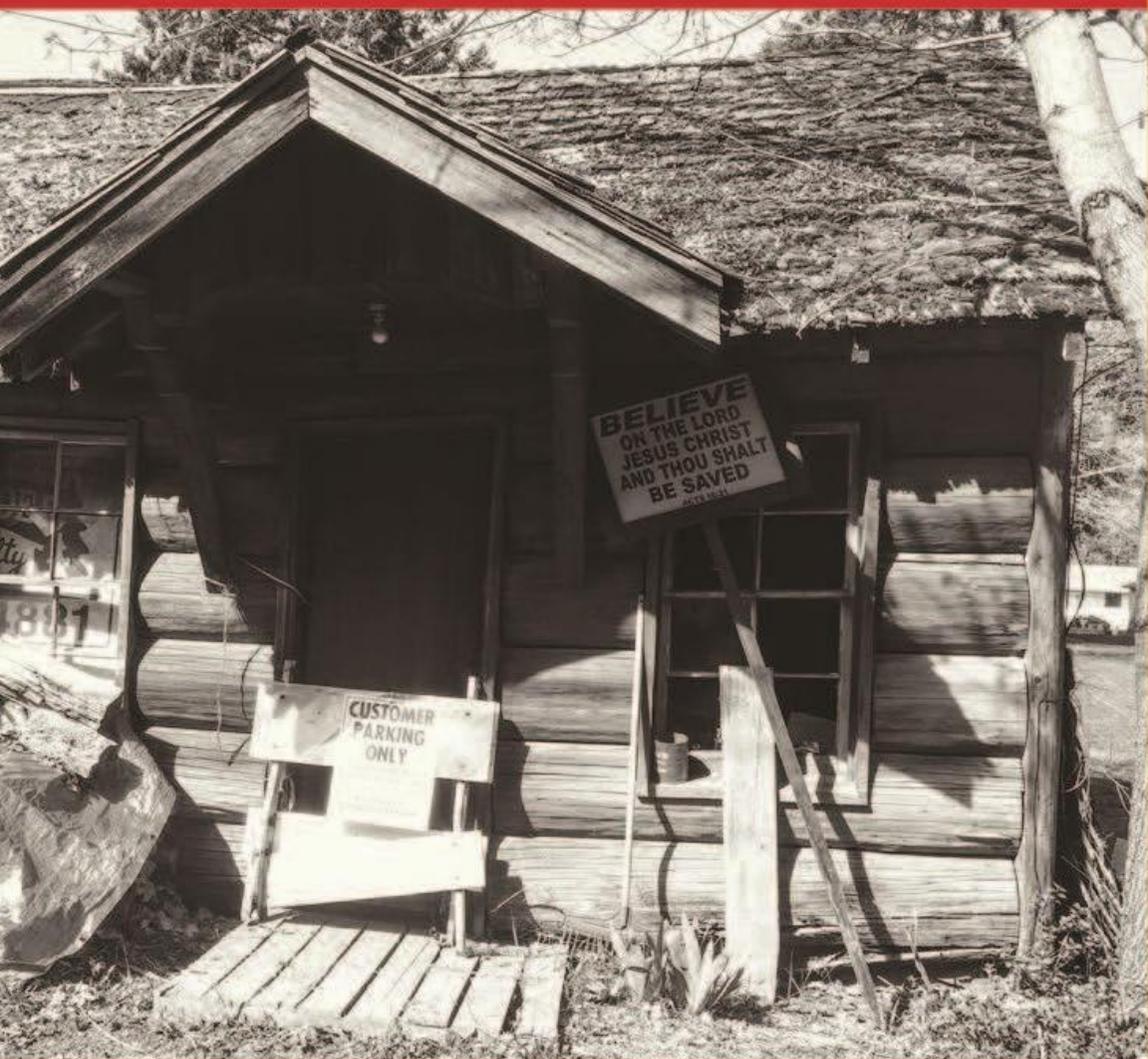


POLITICAL APNEA



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Political Apnea

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Locofo Chaps is dedicated to publishing politically-oriented poetry.

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POLITICAL APNEA

There is nothing
sexy about politics.
It drags on forever, while
I stare at the ceiling.

