

The Drone

by Philip F. Clark

The vindictive screech seeps from televisions,
millions of them like bright eyes in a black wood; a child
works on an old computer; struggling with his common core.
A mother makes a bed, prepares her grief. A father
has yet to find a job. The bar closes, one lone hanger-
on wonders if he has enough for a tip.

Someone is beheaded. A woman begs for change.
A fine party is underway, with porcelain and crystal
and the whispers of the rich: their clothes a sound
like no other -- those sibilant silks and cashmere.

The pilot watches the moon, with his cargo
full of souls, some dreaming of the stars.
A document is signed and lives disappear --
it's easy, it's ink. Kids hang out on a corner, smoking,
drinking, and learn that there is still that line
called 'it ends here'; they go silent at a flashing light.

A man kisses another man in some town where
they are not allowed to. They kiss often.
Two girls discuss a breakup text, going over it again
for clues, like a tarot of bones that would tell them why
it happened. Someone laughs at the news.
"He's at least telling the truth," they say. But the truth
is somewhere distant, in some other room or country
some onyx forest where the animals leave illegible scat.

The drone is here at home. It has its audience of takers.
Dice are thrown in vast casinos, the price of pills rises,
a body bag is lifted quietly down a flight of stairs.
In silent hospital rooms, a few last souls are awake,
tied to their blood and tubes. The nurses play cards,
the doctors sleep. A clock has stopped at half past nine.
The city lights up, and the farm goes dark.

Someone goes to bed loving some small thing: a child,
or an old photograph of one. The office buildings rise
and the subways fill with their itinerant workers.
Heads are bowed these days, but with other things.
A continent away, it is a day ahead, and someone
goes to sleep the day before. "I just missed you,"
someone says, "by seconds."

A man reads late into the night, having lowered
the rant and the noise. But he can't really stop
hearing it: those mouths keep going like that Beckett play,
buried up to their lips, nothing left but language, or its grunt.
He turns in his bed and reaches for a body,
like the blind to braille.

