

THE PERCH

VOL. 6 · FALL 2021

THE VIEW FROM HERE

A SPECIAL ISSUE ON LIVING
IN THE TIME OF COVID





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THE PERCH



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THE PERCH



VOL. 6 · FALL 2021

Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut



Martha Willette Lewis, *Socially Distant Assemblages*

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Introduction

I GREW UP IN A FAMILY forged by combat, even if it was the combat of earlier generations: World War I, World War II, Vietnam. Over the course of my lifetime, even though I personally experienced little to no privation or risk, I grew up with the idea that somewhere in the air around me, a siege could begin at any time. There was no particular reality to this feeling: it was just the notion that the bombing could commence at a moment's notice, as it had for my parents and grandparents. And indeed, in March 2020, the siege that I had prepared for subliminally all my life suddenly arrived, in the mysterious and invisible form of the COVID virus. At a psychological level, if not a physical one, I felt weirdly prepared for the onslaught. I knew from the beginning that this was going to be my generation's war.

I also knew, from my collective familial memory, that wars require a response.

Still I spent the first two months of COVID, like everyone else, in a prolonged numbness, punctuated by moments of despair. I did my best to run for cover. (And it must be said: I was in a place of relative privilege, with a secure job and healthcare, not in any manner a first responder.) But after two months of running and distancing, I felt like I needed to do something in response to the cataclysm around me, at least in my limited way as a writer. And so late last spring—at a moment when things looked particularly dire (there were hardly any treatments for COVID, let alone even the hope for a vaccine)—The Perch editorial team joined with our colleagues at the Mental Health Foundation in Scotland and came up with the idea for this special issue, *The View From Here*. For us, as writers and editors, the appropriate response to trauma has always been to turn our experience into stories and images, with the hope that someday those stories and images might prove useful. We put out a call for stories and poems and art about individual experiences during the early days of COVID.

This issue is the result of that effort, and it amounts to a snapshot of what the world was like last spring and summer. The submissions are arranged in roughly chronological order. Collectively they tell with a surprising coherence the story of the pandemic: the initial shock and pain, the senseless losses, the inurement to suffering, moments of resilience and grace, and then some glimmers of hope. The stories also show the additional cost of the pandemic for those with psychiatric diagnoses, and for people of color.

This issue, we hope, has the exact opposite narrative effect of the media headlines during those dire months. The ongoing barrage of case and death counts, the scientific measures of the spread of disease, and the large-scale mobilizations told the story of pandemic at the largest level. These stories and selections of art speak of COVID at a private, even microscopic level. They tell of how much money it required to stay alive and how to attempt to get along with one's loved ones week after week, month after month, in close quarters. They create poems out of the obituaries of individual people, and speak of the moment of panic when the Wifi went down with a young person in the house. Generally the worlds rendered in these works are small and detailed, miniature moments of anguish and grace.

In retrospect *The View From Here* seems like a first step in the attempt to create order out of chaos. It feels like the first salvo in a long battle, in which our contributors drew upon some of the only weapons—the telling of stories and the creating of images—that we then had available to us.

— Charles Barber
Editor, *The View From Here*

Garden Rebellion

Amy Nicholson



Joni-Rae Carrack, *Learn to Float*



They sent us home.
We planted a garden.
They said, "Wear gloves."
We dug in the dirt.
They said, "Wear masks."
We pressed basil leaves to our noses.
We feasted on ripe tomatoes
Fresh from the vines.
They said "Six feet apart."
We planted tight rows.
Peppers, carrots, beets.
The fewer faces we saw,
The more seeds we added.
Cramming in more sustenance.
We stretched our roots deeper.
Loved stronger.
Prayed higher.
Arms entwined,
We raised our faces
To the sun.
Their voices faded
Into the trees. 🐛

