/iss2020/45>

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Dear Piles of No from All the Usual Suspects

And of course, at first, I mean this picture my friend posted on Facebook of piles of rejection letters she had saved in envelopes from back in the days when we mailed out our work and the noes came back on little slips of paper. We tape-collaged them on the walls above our desks and even one friend really did plaster his bathroom, and another friend would push them into little piles of no from all the usual suspects, on his concrete back porch and then drink too much whiskey and turn them into little SS-like bonfires. He'd write a poem in the ashes with his finger that would sit there on his porch for the postman delivering rejection letters to read, until the rain came and washed it away. Perhaps all the true poems should be written to last only until the rains arrive. The rain of No. All the usual suspects, such as our fifth-grade teacher who took the poem the girl wrote, a poem in the dark shape of her father's hand, and said, "Don't be too dramatic, and I asked you to write a poem in the shape of a Christmas tree," or our religious parent who burned our notebook, our friends who laughed, our bosses, our foreman. I think how once I took a taxi ride across the Bronx, passed bodegas and pawnshops, around and under the El, trying to find this tiny Dominican joint to meet my friend Tony, and the Afghani cab driver named Nouman for no exact reason I can recall (maybe I said we were going to a poetry reading) asked me, do you know the poet Hafiz and recited to me first in Urdu and then in English, "Do you know how beautiful you are / when you sit in the shadow of the friend." We were caught in crosstown traffic and the address I had was wrong, we drove up the side of buildings and up fire escapes, to the rooftops where old men raised pigeons and marijuana groves, drove through *mercados* and

stole avocados and drove away, drove over the water and back to his home in Lashkar, passed the burnt-out Mosque and the place he buried his youngest daughter, over the landmine that took his left hand, and his brother. Passed the wreckage burning on the horizon, the plumes of black ash. He told me how the men without uniforms arrived in pickup trucks, came to his village and the piles of bodies, and that it was poetry that taught him all life goes away, all life returns. Here he handed me a picture of his youngest daughter with her hands raised above her head. She was dancing. Take me to the ocean, I said. I want to smell the ocean. We drove across the Grand Concourse, out to Pelham Bay. He parked the cab. He said, after they murdered the village elders, I learned no one ever really dies. There where our dead were piled and buried in ditches, months later when the rains finally arrived, poppies bloomed on the hillsides. They were like lanterns lighting the inside of the earth.