

“We forgot crowns do nothing for kings but put weight on their heads and a target on their backs.”

- Loyce Gayo

Meditations on Power
by Karla Hernandez Torrijos

I used to think Power was a black-bellied beast

slithering through city street

and baring fangs

I used to think Power rested on the shoulders of the famous

and few and lunged if you got too close

I used to think Power was an endangered animal

the kind you read about in books but never touch

And now, I know the truth:

Power, for all the stories of its scales and bite,

favors people willing to meet its eyes

Belongs to no one but itself, has no master

And yes, I have seen Power side with empire,

with those who wish to collar it and keep it as a pet

And still, it slid free if any such restraints

and the angrier the men became, hoping for Power

's head on a mantle

Something to point to and claim as their own,

The quicker they lost it

like hands bottling smoke

No heavier was the crown than on Coronation Day

No lighter was the crown than beneath a guillotine

As boys who'd become kings transformed into kings who became boys one last time

Death making scared children of us all

I used to think Power was a black-bellied beast

but now, I know the truth:

Power is a shape-shifter, a skin drifter

Power shed its scales, its fangs closed upon by a new beak

Bones grew and muscle stretched

to make way for taloned feet

And of course, the screech of budding wings

as flesh tore to make way for thousands of iridescent feathers

the color of oil spills

made by companies owned by powerful men

Power soared through the skies

Under the shadow of its wingspan, we protested presidents behaving like kings

Our numbers growing larger

Our chants growing louder

Power built its nest on the rooftops of libraries and

perched on the shoulders of nervous eighteen-year-olds entering the ballot box

for the first time

And some days, as Power soared,

A single feather would free itself from a wing and

float down

to become a quill

And feather tip, dipped in ink, would draft declarations of war

or the treaties that end it

Or better yet, it might help write a poem to remind us of what was lost

in the games of kings and pawns and swords and pens

Power answered to no one

but sometimes came when called

Resting at the feet of presidents and poets alike

Neither beast nor bird

(Nothing quite so simple)

Asking only that you meet its eyes