Banging on the Balcony

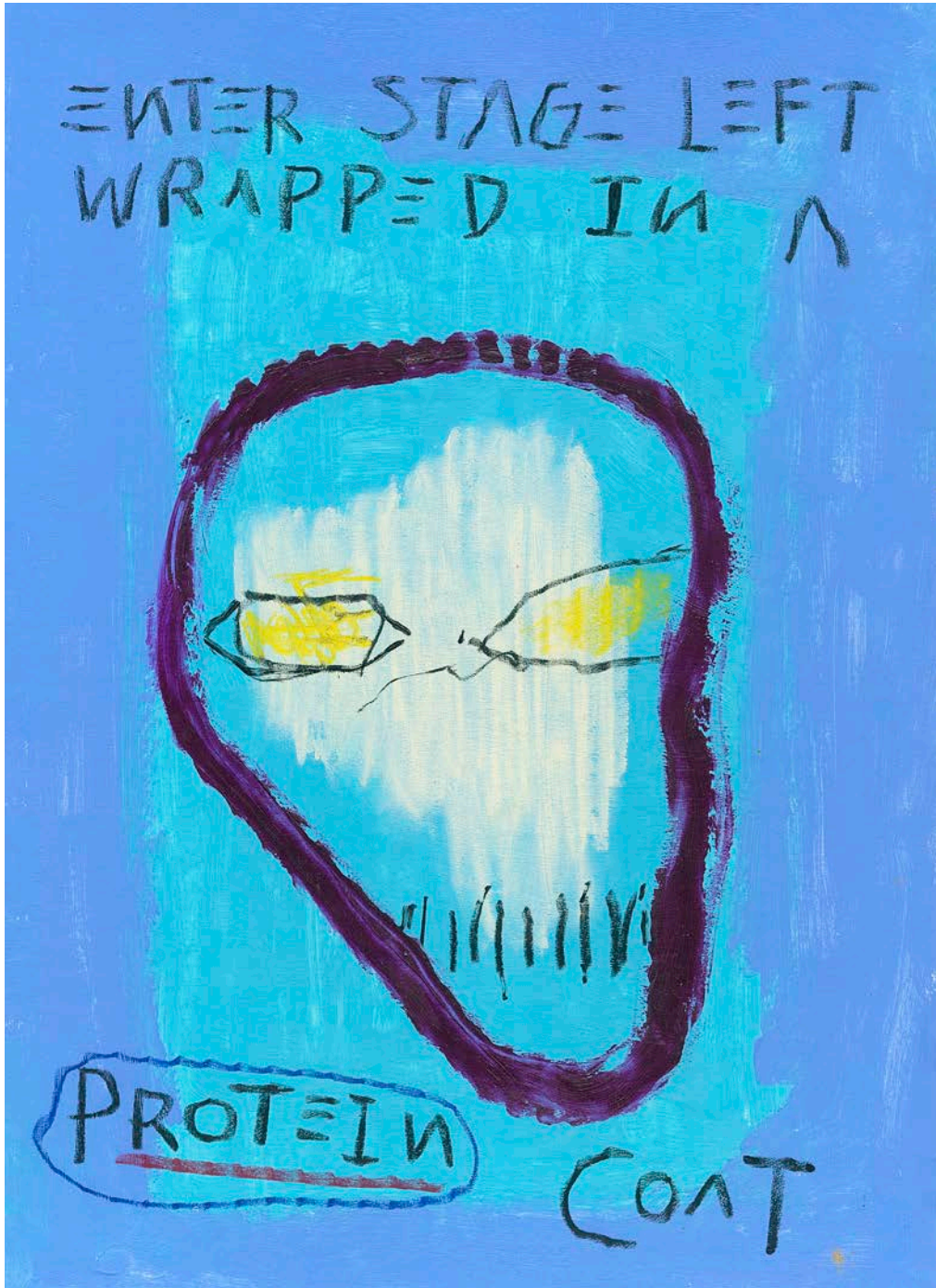
Laura Altshul

Harsh raucous sounds claw the air.
Metal clangs against metal—
insistent desperate homage to workers
in the midst. We turn out on the edge
at seven to join our neighbors and vent,
pounding on pots—makeshift cymbals
bleating fear and frustration—
Ready to bang our heads
against the metal railing. 🐭



Anna Martin, *Red*





Michael Dawson, *Enter Stage Left Wrapped In A Protein Coat*

Too Close

James Hatzopoulos

Over a few feet of theatre floor
my legs briefly tangled with some empty space,
then tightly crossed beneath my seat to brace
against the downstage blocking of an actor
close in towering oration, in song, or
in free-flowing, walloped, sword-wielding chase.
The moment light turned on his nearby face,
I saw beads of sweat, spittle, and more.
This theatre and all others ended
A week later. Most people stayed apart
because of germs, their lungs, and rates of death,
and I now recall how this third act went.
A virus spread, unseen at the start,
but shared through each performer's warm breath. 🦠

Pandemic Produce

Anna Gergen

THREE DAYS HAVE PASSED since New York City went into lockdown, and I am in the produce aisle. Shoppers turn up their masked noses at me as they pass by. I wear no gloves, no mask, and carry no hand sanitizer. I am not scared. This is my third round matched against death, and I am fine, after all. I am still fine. But for a long time, I wasn't.

Since middle school, there had always been a feedback loop playing in my mind: thoughts that I wasn't good enough for anyone, that in fact, I was the worst of them all. By the time I turned seventeen, the noise in my head had become like a constant migraine. In the spring of my junior year, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety.

Over the next semester, I stopped going to school, showering, and eating. Teachers pursed their lips at my persistent do-nothing-ness. My mother and father fought in aggressive spates over what to do about their daughter. Nothing, I thought, just let me do nothing. I tried to kill myself. It is best to say it like that, simply and without overthinking it. I don't remember much about the attempt until the ambulance arrived the next morning. I said to the female paramedic: I meant to do it. I meant to do it. After they tugged me out of the ambulance, though, I said nothing more. I still don't talk about that attempt.

When I return from the grocery store, I begin to wonder: how many Lysol wipes would it take to sanitize today's grocery haul? How can I clean the fruits and vegetables without ending up eating disinfectant chemicals? I vow to ask Google later, and make myself a smoothie.

At night, though, I am still thinking about it, the calculus of health. The mangoes I discarded were probably bought by some other

shopper. Did that shopper wash his hands upon returning home? Did he scrub the fruit with Dawn dish soap and a paper towel? Will our different approaches to fruit-buying matter in this great pandemic gamble, and if so, does that mean I am more at risk than he is?

I start to think I don't know anything about survival.

After I was discharged from the hospital, I had as little regard for living as I had for dying. My psychiatrist, my therapist, and teachers all asked me the same impossible question: *what had I been thinking?* The more they asked, the less I said.

As the months went by, I only got quieter. The therapists still asked the same questions, and the psychiatrist's prescriptions were different in name but not effect. I was still out of school, my friends never reached out to me, and my parents were still fighting. Being twenty-one years old was no different than being eighteen.

My second attempt almost worked. My first memory is of choking as the nurse extracted the intubation tube from my throat. She told me to *breathe, honey, breathe*. I remember shaking my head, but whether that shake meant I can't or I don't want to, I still don't know.

Now ten days have passed since the lockdown in New York began. From China to Italy to the West Coast, the threat grows larger. There are currently 44,635 cases of COVID-19 in New York State. I know people who know people who are sick.

I have been out in the fresh air only twice since my grocery run. I read obits of whole families who were ravaged by the virus. I read how hospitals disproportionately turn away people of color who are sick. Public school closures mean thousands of children from low-income families losing their cafeteria lunches. This is the new normal. I am angry, but mostly, I am afraid.

I am scrolling through all the terrible news on social media when I see his face. Not the face of death, but that of my friend Christopher. I suppose they are the same now.

I knew him tangentially from group therapy as a young adult. Christopher was an outsider among outsiders. He said to our group that



Katrina Simonsen, *Endless Minds*



he didn't want "pity friends." We said we're all a little pitiful so he might as well watch a movie with us. He refused, but the next day he was waiting for us at the theater.

He killed himself three years ago, yet here he is on my social media feed with pictures of his red hair and blue eyes. It startles me: those who loved him are still posting on his online profile, keeping it from falling into digital oblivion. His sister writes: *Dear big brother I love you with all my heart and I deeply miss you.*

Tonight, my chest feels trembly and weak. His loss is still reverberating throughout his community, across state lines, all the way to this isolated survivor in the Bronx.

Thirty-five days have passed since New York closed its doors and sanitized the handles. There are 83,700 cases in the city alone. Watching the numbers grow each day is a sickness in itself. I used to think my attempted suicide had been a choice to escape my fear of living. But this time, it is not only my life in danger, it is everyone's. It is not a choice any of us made. I have given up on mangoes. I have given up a lot: fresh fruit, fresh air, big hugs. But I have also given up putting up an impassive face. I cry when I need to.

