



virus

a liquid black cloud spreads its fingers
across the family sky
like ink from a squid
filling an aquarium tank
blotting out the sun
turning everyone and everything
the color of a funeral
shadow blue.

a virus infects the family tree
twisting the future
obscuring the past
spreading from generation to generation
feeding on the children
turning the adults into monsters
or rendering them
mute.

a parasite enters the family bloodstream
burrowing into hearts and minds
anchoring in tender bodies
protecting and propagating itself with a trance
forget
forget
forget.

I will not forget
and I will not pass these nightmares on to anyone else.

I'll pull those black fingers down out of my sky
I'll dig this virus out of my roots
I'll burn this parasite out of my blood.

I'll hunt down every last trace of this psychic infection
this evil rot that was injected into me when I was a child
and I'll haul it out into the daylight
where it can't survive.

I'll scream it out
I'll vomit it out
I'll drag it out of me
any way I can
tooth and claw
root and branch
blood and bone
until I've purged it from my life
and cleansed myself completely.

I reject the conspiracy of amnesia and silence
that allows this systemic scourge
to thrive unchallenged
in secret
in dark and helpless places

I reject the family commandments
thou shalt not remember
thou shalt not feel
thou shalt not tell

I will remember
I will feel
I will tell
I'll take back my life from this shadow blue plague
and if that makes me an outcast
a traitor in the eyes of the family
then so be it.

Poem by Rick Belden with art by Staci Poirer.

About the artwork:

The art that accompanies my poem above is a mixed media painting called “virus” by the very talented Canadian artist Staci Poirier. Staci created her painting as a both a response and a companion to my poem. You can read more about Staci [here](#) and see more of her artwork on her website at stacipoirierart.com.

Painting and poem were [featured](#) earlier this year on the Good Men Project website with a [“zoom page”](#) for the painting where you can view larger images of various sections to see some of the marvelous detail.

The artwork and poem also [appeared together](#) in the Fall 2012 issue of the Jungian journal *Depth Insights*, which featured Staci’s painting on the cover and includes some additional background from her about materials used to create the art as well as some of her thoughts on the themes that are being expressed.

Depth Insights is also available as [a free PDF](#) with painting and poem presented side by side on page 8.

It’s been a great pleasure to be a part of this poetry-and-art collaboration, and I’ve been very happy to see my poem and Staci’s art presented together in multiple places in such an elegant fashion.

Originally posted at [poetry, dreams, and the body](#) on Nov 24 2012.

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Rick Belden is a respected explorer and chronicler of the psychology and inner lives of men. His book, [Iron Man Family Outing: Poems about Transition into a More Conscious Manhood](#), is widely used in the United States and internationally by therapists, counselors, and men’s groups as an aid in the exploration of masculine psychology and men’s issues, and as a resource for men who grew up in dysfunctional, abusive, or neglectful family systems. His second book, [Scapegoat’s Cross: Poems about Finding and Reclaiming the Lost Man Within](#), is currently awaiting publication. He lives in Austin, Texas.

More information, including excerpts from Rick’s books, is available on his [website](#) and [blog](#). You can also find him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).