

Numbers

Abigail Ellis, University of Colorado Boulder

I have this app for alarms that I reserve for
The morning after
After a sleepless night
Spent tangled in sheets of
Paper and printer ink
My lover is a class on Gandhian philosophy,
And my lover demands of me
A 12 page paper by 9am

To turn off these alarms, you have to solve a math problem
On November 10th, my problem is
 $4x+3 = -5x+21$, solve for x ,
It takes a minute but x is 11 and the ringing in my ears convinces me to delete this app

Notifications grace my screen with more numbers
A 4-day Duolingo streak will expire in 18 minutes
A New York Times article lists 11,078 dead in Gaza,
I open the article, read the first line
Among them are 4,506 children, 3,027 women, and 678 elders

There are 8,211 named bodies to bury but
My country lays rest to its compassion instead,
We sign off and close our eyes
Scroll through bombed buildings and hollow eyes
Until we find
Behind-the-scenes edits and clips of reality TV

We learn the numbers to stay informed, but their
Names don't help us perform,
They become raindrops
In a hurricane
And nobody wants to be
Caught in a storm

There's no x to solve for in the headline, but with 11,078 dead,
The New York Times leaves 2867 nameless,
A variable

So I continue reading
"Conspirators and radicals"
"Extremists and animals"
Best "behind bars," not "hiding in tunnels"
Oh, these are the ones they call *Terrorist*

They disrupt the stability of the boot crushing their neck,
Threaten the peace between captor and captive,
Their justice is a disease, their protests a poison
Their sickened limbs are bandaged in ball and chain
Resistance runs in their blood,
So when it stains the cobblestone streets,
They paint the city in oaths and dreams

They are the men of Gaza.
They are medics, their hearts
Heavy with the weight of
Knowledge and skills silenced by blockades.

They are teachers, their minds driven mad with
Names of students now outlived by history
They are sons, standing in the rubble,
And they are fathers, digging their people out.

Digging in the dead of night, bathed in the orange glow of massacres,
And when dawn breaks, they continue under crimson skies.
Their hands stained with ash,
Their voices, exhausted by unanswered screams to a concrete graveyard.
Their fingertips raw, nails cracked,
Digging, digging, digging, digging, digging
And then
Finding.

Pulling.
Kneeling.
Aching.
Cradling.

Spiraling.
Blinking.
Breathing.

Breaking.
And they stand.

And they search for the father who lost their baby girl,
An angel in their arms with eyes of amber
A girl whose name they do not know.

But they weep as if they lost their own because
A child in Gaza is
A child of Gaza
And the land has lost
4,506 pieces of a future
That can never exist

I was never a fan of numbers
Or finding x
But I finish the article,
And I redownload the math alarms app
So I know tomorrow
I can wake up to a problem I know how to solve