

Decaying on Route Number Four

You catch the bus on Cleland Drive and sit perfectly still, hoping no one notices your nervous tic. Your umber eyes passing over old-man Al and wondering *huh, is that what they see?* Are you like them?

You can see yourself in Janette Harker, with her curdling shouts and heroin veins. With the raggedy grey in her hair and how she presses STOP on the drug-run Martin Street block past the Subway. How did it come to this?

Why are those obnoxious high school kids' hushed voices and jabbed "freaks" directed at you?

You see yourself in the midday alley passengers who look like they haven't had anything to eat today and they rock all fetal, back and forth, miasma on their breath. It smells like alcohol and not quite death, but like a life has ended. No vigor in those backlit, sleepless eyes.

You tug the pulley and in your neatest, most orderly fashion, you exit, all while hoping that they don't see in you what you see in Al and Janette. That they don't think you've died. That all you are is sentient tragedy—a quivering corpse.

It was a place to feel alone,
even if cacophonous and crowded.
Even if the couch was bowing in the middle,
and the lively jungle on the wallpaper had
begun fraying and peeling at the edges.

It was a place to feel alone,
even with their care and companionship.
Even if a best friend lays their legs on yours
and you forget to feel uncomfortable
in all that discomfort

It was a place to feel alone,
even amid the cheering of comrades.
Even if your card games were spectated, as if
a life might depend on the outcome of children's
play, and the sound of paper against paper.

It was a place to feel alone,
even if kids got caught up in the shuffling.
Even if a community flourished, and
the stale tasting stagnancy was dubbed
“that old-book-smell.”

It was a place to feel alone,
even though you know you weren't.
Even if the memories fail you, and
your reliability starts to fail too.
And you had a happy childhood,

—*Even If You Can't Convince Yourself of It,*
by Zackery D. Fitz

The Cherishing of Life, The Feeling of Apocalypse

“They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine, plague and by the wild beasts of the earth.” (Revelation 6:7-8, on the four horsemen)

Dead flowers held aloft like
heat rising from her upraised hands.
A sickly sunlight to
make things grow and peer outward.
On her face, eyes like candle-smoke.
A blossom withering limp.
A flower like a child, born with
the potential to sprout and
to flourish in our wake, still—
one lay dead thanks to
an ignorance-bred massacre.
And there she lay. Hospital
bed rigid and cold, yet limp.
Decrepit, rain-rot roots hang.

It is eleven at night.
They haven't gotten to her yet.
In minutes they'll tell her dad
they didn't tend the garden.
Not well enough to foster
life. They'll tell her mom that they
are very sorry at the
loss of a child. They'll tell them,
in different words, that *she*
was meant to inherit the
earth, but like trampled fields crushed
under gallop, your world ends.