Just when I think politics
can't continue much longer,
it finishes abruptly,
rolls over on the mattress,

and goes to sleep, then grunts
and snores with tortured gasps.
I try desperately to rest,

while I lie with my ass
in the puddle.

One day I will leave
politics for good,

but for now I am beholden
and need the security.
I roll on the sagging mattress,
twist my pillow against my ears,
clench my jaw
until the noise subsides.

I have no other place to go:
just this uncomfortable bed
with no promise of improvement,

and the morning is years away.

GREAT, AGAIN

Gray regime breakfast
blunt and slow: rain pouring
intermittently, sideways.
As the television drones
of political sports,
the dry eggs assault me
with unknown ingredients.

Finally, the big game:
the crowd watches, aghast.
They huddle in blankets
while the action unfolds
on the fields below. How
can one man inspire
such fear? The monster terrifies,
but is visible. Much worse
are the ones I can't see.

I sleep fitfully
the night before, dream
of clever escape. Forced
into wooded exile,
my daughter and I
manage to stay miles
ahead of attackers, but she
forgets her sleeping bag.
"Take mine," I tell her,
without hesitation.

I walk across the beach
as birds argue about
leftover garbage, and
waves continue their
indifferent pounding.
The manufactured greatness
of humans is so
much less than this,
but the carnage compels
and I can't stop looking.

SEVEN STAGES OF GRIEF

1). I shouldn't try
to speak to anybody:
I should just be here, where
everyone has arrived by invitation
and is on her best behavior.

2). The can has capsized,
crows pick at the remains.
Last week, the police
came to my street twice.
They made no arrests.

3). I should be here. My life
has been a series of collapses
like early airplane films. No one
is concerned, except me.
This should not
be a surprise.

4). No point in pretending
it doesn't matter. The rest is
popcorn in my movie.
The wall was always built
and waited patiently
for someone to make it visible.

5). I should be here.
End is abandonment.
The wreckage won't go quietly.
Throw my wounded shoulder
to the gate, but settle for
the opposite, until finally
everything stops working.

6). We all say
whatever we want. My
main objective is to endure
until bedtime, then repeat.
Don't forget to leave
the silverware out, in
preparation for mourning.
It saves time.

7). I never expected this knob

to last any longer
than its predecessors,
but the boss told me
it would work fine for
a few more years. I
am not responsible
for its failure, when it
finally falls apart.

PLUTOCRACY

Chunks for the masters
 one at a time,
 until eventually

everything is gone:

you're clutching at
 a wind tunnel,

trying to grab
 that handle, but you sold it

years ago. Too bad, because
 you could have used it now.

Masters sitting up on haunches
 like seals for the catch,
 always hungry. If you don't

 keep them fed, they will
bite you, and they won't stop biting,
 and besides,

your champagne tastes good.

LEFT BEHIND

Pence stormed up to the Capital
in a dither of self-righteous fury:
hands clenched in fists, ready
to do battle with everyone
foolish enough to believe
in education for the masses.

How dare they, he fumed,
they're too stupid to know
that learning is not a right,
but a privilege, granted solely
to those who can afford it,
not the grimy, demanding brats
of the undeserving poor. Determined

to stop the impoverished
from pushing over the tower,
he arrived in time to cast
a deciding vote for the grinning matron,
who stood in the wings like a prom ingenue,
hands clasped, teeth gleaming,
waiting for the count.
The veins of her neck bulged
as she posed for the camera.

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away,
a schoolchild clutched the pages
of a tattered textbook, and wondered
why the teacher rested her head on her desk
and cried without making a sound.

CHARLATAN

Some people can't hear
unless there is noise.
When that fails, they turn up the volume.

Words like gravel
pellets, each more pointed
than the last. Vows of
redemption, delivered by the huckster
whose wagon just pulled into town.
The people push forward,
clamor for redemption.

More clamor. Then shouting.
Voices so distorted you can't hear.

The huckster moves
his fish mouth, promises
to heal sickness, bring jobs back,
pay the three months' overdue mortgage,

make wives love husbands again.
There will be sex, and wads
of money, and more sex.
Everything will return to life.

