The Way We Live Now: Rafael Campo

Doctor, Poet

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Elegy for the AIDS Virus

How difficult it is to say goodbye
to scourge. For years we were obsessed

with you,
your complex glycoproteins and
your sly,
haphazard reproduction, your
restraint
in your resistance, how you bathed
so slight
yet fierce in our most intimate
secretions.
We will remember you for generations;
electron micrographs of you seem quaint
already, in the moment of our victory.
How difficult it is to claim one's right
to living honestly. The honesty
you taught was nothing quite as true

as death, but neither was it final. Yes,
we vanquished you, with latex, protease
inhibitors, a little common sense—
what's that, you say? That some
remain at risk?
How dare you try to threaten us again!
Of course, you'd like to make
outrageous claims
that some behaviors haven't changed,
that some
have not had access to the drugs
that mask
your presence in the body. Difficult
it is, how very sad, to see you strain
(no pun intended) at response—

our quilts,
our bravest poetry, our deaths
with grace

and dignity have put you in
your place.
This elegy itself renounces you,
as from this consciousness you've
been erased.
The love for you was very strong, the hot
pursuits so many of us reveled in—
but what once felt like love was
really not.
I hardly know what I will find to hate
as much as I have loved and
hated what
you brought to bear upon my verse,
the weight
of your oppression and the joys
of truth.
How difficult it is—to face the white
of nothingness, of clarity. We win!

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