

A PROSE POEM CORONAVIRUS-19 HARLEM ENCOUNTER

during the first week of the novel coronavirus pandemic,
before fear of death emptied all the streets –
except for rats and the homeless – eye left my apartment
in Harlem to pick up newspapers at the deli on the corner
across 116th Street at 7th Avenue, ran into our neighbor
hood broke down junkie feverishly scratching old
scabs and scars on his skinny arms and since he knew
eye was a writer – though eye never knew how he knew this –
he addressed me like this: “poet, it’s hard on a broke junkie,
pick pocket these days, out here on these empty streets
because of this goddam whatever you call it virus, shit,
that has made everybody stay home, so there’s no crowds
out here walking around, not even down in Times Square,
so a man like me out here trying hard to make a living, you know
what I mean, hustling, trying to rub two nickels together inside
my pocket to get me something to eat, so it’s bad news,
hard for a pickpocket like me to make any money,
cause eye needs these goddamn crowds, the more the merrier,
so eye can take good care of my “white girl” heroin habit,
so please, poet, can you lay a five spot on me until business
picks up again, when this what-chu-ma-call it virus
goes the fuck away and eye can get back up on my feet
so I can take care of my business? I swear when this

shit is over, I'll pay you back with interest!"

eye looked at him, smiled, pulled two weary dollar bills from my pocket and gave them to him, then he said with a smirk on his wizened black face, "that's all you got, brother?" eye looked at him, smiled and said while crossing the street, "yeah, that's it, that's all eye got for you today," and he said, shaking his head, "damn, poet, I thought you was a rich man doing that poetry shit!" shocked as eye was by this, eye had to laugh when he said it, that a poet was rich in dollars, when all along eye thought poets were rich with creative ideas and as I crossed the street, eye told myself to tell him this the next time - whenever, if ever - eye saw him again, "motherfucker eye ain't never supported junkies anyway, so get out of my face before eye slap the stupid off you!

Quincy Troupe

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