The morning brings ashes
and overturned bottles, and
the circling of predators.

No one knows where
the huckster went. Some insist
they spotted him at the edge of town,
clutching a suitcase, and laughing.
Others claim he never
existed in the first place:

he was just another fantasy
people have when
they have nothing else left:

and all that remains is cacophony.

JUNK FOOD COWBOY

The country isn't walking correctly.
It has a slight limp,
not noticeable from certain angles,
but slowly getting worse.

The country can't stand up tall,
can't maintain a military posture.
Though a board is lodged permanently
in its rectum, its gut
has grown huge and spills out
of its too-tight pants.
It still tries to swagger
like it's in charge.

The country ran sprints and dashes
back in high school, and maintained
fairly decent scores, along with a C average
marked up to an A, for no reason
except it showed up in class, and knew
somebody's daddy.

The country sits at Cracker Barrel
and is gunned down in the parking lot
after eating another meal
of lard and rage.
There is no cowboy strut,
no fifty paces, the sniper
takes aim from his car window
and six are dead. The driver is
another local guy
who mows his lawn, and fires shots
into his yard, but
his neighbors hear nothing.

The country is almost dead.
The country sits in the waiting room
and hopes that somebody else
will solve its emergency.
Meanwhile the sound of lullabies
over the loudspeaker
as babies are born,

eager for their turn at the wheel.

The country eats poison
from the vending machine,
shuffles around the corridors
with its ass hanging out of pajamas.

The country has dementia, and
insists it's in the wrong hospital,
while the nurses laugh
from their vantage point
on the other side of the window.

The country lies on its single bed
with a jar of IV fluids
and a bad show on television.
The program is familiar
and the country knows every word.
The country reclines
with the remote, searches
for a better channel.
The official prognosis
is poor, and the sentence terminal,
but still, the country
is glad for a vacation—
so it dials room service
from the bedside phone,
puts the meal on someone else's tab.

HOLIDAY IN THE NEW REGIME

You never watched Twin Peaks
though you couldn't help but
be aware of its existence: living
in a region where everything
reminds you of David Lynch –

trucks filled to overflowing with
mossy logs, rumbling down the highway
in sideways rain, and people
who don't care much for conversation.

The roadside cafes on 101
always manage to close
a few seconds before you arrive, and
the waitress apologizes because she can
only offer breaded chicken strips and beer.

At a nearby tavern,
the word “amber” floors the bartender.
You are a snotty urbanite

from a city along the interstate,
and everybody knows it.
They do not speak to you.

Finally your vegetable patty arrives
on a cheap white bun, with a
pale curve of iceberg lettuce
and a leftover slice of tomato.

The tomato appears oddly festive
against the backdrop
of flickering holiday lights.

December is the slow month
at the ocean, and only lunatics
come here. That explains a lot.

Christmas is a week away,
and people are bombing the hell
out of each other on the news.

You'd be amazed if they chose
to do anything else, since
they never learned how to sit quietly.

Folks who live alone in the mountains
erect enormous Trump signs in their yards,
sentinels to keep them company
during the damp and chilly winter.

Those who have the largest signs
live in the smallest houses:
crumbling shacks and trailers
in desperate need of new roofs and floors.

These people never come outside,
and they refuse to throw anything away:
their lawns are littered with old engine parts
and overturned lawn chairs,
as if they just sprang forward

and left town in a hurry, except
they are still there, watching television.

Part of you thinks everything should
just hurry up and go to hell,
since it was headed there
for such a long time anyway.

Everyone was having fun,
and didn't want to let a little thing
like a massacre spoil their party. Still,

you don't have to live in a trailer
at the bottom of a rain-drenched knoll,
you get to go home and drink
lattes and microbrews.

These folks are braver than you, because
they know how to remain in one place,
even if everything shuts down at 7 PM.

When the apocalypse comes
the Trump people will inherit the earth,

and you will die, clutching your screed
and your plate of gluten free food.

They will congregate on your grave, cackling
with merriment, as they smoke cigarettes
and devour bags of deep-fried chicken.
They will insist you had it coming all along:

and who's to say they won't be right?

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