

THE NEW TROPIC

April 19, 2023 – Miami, Florida

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... in honor of National Poetry Month, we have a special edition of our monthly poetry series with The Betsy Writer's Room to share ...

Poetry from The Writer's Room

A word from Caridad Moro-Gronlier, curator of our monthly feature of work by poet alumni of The Betsy Writer's Room: "I'm elated to share that this Poetry Month's poem comes to us from Miami's first Poet Laureate, Presidential Inaugural Poet, Richard Blanco, who writes of the gift of time and space The Betsy provided him during an especially stressful time. A room of one's own in Miami is at a premium these days, but as Blanco recounts, the Betsy continues to offer a respite from stress and chaos, making those watershed moments possible for us all."

Says Blanco, recent recipient of a National Humanities Medal, "Deborah Briggs from The Betsy Hotel called to offer me residency at the Writers Room after a last-minute cancellation. I was extremely stressed due to deadlines and teaching in person while the COVID pandemic was still a threat. I told Deborah, 'Not sure how much writing I'll get done, but I could sure use the break.' She assured me the Writers Room was for nurturing whatever I needed. I arrived determined to do nothing except decompress. Easier said than done. But finally, while lounging on the beach during the sunset hours, I had a watershed moment as all the pressures of my life lifted. I returned to the room and began penning this poem, which cathartically practically spilled out of me in one sitting."

WHY I NEEDED TO

BY RICHARD BLANCO

because I faithfully reply to every email from the absurd
gods of urgency who punish my good deeds by leaving me
empty when I empty my inbox...because I praise hating

myself, broken into my calendar's time-slotted tasks, slicing
me thin with the thick duty of being everything yet nothing
to anyone, not even to me...because I remember birthdays

but forget my own and my mother's...because she is bitter
sweet as the Cuban coffee she brews after Sunday dinners...
because she only loves me in the language of her cooking

my favorite dish: shrimp enchilados...because of my bland
father sunk in his armchair without me on his lap...because
he never told me the life story I only read finally in the half

moons of his eyes the morning he gazed into mine then
died...because my brother and I need to drink to share
our shared hurt at happy-hour, so unhappily grateful for

love's wreckage...because my husband, who's still scared
of his adoration for me as we embrace sleep, still doubts
how long I'll nest my dreams in his arms...because I have

never quite told him: always...because I'm just as afraid of
needing him more than myself...because I'm not the one
I've curated on Instagram: oh so humbled by, so grateful for...

so many posted blessings with my posed selves...because
tonight I again remember I'm nothing more than a mirage
slowly disappearing on my porch, sitting with half the life

I have left, still trying to piece how I fit into the puzzle of
the constellations...because I've drunk their shots of light
and too-many Martinis...because I'm cheering mindlessly

to the moon, to my wish for immortality amid the clouds
of my own cigarette smoke...because I should finally quit
doubting my life will be more than these anonymous bones

...because I need to believe in something else, truer than
me...because that's why today I had to take myself away
to the beach...because I needed to imagine my father as

that father at the shore, handing a bouquet of seashells to
his son...because I needed to taste that love can be simple
as a mother remembering to pack sodas and sandwiches...

because I needed the seagulls tending the horizon to teach
me again to be as still as them, peer calmly into the void
of the skies I face...because I needed to hear the waves

break and break me into the lines of this poem...because
I needed to burn, to see myself shine just as beautifully
as the rosy glow of the sunlight bathing my closed eyes.