

The Panic Cotillion

“How long do you think it’s gonna last?”

— Taylor Swift

Today’s disaster’s piled up outside
your building’s gates in shiny green garbage
bags that shift in passing light. It’s a living
monument on which you stand & sink.

It’s good to shout from your tipsy ziggurat,
I’m not history’s dust yet!
But you’re beginning to break down
like the old sledding hill outside Lawrenceville

vanished now somewhere beneath
a scrawl of scrub & pine. Fast trees
will cover you, too. Better than being swallowed
by a flash flood. Or sucker-punched

by absolute sun. Or shot and left to poison
someone’s drinking water. Or losing oxygen
in a down-sized elevator. Or caught inside
the TV’s blast zone at a care facility.

By this point in the writing of the verse,
Auden’s capacious lips would’ve kissed
a dozen vodka drinks lined up firing-squad-style —
getting loaded to bind his own low, mean

decade with the past. But you don't have
his gimlet-eye view of Thucydides
and this variable line of yours is too weak
to stitch into our all-American catastrophe.

Out the bedroom window, you see
a wall of bedroom windows.
We're three hundred million nation-states,
each falling apart alone.

You want to send your fellow dictators
each a poem, but keep addressing yourself
to stone. *Dear implacable history
of divinity and loneliness! ...*

You've long since left the business
of prophecy to talking heads that glow
inside shiny black slabs
that line our basement showrooms —

eyeballing monitors like a gambler
checks face-up cards, looking
for a hedge against what's next. e.g.
in this morning's "Morning" email

you caught three new elegies for the future:
one's a blaze the size of Rhode Island
swallowing the northwest; two's another
once-in-a-millennium drought;

three's a mountain of silent ash adrift,
turning the evening cherry red.
You tap open the Dark Sky app to see
what it knows. *Loading ... Loading ...*

Are someone's children drowning
in a subway in Zhengzhou? Are your own
getting shot by a cop in Chicago?
What's your disaster plan? Maybe

we could meet somewhere north of here.
There's an ancient ocean bed the sea tugged away
from a few millennia ago. It made a rift
when it pulled back, space for wind to become

a tide that made a sex of seeds & shit
weaving shifting bits
of you and me into the fray.