

D.C. al Coda

Siren Hand

I (A)

“Drill Sergeant, can you burn my flag?”

I wave away his smirk and motion, *Give it here.*

The Private pries the Velcro flag from his uniform

fuzzy from wear (fuzzier than his rank),

embroidery tension-frayed from everyday tear.

The sparkstart of a lighter

a flame

a flashpoint—

This is one thing, among us, I say,

but be careful who’s watching:

we wouldn’t want them to get the wrong idea.

It’s one thing, to burn the edges of this patch,

make it good as new,

acceptable for wear.

It’s another to burn it out of boredom.

This is your flag, too. Care for it as you need to.

The questioning refrain:

and when people burn it for protest?

Covered under free speech. All of it:

The right to burn a flag

To kneel with it,

To fly it upside down in distress—

If a protestor feels there’s need for it.

This cloth is voice, and presence, and power.

If not for all, then for whom?

II (A)

It’s 12:49pm. My heart is pounding

the drumroll of another Civil War

in my throat

in hours of/and seconds

in prayer

in refrain

beating like a flagpole on the Capitol steps

and there is no place for this type of wrong:

this spark of a flashpoint,
a flame,
a warning:
*This is one thing, among us,
but be careful who's watching*
some dead flag parades the halls as a living victor.
I wonder if the hands of Clio's clock stopped
if she watched from the hallways of the House,
wonder if her gaze was in glee or horror,
if it was some rebirth of a nation, again.
How many has she midwived?

I(B)

*Private, are you asking because in August
A Black football player kneeled*
(kneeled: as in protest
as in prayer
as in reverence
as in acknowledgement)
*instead of burning it, or putting his hand over his heart,
instead of complying to violence?*
Some considered this the greatest offense, disrespect to our flag—
never like recoloring it black and blue
(as in brutality,
as in bruising from
the finger-deep press to find a pulse
of the Black cadaver).

III

*This cloth is voice, and presence, and power.
If not for all, then for whom?*
Give a name to the distress.
Signal however you can.
Make your grief unmistakable—
your questions, unavoidable.
The sacrifice of symbols is a sacred voice
People will always judge you for it
seek ways to invalidate
it. You. Your life
heart
beating in refrain:

This is your flag, too. Care for it as you need to.

burn

make new,

acceptable .

You have the right.

if there's need for it.

II (B)

I emailed the Architect of the Capitol to ask

If any clocks were broken during the riots.

“None of the historic clocks were damaged on January 6,”

As if Time kept going,

with or without the whole Nation behind it.

D.C. al Coda

The thread from his Flag shrinks from the heat

coiling tightly

blackening into crumbling

rubbing into good-as-new

into January 7th,

into some refrain of a spotless nation

put back as it was supposed to be— no one ever the wiser.