

IN THE MOURNING

DeeSoul Carson

Today it is cancer. Yesterday it is a bullet.
Tomorrow you will read this poem

and think of a new name, someone familiar,

like a cousin you haven't heard from in a while.
I hear of death and want to make a joke,

then nothing at all. Black people are always

laughing or crying, making light of what looms.
Our superpowers: going through grief

in an instant. Growing around what haunts

like a mausoleum, a graveyard of perennials.
A friend tells me that no one is ever truly gone,

but somewhere a family plans a funeral service.

Our memories cannot resurrect the dead.
Our good intentions cannot snatch the breath

back to their body. When I see Black people dead

on social media, I can't bring myself to gather
the details. I thank God it is not someone I know.

Forgive me. I know my sorrow has made me selfish.

I know my prayer is worth so little to the dead, but still.
I pray late-night drives with the ones I love.

I pray weekend rollouts with the homies.

I pray we can hit Fantasia's notes in "When I See U,"
our gentle hubris. I pray the melody of sink water

when my beloved rises to brush their teeth, the cursing

as they stumble through their morning daze, the groaning
of the carpetless floor beneath the activity of our waking.

I pray the anti-bacterial shushing of a Windex bottle

on a Saturday morning, the percussion of the vacuum
banging my bedroom door as my mother sings her gospel.

I pray Marvin Sapp for what haunts. Whitney Houston for what hurts.

I pray children screaming for no good reason at parties,
the soundtrack of my auntie schooling someone in Phase 10.

I pray the mercy of a quiet death.

I pray to pass without *TMZ* or *New York Post*
or Facebook breaking the story first. I pray

my God be a fence, a distraction that saves

the life of someone I love. Someone I don't.

I pray my friends make it to corner stores

and back with those stale-ass chips they love

so much, the ones we clown them for

as we reach into the bag for our share.