

Christian Wiman on “The Days We Have”

This title, in this context, is wrenching. Depressingly prescient too, since it was written before Paris and Colorado Springs and San Bernardino and no doubt some other mad massacre that will have happened by the time this goes to print. I met Brett Foster over twenty years ago in Palo Alto. It was rumored that he was a Christian—“like, a *serious* Christian,” someone told me—which seemed, in that place and among that crowd, half-illicit and half-insane. We realize too rarely how retrospective hope can be, how the little seed of feeling within your inert despair is the same full-blown flower that now graces—and is—your life. I don’t want to make too much of this. I never knew Brett all that well, though I did feel—I still feel—deeply and strangely stabbed when he died. Let me say this: at some point I realized that Brett had within him something to which I aspired, a clarity of being that kept the world from snagging in him, a faith that wasn’t simple but natural. And *strong*. Of course poetry was always part of this. I last saw Brett in a restaurant in downtown New Haven after a reading he had given at Yale, where he had done his doctoral work and still had friends. He was in his element, and he was so happy and so utterly himself that I remember literally thinking the word *charmed* about him. “No one mixes the poisons as creatively, as we do,” as the poem says. And now I want to say: God damn you, God. Full stop. But Brett and his poem keep going. May he always keep going: *to defend our living*.