When I'm done, I turn up the music in my kitchen, shades up, lights on. I dance, sometimes I even sing. I do it all again the next lonely day. 🐛

March 29th 2020

Griffin Epstein

i. catalogue of dangers, shrunk and grown

a little prescription never hurt anyone, i
find myself thinking though
it isn't true
briefly grateful to have weaned
off of everything (again and
for now)

never so in touch with the changing sky
as when trying to withhold judgment
from the clot of cyclists out the window
their tangle of hair and many children

i mean, who does that? sits at the window
thinking loudly at strangers just trying
to get by

or crosses the street throwing an angry look
all the while murmuring
apology and thanks

ii. grief

on friday everybody reads the same article about grieving
and suddenly people want to name their feelings

not all feelings,
just that one

at home, i prepare lentils and packages of books
email my students over and over
watch videos of meercats and friendly cows

have thoughts like “it’s not fair. i should be there too”
or, more unnerving, “at least you aren’t still alive
for this”

try it

give a name to that 🐛



Matt Farr, *Pocket Flowers*

Statewide Lockdown, Day Fourteen

Ace Boggess

My heart is a revolving door of emotional phases.

Sporadic panic. Didn't want to go shopping,

but I went. I caught a case of shivers, heebie-jeebies,

this virus, the invisible box that every mime gets

trapped inside. I try to stay quiet, safe, escaping

noise of the supermarket, laughter echoing

from walkers on the street below, droning

ignorance of a child-like leader on TV.

It won't be me, I try to convince myself.

Mornings, I'm okay; by night, I've resumed dying.

I didn't want to go shopping, but need sets rules &

I accede. I fill my cart with sacrifice.

I fill my cart with hope like a secret message

read using lemon juice & light. 🐛

Cardio-in-Place

Gloria Heffernan

On the fifth straight day of rain, the temperature drops
and we look out the window through a scrim of April snow.
Donning bathrobes and slippers,
we grab hand-weights, dusty from disuse, and try a new strategy:
marching from room to room
making up lyrics to John Philip Sousa's greatest hits.

Pumping our arms we stomp from our bedroom to the guest room
where tumbleweeds of dog hair pool under the dresser.
Then down the hall to the living room
where last week's newspapers are stacked on the floor
next to a month's worth of *New Yorkers* which we have actually read
instead of merely skimming the cartoons and puzzling over the poems.

Lifting our knees higher, we swing the dumbbells in unison
as we stride through the kitchen, past the refrigerator
and the pantry I have organized alphabetically by soup and bean variety,

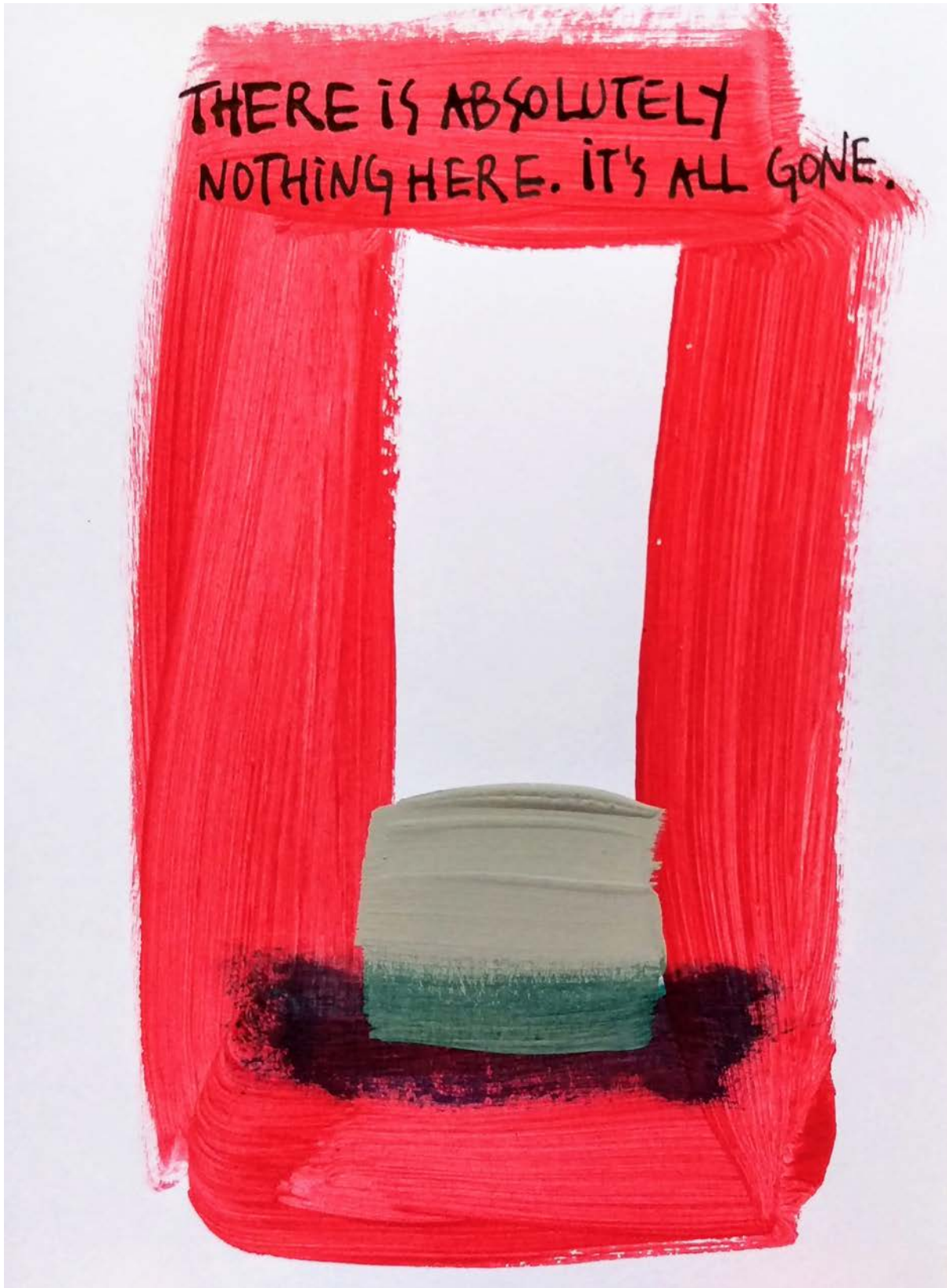
then downstairs to the basement, around the woodshop,
past the washer-dryer, and the spare futon
where the grandkids congregate during holiday sleepovers.
Marching back up the stairs to repeat the circuit,
we urge each other on for the next lap as Max falls in behind us,
tail wagging though clearly confused by the sudden flurry of activity.

