

Crown of Sonnets on Appearance/Reality
By Dr. Dorothy Chan

I.

In my dreams, dolphins swim in clear waters,
and I wonder about the way our bodies breathe:
the inhale and exhale, or as my lover says,
“Take a deep breath. In and out. It’ll be okay.”
I want to practice this more. Let go of things
out of my control. I watch an architecture
video, and a supermodel recommends the art
of James Turrell, for calming down: a neon pink
orb in the entrance of her million-dollar home,
and wouldn’t life be much easier that way?
I call this escapism in the middle of a pandemic,
and I push myself to hold on tighter, when my lover
asks me, “Why can’t you and I just focus
on loving each other the best way we can.”

II.

“Why can’t you and I just focus on loving
each other?” is the question that pushes me
through the morning. It’s simple. I breathe in
and I breathe out. I make myself three cups
of tea a day. Now I’m running out of honey.
I wonder why names like Honey or Sugar
or Sweetie stick. Really, too much cheese.
But we all have our thing. Isn’t it the simple
things that get us through the panic, like movies:
the screen lighting up in dark rooms across
America, and my friend Danika says that
it’s remarkable how in homes across the country,
people used to tune in at the same time to the same
show—it’s like looking at the moon—all of us.

III.

Artists have always loved the moon, and this is
nothing new. Make a wish on a celestial body,
I tell my friends. Trace the lines of your palm.
I take a walk in Eau Claire, Wisconsin when
it's pitch black outside—a scene straight out
of a painting of a small town, complete with
streetlights and a theater marquee, and don't you
love the moment in a black and white film when
The End shows up in a bold font, and how epic
to have finished the journey, and if film is like life
and life is like film, which one is which, and when
will we know which is appearance and which is
reality? Days blend into nights, and my clock is off.
We look at the same moon at night. The same sun.

IV.

I think about gods taking laps around the sun.
In my dreams, we're not on this timeline.
In my dreams, I wake up at 3:00 AM ready
to travel. I love the way home looks at 3:00 AM.
In my dreams, I kiss her. In my dreams, I eat
three meals a day, rather than one or five,
depending on my mood. In my dreams, we're not
wearing masks—I get to see your face—you get
to see mine. It's shallow, but I miss wearing
lipstick. In my dreams, I'm not worried about
a loved one who works at the ER. In my dreams,
I'm not worried about a loved one who's a chef.
In my dreams, I'm not worried about loved ones
in Arizona, where the numbers keep spiking.

V.

In my dreams, we're not in this reality,
 though I'm still asking, "How are you?"
for the sake of appearances and manners.
 But really, *How are you? I hope you and your
loved ones are safe and well. Sending you love
 and light, always. Sending you support, my friend.*
It's sad how these words are now routine.
 My father reminds me of a Chinese saying
that translates to, "Friends are like plants.
 You must water them." I ask her what her
favorite flower is. I think of my friend Claire
 who says, "A bouquet. Not the entire meadow."
Maybe this is a metaphor about greed.
 Maybe this is about going into a field.

VI.

 Maybe this is about going into a field
and restoring one's sanity. Maybe this is
 about only taking one flower and leaving
the rest to nature and to love. I don't want
 to get angry. The anger from weeks ago
still has not left my system. The anger from
 weeks ago has always been in me, but I cannot
do it anymore. Maybe this is about going
 into a field and feeling like a child again.
Isn't it strange how I feel like I need to take
 care of the entire world sometimes, when
I can't even take care of myself. I can't
 always carry that weight. The world is heavy—
too heavy. Too much. Let's get through today.

VII.

Let's get through today. Let's get through tonight.

A friend asks me, "What was the last thing that brought you joy?" I'm trying to remember the answers like it's a multiple-choice test, but I'm still guessing. Why is it so hard?

I think about being inside when it's raining. I think about how this isn't forever, or how a loved one tells me to always be thankful to be alive. How powerful is that? To be alive.

To take care of my body. To let my emotions out like it's the rain outside. It's really okay.

In my dreams, dolphins swim in clear waters. We see our reflections. We need to take care of ourselves. We let our emotions out, like rain.