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Amorak Huey
Grand Valley State University

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Sept. 11, 2004

For a while, in the newsroom, we stopped
using words like “bomb” and “slaughter”
in sports headlines. We complained

less about micro-managing editors,
weak coffee, system crashes,
incompetence in the composing room;

we pitched in and made our deadlines.
We felt like, no, not quite a family,
but a team, at least. We looked around and were glad:

no one in this room believed
in anything with enough fury
to shave his earthly body clean

and plunge us all headlong into the milky fire.
It was an exciting time. We did not pity the planet,
we felt renewed with possibility, knowing

all the best love stories
have a backdrop of crisis, calamity, cholera,
Oh, how we felt proud

we were the first to see this date as the proper noun
it would become, we were responsible
for its becoming, we were patriotic

because we didn't flinch
at the risen cost of gasoline. Resilient,
we kept the Friday Doughnut Club alive—

to do otherwise was to let someone else win—
all we had to do was wait
for time to pass, for a holiday, even a somber one.

the kind marked with a slow parade
and black crepe paper.
to be born in tragedy's muck. Three years,

turns out, for most of us, who made love
and war, who had babies in June
or miscarried on Thanksgiving,

football on TV downstairs and our future
bleeding into a cold toilet one purple clot at a time,
our bodies helpless with cramps.

There's more than one anniversary today.
Twenty years ago in Leicester, England,
before that Monday's first cup of coffee was gone,

someone unlocked DNA's inner chamber,
opening the door on the unique self
written in that knotted helix,

the double strand that determines
guilt or innocence, that decides
before birth whether we are capable

of living in the first place
or of meeting death with the angry word
of god burning like jet fuel on our tongues.