I wonder what the neighbors would think if they walked past the window
and caught a glimpse of us in our pajamas parading from room to room.
But I don't worry about it since they are too busy draping sheets
over their kitchen tables to build forts for desperately bored children
who cannot bear to watch another episode of *Umizoomi*,
or play one more round of *I Spy* on Zoom with tech-weary grandparents.

Four laps later, we have traded Sousa for Springsteen,
and even if we weren't "*Born to Run*," we keep going,
certain the endorphins will kick in any minute now.
Stopping to catch our breath, we look out the picture window
where the magnolia tree blooms under a light veil of snow.

We are safe at home where our greatest burden is the privilege of boredom.
Our lungs are full and functioning. We are together.
I can't complain. 🐶

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY
NOTHING HERE. IT'S ALL GONE.



Katherina Radeva, *It's All Gone. Gone. Gone.*

THERE IS NOTHING HERE



Strong Birds Float Softly

Samantha Clark

I 'VE BEEN TOO LONG in front of screens, this last fortnight. A frantic last-minute online recalibration of a suddenly cancelled diary. It's left me distracted, anxious and irritable. I can't seem to plan anything, begin anything. I don't know where to begin.

This is where to begin. Right here, exactly now, exactly this, with my head still spinning with Twitter-feed fear-bulletins and my thoughts jinking randomly like running hares. I can just step out of my front door and walk, with no expectation or plan. That's still allowed, isn't it? In this strange new virus-stricken world? To walk? I know I am lucky to be in lockdown here, in my rural island home.

On an island it doesn't much matter which way you walk. The sea will always meet you in the end. Zipping up my winter parka against the sharp chill of a stiff westerly I step outside and head up the potholed track towards the road, heading straight into the wind. My eyes water and I'm squinting in the cold light as I follow the road a mile or so to where the tarmac gives way to a rutted farm track that ends at the sea. The whole wide bay before me is a churn of white. My eyes and ears are filled with roaring sea and cold white light. Line after line of breakers are flattened to a mess of froth by a wind that can't be far off gale force now. Puffs of glistening white spray break silently against the cliffs beyond, like distant explosions.

Facing out to this immensity of wind and wave and light, exhilarated and yet safe, I feel myself beginning to ease into this unsettling new reality, the sense of a building calamity, and the realisation that really, the land is not firm either. These last weeks the headlines have been screaming 'Stay at Home! Stay safe!' But no one is ever really safe. Not now. Not ever. It's just so easy, in our usual humdrum complacency, to forget that we are not really in control of our lives. We are not in control of nature. And, storm or virus, nature doesn't care about us.

Here at the edge of this cold, turbulent sea I can let myself feel directly, for a moment, that nature is relentless and immense and deadly and life-giving and heartbreakingly lovely, that my life is not about me. It is about participation in this larger mystery. We are none of us in control of our lives.

On the other side of the bay lies a tidal island, the Brough of Birsay. I can just make out the outline of the ruined medieval monastery that huddles near the causeway. The monks who came here to pray so precariously close to the sea's edge must have sensed that this tip of land exposed to the whole heft of the North Atlantic could open them up to something more powerful than themselves. "*If we are to feel at home in this world we have to come to know we are not steering this ship*"¹ says Franciscan friar Richard Rohr. It's a hard lesson. I'm not sure I'm there yet.

Seen from this island shore, the pandemic is like a huge tidal wave. We can see it coming, but as much as we may try, we each of us know we can't outrun it, that we or our loved ones may not survive, and that even if we stay well, this virus will still sweep away much that we love. It has already taken so much. No, we are not in control. We never have been.

I'm right in the teeth of the gale. Gritty sand is blowing up from the beach and it stings my cheek painfully. I pull my hood up and skirt the beach heading towards the village. My neighbour's Angus cattle, bony-hipped beasts that winter out in all weathers, stoic through adversities of mud and storms and long black nights, are huddled around the silage feeders. No sign of new grass yet. Spring is in no hurry to reach us here.

¹ Rohr, Richard. (2020, April 2). *Reality Initiating Us: Part One: Lesson Four: You Are Not In Control*. Center for Action and Contemplation. <https://cac.org/lesson-four-you-are-not-in-control-2020-04-02/>

For the Orcadian filmmaker and writer Margaret Tait, who spent time studying in Rome, the mildness of the Italian spring only served to make her see her home island more clearly. In April 1950 she wrote:

*...the North in Spring is a hard time;
Bird song pierces and strong winds blow.
Strong birds float softly on the strong sea.
Wild flashing sea stutters on hard green land.
Green cries to us, blue and white laugh at us,
And we stand, buffeted, laughing, crying against the sea.
Oh, who would choose the sweetness and not know
The saltness, flashing whiteness and the strength?*

I am buffeted certainly, and somewhere between laughing and crying, scoured out by the wind-driven sand and salt, as I pass through the quiet village, the empty holiday lets, the locked public toilets and shuttered shop. The wind tears my thoughts away from the grasp of my worrying mind and sends them tumbling across the fields.

As I take the last turn for home along the deserted main road with the gale at my back it seems as if I am seeing the world beyond my own circular thoughts more clearly again, in all its immediacy and sudden moments of surprise. Crowds of greylag geese waddle heavily around the fields, lifting in ragged groups to pass overhead in loose formations, yapping and squawking. To my left and right leggy brown hares gallop and tussle each other in the empty pastures.

May I too learn to float softly on this strong sea.

Yes. This hard spring day I would know the saltness, the crying blue of the sea, the flashing whiteness of the strong birds, and this cold wind shoving at me. And I choose it over the sweetness.

I have walked myself home. 🐣

The new normal circa April 2020

Peter Chua

In the new normal
Your castle becomes your jail
The draw bridge is raised
A self-imposed enslavement
Your defence from the disease.

In the new normal
Smiles are hidden away, to
Enjoy by themselves.
Our human intimacy
Sleeps till we can touch again.

In the new normal
The game of musical chairs
Everyone will play
Dancing in their own bubble
To a beat that's never right.

In the new normal
When it seems the coast is clear
Will you bet the odds?
Live life as it once was and
Be 'the new normal' again? 🦘





MUSIC AZA Allsop, *Do Better*

Kathy Bruce, *Biophilia Hypothesis*

2020

Carol Clark Williams

The year repeats its name
like a stutter
all curves and lines, numbers
with swan necks
and diameters
round like open mouths
appalled, gasping for breath—
O, O

April spits hard rain
between its teeth,
thick and slippery as motor oil;
storms slam down
my forty-year-old lilac tree,
shredding the fragrant flowers
I've nurtured, sheltered,
culling what hope I could.

