The Day the Vests Played Ball

David A. Romero

Today the Vests play ball
An outfield and diamond
Of dirt and dust
Pebbles and concrete
The Vests take the field in a city junkyard
As the Uniforms watch them from their trucks
The Vests
Court-ordered
Community service workers
Everything from first-offense
First-timers
To multi-offense
Seasoned veterans
Men and women
Who have spent more time in the neon mesh Velcro
Than out of it
The city employees call them, "Vests"
The meaner ones call them, "Inmates"
Whether in the vans or outside
They say
To remind some
Where they've been
To tell some
Where they're going
Some days
The Uniforms like to gesture as they drive by State,
"Don't you worry
Some of you will be in there
Soon enough"
They find this
Hilarious
Most Vests immediately respond,
"Ah
Hell
No!"
Some Vests reflect quietly
As they drive by that complex
Of concrete
Field
And fence
Thinking they're just glad to be out
Others
Usually sitting right by the door
Or all the way in the furthest corner of the back
They gnash their teeth
They've got an itch in their blood
They curse the Uniforms
Under their breath
And the anger stays with them
Long after they get out of the van...
On lunch break
We vests chew on clouds of dust
Like all the bitterness of the past
Like the fear that we're not actually all innocent here
That all this time costs a lotta money
That we have some serious shit to deal with
And that something's gotta give
Or it won't
And we'll spend a lot of time chewing on that
Or we won't
But not today...
No.

Today, the vests play ball!
A broken broom
Or shovel handle for the bat
Pizza box and traffic signs for the bases
Fast food burger wrappers for the ball
We don't need gloves to catch with
We have our hands
Today the Vests play ball
Moises is on first
Guillermo is on second
Antoinette is on third
Cullen is up to bat
And I'm at the pitcher's mound
Serving up soft balls because
Who doesn't want to see
These Vests run the bases in this junkyard like champions?
We try
To make those burger wrappers fly
We run
Our open Vests wave like banners
We steal bases
And joke with each other
Those too embarrassed
Or too tough to play
They tease us from the benches made bleachers
The city employees come around
They ask each other,
"Are those inmates playing baseball?"
They laugh,
"Looks like they're playing with a bunch of trash!"
We're just a bunch of trash-people to most of them
Because their world is made up of rules
The dirty and the clean
The good and the bad
Purchased equipment
And piles of dirt
Dirt
That only children and idiots
Would choose to shape into tunnels and sandcastles
Forgetting that no game would exist without some nutcase
Having put sticks
Balls
Baskets
And lines in the sand together
To create
Sport
A city employee remarks,
"Looks like they're having fun"
"Well, why don't you join them, then?"
And he does
Comes up for a hit
Makes it
Smiles and quickly leaves
The ball falls apart
The game ends as unceremoniously as it started
Lunch is over
The Vests get back into the van
Some Vests leave
Others come in
But every time we pass by that junkyard
I'll tell them
About the day the Vests played ball.

Cobalt Poets Series # 583 ~ August 22, 2023

David A. Romero is a Mexican-American spoken word artist from Diamond Bar, CA. He is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of El Martillo Press. Romero is the author of My Name Is Romero (FlowerSong Press), a book reviewed by Gustavo Arellano (¡Ask a Mexican!), Curtis Marez (University Babylon), and founding member of Ozomatli, Ulises Bella. Romero has received honorariums from nearly a hundred colleges and universities in thirty-four different states in the USA and has performed live in Mexico, Italy, and France. Romero's work has been published in literary magazines in the United States, Mexico, England, Scotland, and Canada. Romero has opened for Latin Grammy winning bands Ozomatli and La Santa Cecilia. Romero's work has been published in anthologies alongside poets laureate Joy Harjo, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Luis J. Rodriguez, Jack Hirschman, and Tongo Eisen-Martin. Romero has won the Uptown Slam at the historic Green Mill in Chicago; the birthplace of slam poetry. Romero offers a scholarship for high school seniors interested in spoken word and social justice: "The Romero Scholarship for Excellence in Spoken Word."