Virus Vigil

Poetry by Jim Blackburn
Art by Isabelle Scurry Chapman

SICKNESS MAKES THE ROOM BEAUTIFUL. WHEN THE ROUTINE FORMATION ALWAYS THE LIVING ROOM IS OCCUPIED AND IT IS UNANCESTOR CATIVE TO INTRUDE, ANY ANIZE YOUR LIFE. SUCH A WAY THAT GOD FEELS CAN TOUCHED DAILY. THICK HAIR.
The Clapper Rail

In my kayak on Eckert’s Bayou
On the west end of Galveston Island.

West Bay is full of lunar water,
Pulsing with celestial connections
That connect with some inner part of me.
Rounding a marsh point, I see
The ghost-like marsh chickens dashing
Around the clump of bunch grass,
Revealed for an instant and then gone,
A clapper rail and her chicks
Blending with the grass,
The yellow and brown and black
Swallowed by yellow and brown
Full of dark shadows.

Floating on the bayou on a good day,
I wonder what makes the rails run
And hide from me in my kayak?
Is it the smile of politicians
Promising wetland and dune protection
Only to turn their backs on what nature needs?
Or is it the specter of the Galveston developers
Promising a false economy built on ecological loss?
Or is it simply that the rail is a wise bird
That learned long ago
To hide amongst the wetland grasses
And stay away from my kind?

As I paddle back in the near-dark glow
I am refreshed and renewed
With the lubrication of sublimation
By nature, to nature, into nature,
Wholly and completely transformed,
At least for today, and it is good,
Convinced that there is a lesson for humans
To be found watching the marsh chicken
Live within the rules of the ecosystem
Within which it evolved,
Staying unto itself, away from the crowd,
Living where it is hard for humans
To easily tread and move about
Which is, after all, why the rail lives here.

Paddling on Eckert’s Bayou off of West Bay
On a higher high tide with the clapper rail.