It is battered, diminished
like these backward-looking months
where only our four walls
are almost safe, if we lock our doors
and mind the roof.
But roots and branches are still alive
as you are, as I am, planning how
to bloom again next spring. 🐣

how do we figure

Cassandra Windwalker

count the coffins, dear

we cannot name them, plainly—
they are too many, too spare,
too bare of any remark
to be remembered by name

and they found their space in clay
unencumbered by shadows of the grieving,
so we will only count them

not color them out
in shades of grief and love and memory

those colors are best left for gardens
others will plant—

you and me, we will count
the coffins, measure lives by handfuls
of dirt, and name our days

the absence of the infected. 🐛

Poem for the Pandemic #5: Easter Sunday, April 2020

Herman Sutter

Morning's minion stirs,
eager to awaken,
always wanting to open
some new door, always
longing to step outside
of darkness into the first faint glow
where anxious birds call night's
long bluff with incautious
song, stirring the stillness:
bold, impetuous, small.

This is the song I love best of all,
and I would sing
even with the sun already high
and the day half done. I would sing
even now, in the heat
of an April afternoon, sing
like those beloved birds
awaiting the sun.

Enough darkness.
The tomb is empty;
the night is done.
Open every window,
throw open every door,
let us hide no more.
Come forth, come forth.
Hear the dawn. Let us go
forth and join the song. 🐣



Do Walker, Violets and Nine for the Paul and Pat Trotta Family



Surbhi Pathania, *A retreat, a quarantine, a sickness*

Glitch

Alfred Fournier

WHEN WE WOKE UP, the wireless was down. For the first time in two months of pandemic lockdown, my nine-year-old daughter freaked out.

“I have no entertainment!” she moaned, and I realized how important the distraction had been for her—Netflix, YouTube, games on her phone. She didn’t mention—and I didn’t point out—this also meant no Zoom “playdates” with her friends.

She’d been home-schooling, sort of, but not really. Had a hard time focusing on the teacher’s voice over Zoom. Kept looking at the miniaturized faces of her friends on the laptop screen, eyes darting from one to another.

For weeks, I’d probed around the edges of her calm demeanor. How did she feel? She never responded to such questions, but gradually started sharing vivid memories of good times with her friends: Magiquest at Great Wolf Lodge, the Ghost Rider at Knott’s Berry Farm, Camp Collie with her schoolmates. I smiled at the pleasure in her voice as she relived each moment.

She started planning her tenth birthday party, nine months away, her voice excited as she flooded me with details. She’d invite everyone. They’d play laser tag and video games at Jakes Unlimited, go out for pizza, then fall asleep watching movies in front of the TV. Her face lit up. I watched her in silence, wondering what the world would be like nine months from now.

When I restarted the modem, the internet worked right away. My daughter said nothing. She settled into the couch, starting Netflix and scooping up her phone in a single fluid motion. 🐜

Obituary #4

Timothy Berrigan

AS HURTFUL as this is,¹ the bright, morning sky² talks³ in an eloquent⁴ long-observed phenomenon, but one that remains poorly understood.⁵ And so⁶ they⁷ developed a gentle but straightforward way of explaining the process⁸ to⁹ anyone willing to listen to the science of rainbows.¹⁰ They¹¹ wanted¹² to mix warmth and love with seriousness and rigor.¹³ Each parent alone, on a separate floor¹⁴ were shadows behind the California sunlight.¹⁵ The bright, morning sky¹⁶ and the engine¹⁷ dying almost in tandem. A psychological or emotional component could play a role.¹⁸ They fell in love against his family's wishes¹⁹ making them both more whimsical and more terrifying.²⁰ "Since we have left home," he wrote. "We neither dwelled on the past nor anticipated the future."²¹ The attempt failed and became despondent.²² What happens most of the time is nothing.²³ Shadows sunlight,²⁴ and those that go above, beyond, below and within, embracing both the infinities²⁵ live without each other.²⁶

1 Alfredo and Susana Pabatao Die; Health Care Aides on the Front Lines. March 26 and March 30, 2020.

2 Jerzy Glowczewski, Polish Ace in a Spitfire, Dies at 97. April 13, 2020.

3 John Horton Conway, a 'Magical Genius' in Math, Dies at 82. April 11, 2020.

4 Hailey Herrera, 25, Dies; Therapy Student Focused on Families. April 7, 2020.

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12 Alfredo and Susana Pabatao Die; Health Care Aides on the Front Lines. March 26 and March 30, 2020.

13 Sandra Santos-Vizcaino, Beloved Brooklyn Teacher, Dies at 54. March 31, 2020.

14 Alfredo and Susana Pabatao Die; Health Care Aides on the Front Lines. March 26 and March 30, 2020.

15 Patricia Bosworth, Actress-Turned-Author, Dies at 86. April 2, 2020.

16 Jerzy Glowczewski, Polish Ace in a Spitfire, Dies at 97. April 13, 2020.

17 Cristina, Cult Downtown New York Singer, Dies at 64. March 31, 2020.

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26 Alfredo and Susana Pabatao Die; Health Care Aides on the Front Lines. March 26 and March 30, 2020.

RIGHT Peggy Bloomer, *Seeing the Trees in the Forest*



Obituary #7

Timothy Berrigan

I **N THE END**⁸⁶ you are not managing⁸⁷ your event.⁸⁸ We⁸⁹ graduated from⁹⁰ heart problems likely connected to⁹¹ the dead of winter and the muggy heat of summer.⁹² The inspiration⁹³ singing as easily as⁹⁴ the stream.⁹⁵ Something rare and exciting:⁹⁶ an abiding interest in⁹⁷ farewell.⁹⁸ The streetscape⁹⁹ smiled broadly,¹⁰⁰ equally beautiful in and out.¹⁰¹ And when¹⁰² days of wonder¹⁰³ sing¹⁰⁴ as if¹⁰⁵ conversing,¹⁰⁶ I miss¹⁰⁷ her.¹⁰⁸ And when,¹⁰⁹ in the end, it was as if she had said, “I’m not going alone,” and as if he had said, “You’re not going alone,”¹¹⁰ then came a sudden¹¹¹ six-week battle with new¹¹² natural history.¹¹³ On Monday¹¹⁴ the messages began pinging.¹¹⁵ Saturday rolled around and he fell out of touch.¹¹⁶

86 Daniel and Valerie Zane, Married 71 Years, Die 2 Days Apart. April 17 & 19, 2020.

87 Eduardo L. Gancayco, Who Kept Hospital Workers Fed, Dies at 62. May 6, 2020.

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90 Beryl Bernay, Children’s TV Host With a Varied Career, Dies at 94. March 29, 2020.

