

Ring

We are the unfinished agenda
spooling, infinite, we are action items
we are the big idea

We are the paper upon which this is printed

We are the wood from which it is made

We are, each generation

One ring of this tree

Rooted: how far back we go you will not see, unless you cut this down

We have no intention of that
I have made this speech once before

The tempest that roars within the lion's gut of these tormented times
demands its long due meal

Neither the shallow pool whose bottom is found with the tip of a single toe

Nor the Hollywood cardboard cut-out set, toppled with the strength of one strong
hip

Will match this rightful appetite
This season's urgent planting demands its ample earth

One shovel of dirt will not do DIG DEEP

Meet this great cat's maw with equal teeth

Fortify this home: no wolves will huff and puff this frame

Over there: Look! A stony pillar, a statue of hardened delay? Or is that just plain
salt? Douse it NOW, and see

This needle not moved, but buried
at a pace that outrivals the onslaught
of the termite's steady chew

BEHOLD

Hear us, those:

Whose sharpest need is met with coolest glance
computer chessboard marking out old familiar moves

Whose very living breath inhales this daily dread: told to drop, of windpipe
blocked, their mother's child's beating heart, altogether
stopped

Whose young voices are heard in this room, this Zoom, just now in the fray—a
truer democracy's proper bloom

Who scrape dinner plates on meeting nights, who tuck it all in, and when full glass
spills out the hasty door, wave hand saying *I got it! I'll clean it*

Whose sturdy green light says *GO*
laboring hard
each time
every time
choosing, to mean it

And you: granola bar and water bottle, poised
way too much wear, weary
keeping faith that it's
worth it

So cast off those incremental blues!

Grab that hammer
Get under the hood

Write it up
Knock it out
Run it past legal

Phone a friend

But skip the castle dripping jewels, skip the warship and its spacious brig

Instead let us gaze upon an orchard
with its tallest flourishing tree
turn our eye to the town's inhabitants
gathering under its shade

Let there be one last
of us among them

Passes extra bucket into nearby hand, pauses then to rest
leans against its sturdy trunk

Conjuring a season,
once upon a moment met

Filled with rain and seeds and soil
its sowers largely unrecorded, difficult to trace

But for a secret within this tree
never to be cut

The years we took hold of that ageless wheel
the years we took our turn

This unsparing, lavish ring we made

Silent, ancient,
thick



—Jodi Vander Molen