91 Steve Hann, Sidewalk Bookseller With a Brainy Following, Dies at 67. April 4, 2020.

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Mary Pauline Herron, *Raven Descending*

How the Pandemic Killed Me

Ahrend Torrey

*Top U.S. Officials Warn of 'Our Pearl Harbor';
Deaths in Country May be Undercounted*
— *New York Times* Headline
April 5, 2020

*Too many lives taken—
I say to myself—
too many lives.*

So I touch the petunia out of hope it can save us,

nothing.

I let the big ear of the geranium
run through my hand,

nothing.





MMO.

Mette Norrie, *Linescapes 14*

I clip the stalk of the rust-colored daylily,

nothing.

I'm so dead,

I poke my finger at the long-thorned cactus:
it bleeds...

Nothing. I feel nothing.

Nothing. 🐛

Katabasis

Ronald Kelly

IT'S BEEN SURPRISINGLY difficult to get used to the feeling of sunlight in my eyes now that I work in the daytime. The new normal is built on sleeping, instead of working, at night. I wake up for my nine-to-five with coffee grounds ready for the French press, and worry more about the article I read on cholesterol in boiled coffee than about whether or not I will get through the day.

This time last year, when SARS was just an acronym I hadn't looked up yet, I lived in New York for the summer. I had enrolled in an intensive Ancient Greek course that ran through normal working hours, from eight to six. Even now, sometimes phrases in strange accents will pop into my brain. *Kakos phronountes*—literally “thinking badly,” a bit of invective courtesy of Medea. *Katabasis*—descent into the underworld. I rubbed shoulders with brilliant graduate students and professors who wrote lovely Attic hexameters about the way I was constantly falling asleep in class.

I'd take the M back to Brooklyn from Manhattan, my great-grandmother's home cooking waiting for me. My auntie Darlisa and her daughter lived on another floor of the same building. Grandma seemed to enjoy taking care of me, my offers of cooking and help with errands ignored. I would sneak a nap on the couch, maybe a shower.

But come eleven PM, I would leave the apartment to bus, train, and walk to a warehouse belonging to a large commercial shipping company by the river in Queens. The bus dropped me off half a mile from the warehouse, and I'd pick my way in the pitch dark down train tracks and into the concrete, taking the elevator down into the guts of the world of package delivery.

The chain of moving boxes and envelopes moves through hours nine-to-five hustlers don't even think about. It flows down the highway in semis that have to be unloaded, their cargo sorted onto the trucks that prowl the streets before the dew burns off the grass. Four days a week, more if I needed the money, I hurled boxes instead of sleeping at night with other people too broke or too busy to make all their money by day. I wandered through that concrete underworld with sore arms and jeans that became permanently filthy after my first time wearing them on shift, a bandanna cinched around my forehead to catch the sweat.

Every morning I took the elevator up out of the warehouse and walked outside to a sunlight my body had managed to forget in the time I had been underground. It hurt my eyes with its brilliance. My weary body too wrung out to appreciate relief, I would take a seat on the bus, hold my backpack to my lap, and desperately try to pour Ancient Greek into my sleep-deprived mind, eyes still sore from the sun.

Two months before the pandemic, I got an office job through a temp agency. Two months after that, my Auntie Darlisa lay dead in a casket, chest broken by heart attacks and lung damage. Living in the hardest hit city in the world, she was just another casualty. My family's prayers couldn't save her. I don't believe in God, so maybe my prayers just counted for less.

I learned what she did for a living only after she died: an MTA conductor. While I had drowned in sleeplessness, perhaps she had been operating the train I tried not to sleep on. One of the peculiarities of this pandemic is how its tragedy and farce live side by side. Even in my immediate family, I was probably the one who knew Auntie the least.



She supported me even though work and school kept us distant, sent a few dollars when I couldn't quite make bills and food add up in my new place. But while I had learned to sleep at night and work in the daytime, Auntie had breathed in the wrong puff of air, gotten sent home with ibuprofen when she went to the doctor for help, and died only weeks later in pain.

Auntie was a great woman. She never changed the world, but she changed the people next to her. She believed in God, her family, and her community, and she dressed like a million bucks on Sunday. But instead of taking the bus to New York for her funeral, the last time I saw her was over Zoom, dressed in white. Our family dealt with grief alone in our houses. And my new office job had gone remote before the disease even got to our city, so I was safe at home with my cat, waiting on packages that only months ago it had been my job to load onto trucks.

So now I live easy. I work much less hard than I did throwing boxes, even though I'm full-time, and now I don't even have to put on pants. I haven't seen the inside of a warehouse in what's going to be a year in less than six months. Between the antidepressants, the new job, and the mandatory home stay, the pandemic has freed me from most of life's pains.

That's the evil of it: an easy life in exchange for the death of people I love, and the knowledge that the price of my luxury is the misery of others who still work where I've escaped. I thought I was going crazy in New York, hearing birds sing in Ancient Greek as they bathed in puddles, but now I know that I was closer to reality than I am now when I was overworked and all but broken. Nothing is more human than suffering, and nothing so inhuman as freedom while others still suffer below my feet.

I believe that Auntie is resting in peace, both underground and in heaven. It's only the dead who can see both the sun and the world beneath the concrete. 🐛

LEFT Desiree Dufresne, *self portrait twenty twenty*

Paradox

Lyall Harris

at the end of this
the paradox of the pandemic
(at once medieval and dystopian)
will be cliché—
that we would finally find each other
(as swiftly as water over rapids
as urgently as need)
in the midst of forced isolation—
scarved or masked at distances
on sidewalks or country roads
aware of our lungs
of spring and pollen
of insects and fear
of a lack of emissions
of countless felled trees
waiting like coffins in the expanse
of the force of nature
of our breath under the bandana
of how it miraculously carried words
to the people we loved
of a bright green and yellow tractor
aslant in a field
as if this were a lunch break
of row after row of quieted cars
side view mirrors framing the past
of the transformer on Fifth Avenue
on every avenue catching midday sun
gleaming like all the machines of our time
of how they bask and bask
in shiny obsolescence 🐜

Claustrophobia

Ruth Hoberman

Four people in the narrow house
and in the basement knitting—
helixes of hair, torso, eyes,

and something made of clouds or sky:
whatever's in the tea my granddaughter
serves. *It's full of germs, she says, but*

*not the kind that make you sick; these
only want to play.* I take a cup and blow
before I sip. Lovers crowd the tiny house—

her father's eyes, her mother's mouth and will,
my hair, whose rage? What throws her down
screaming no no no and rattling our bones?

Let's all be horses, she says next. I'm tired
of playing but offer oats. She's only three,
crammed with us in the flimsy house, her mother

eight months on, her father quarantined.
When will I die? she asks. *Not for years
and years and years and years.*

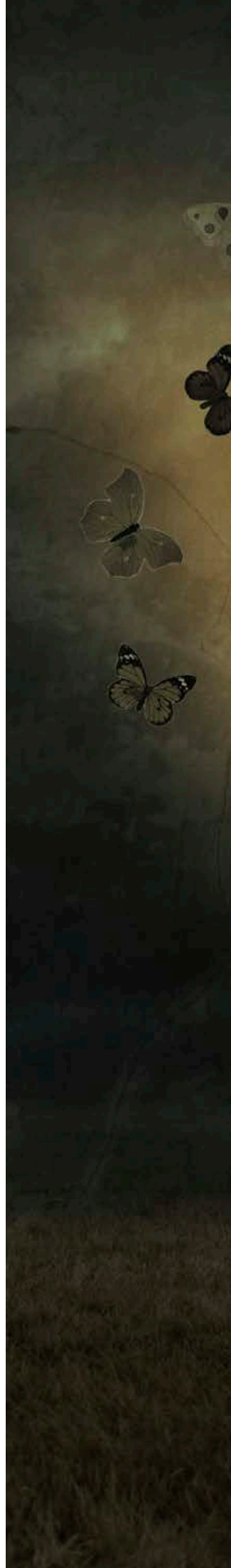
*Look, she says and runs, arms flung wide,
dodging tables, couches, and chairs.
I'm a fairy seahorse, flying.* 🐠

Balance

Rex Wilder

Dishes had been shattering in my brain since April.
I had been shattering, too, but what passed for plates
Inside my head thudded silently, like roadkill
Heaven-sent (soft, fleshy rhythms) down the interstates.
My brain: too small for my skull since I fell ill,
Rattled when I was. Some- times I was sure
I was thinking rationally, as if I carried an umbrella
Through a rousing storm and *felt* dry, *felt* cured. 🐜

RIGHT Maureen Denny, *Letting Go*





Day 44

Shurouq Ibrahim

I had him five months ago,
before the virus reached our city.
The experts now say the virus was already here,
but it had spared us.
I took my son home.
Over 43 days, I watched his hair go from reddish brown to brownish blond.
No eyebrows or lashes to eyebrows and lashes.
There was a birthmark on his left hand which was growing with him.
His nails needed to be cut every three days.
Layers. One layer more than you.
Temperature set at 77.
I left my home for the first time on Day 44 for a checkup of my own.
Where am I? What is this place?
Wait inside your car. Call when you're here. Follow the signs. Stand on the
stickers. Mask on.
I'm done. I sob in my car. What if he looks different when I get home?
I am home. Mask off. I wash my hands vigorously.
I inspect him as he sleeps. I check his hands and feet.
I thank God. They don't need to be cut. 🐜

RIGHT Hyewon Cho, *Myself*





Andrew Salisbury, *Still Waiting*

Distance

Amie Campbell

I see your face in that tiny box on my screen
I long to curl up in your arms
Snuggle under that quarantine beard
And listen to your heartbeat

I can't remember the last time you held me close
When you enveloped me in your long arms
And I melted into that feeling of safety and comfort

My memories fade with each passing week
I no longer remember what your soap smells like
I can't quite recall just how much taller than me you are

I hope I still remember how to hug you
When we finally meet again 🐼

What I learned from my seven-year-old nephew (your son) while you were away camping during the COVID-19 pandemic

Rhiannon Weber

I can write poetry (or what I consider to be) on a torn piece of wide-ruled with only the back of a Pokémon binder for support.

That he has a toothbrush that flashes a blue light, so he'll know when to stop brushing.

That he can tolerate corn dogs for dinner every day of the week.

That I'm not his dad and don't roll him in a towel burrito after a bath.

I learned that his classmate, Malaysia, has trouble staying awake during online classes.

That you don't brush his hair regularly.

That his pillowcases smell like our parents' house (and probably haven't been washed since you moved out).

That he's good at coming up with random user and password names (marshmallowsarentreal99)

That he has arbitrary rules when playing Pokémon cards.



DubbleX, *Water in Many Tongues*

That he has a lot of questions about homeless people and why his mom chose to become one.

I learned that he's afraid you won't come back from your camping trip; afraid you might be like his mom and decide you don't want to be a dad anymore.

That these thoughts can be quelled by guaranteeing him you'll return because once he was born, being a dad was no longer a choice but a responsibility, a serious one, like towel-burrito serious. 🌮

Covid Heart

Margaret Hawkins

I AM MY SISTER'S LEGAL GUARDIAN. She has schizophrenia. She lives in the house we grew up in, about a half hour away from me. She lives alone now. Before, my parents took care of her, then my father did, and when he died he left a trust, not huge but sufficient, which I use to maintain the house and to buy her necessities, such as ice cream bars, and occasional luxuries that include an unusual amount of Scotch tape. She also receives SSI. This combined income allows me to keep my sister in her home, where she wants to stay. This arrangement has gone on for over a decade.

I usually visit on Sunday. Our routine is set—lunch, The New York Times, the jigsaw puzzle, occasionally a visitor. Now, except for the daily caregiver who comes during the week, visitors are out. I've tried to explain about the virus and she seems to get it. We do elbow bumps now or air-high-fives instead of hugs, too bad since part of her amazing partial recovery after my father's death and her subsequent agreement to take a small daily dose of Risperdal (for a while) was her new willingness to be touched. But her flexibility in adjusting to the new demands of a worldwide pandemic is itself a sign of improvement. In fact, she's weirdly down with it. The thing is, social isolation and the fear that something invisible is trying to kill you are exactly in synch with my sister's worldview. What the rest of us are living through is a mild version of what she's always lived, particularly for the thirty-plus years when her symptoms were at their worst.

In fact, in that little bubble that is my life with my sister on Sundays, our life has gotten easier, not harder. I've noticed a strange mood settling over our world, a kind of creeping kindness. The child next door brings little gifts, drawings and handmade objects. Recently, a beautiful plant showed up on the back porch, with no note. Neighbors bring home-baked cookies. A friend sent me part of her stimulus payment, which I passed on to my sister's caregiver as hazard pay. Now John, the landscaper I hired to take care of the lawn at my sister's house, has stopped sending us a bill. This is particularly strange. My husband, who takes care

of our lawn and knows how to talk about shrubs, is in charge of communications with John. Lately he points out every few weeks that he hasn't gotten a bill lately. Then he calls John and John makes excuses. He says he's busy. Last time he said he was busy buying a house, but that he'd send a bill next week. It didn't come. We've discussed just sending him money but sometimes he does extra work and we don't know what we owe. Recently I called John and the same thing happened. John said he'd been busy building patios and that he wasn't good at paperwork. (Earlier, we always got bills.) In the meantime the lawn gets mowed like clockwork. This has been going on for months.

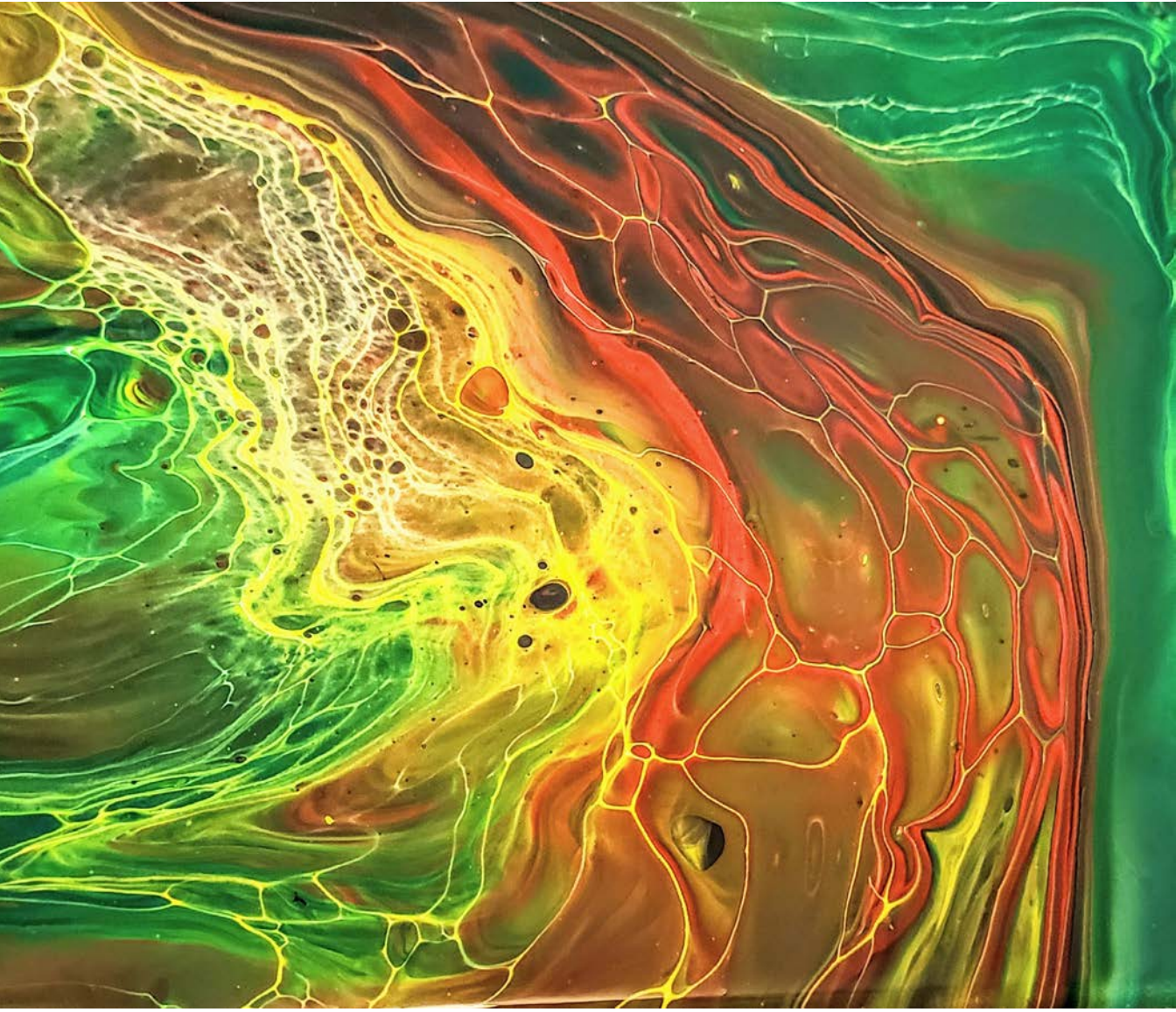
There are some very nice neighbors, the cookie-bakers, who live nearby, who were friendly with my parents and are sympathetic to our situation. I see them walking to and from church on Sundays, when I visit. I've begun to suspect them of secretly paying our bill.

I became so convinced of this I asked John directly if someone else was paying him. He said no, but he hesitated and I'm not 100% sure I believe him. They might have told him to deny it! I've thought of just asking the neighbors if they're paying my bill, to thank them, but that would embarrass us both if they weren't. And if they said no, how would I know they were telling the truth? They might lie!

I've become obsessed with this problem, trying to figure out what's going on. I've begun to see patterns of kindness everywhere, glowing webs of connectedness, and to wonder if this too is a kind of paranoia, an opposite sort from what my sister suffers, when you think people are secretly doing you good but you can't prove it. Could it be another strange side symptom of the virus, like Covid toes? Might we call it Covid Heart? Has the pandemic sparked some underground movement of radical kindness?

My sister has a different take on things. She seems to think I have some control over the virus. One Sunday in April she threw down the newspaper she'd been reading and commanded me to lift the virus up and let people out of their sickbay beds. "How?" I asked. In a tone suggesting it was obvious and I should have figured this out myself, she said, "By having fun."

This morning I again asked my husband what we should do about the unbilled landscaping—I'm afraid I have asked him many times—and he shouted, "Nothing!" Then he calmed down and quoted an obscure Dutch aphorism: Let God's waters flow over God's green land. 🐜



Mary Snyder, *Breaking Free*

The View From Here is Best Kept Hidden

Celia Donovan

I CANNOT DESCRIBE THE VIEW from here; my location must remain secret, or lives will be at risk, just know that I am somewhere discreet, tucked away, protected.

See, I came into a women's refuge just before lockdown, and became promptly marooned.

When news of the pandemic arrives I'm busy filling out endless forms, organising removal of belongings from the home I have fled, navigating abusive messages from my ex and trying to diffuse difficult communications with his family. I'm dealing with police reports and solicitors' letters and the loss of two pregnancies; I bat the news reports away like an annoying buzzing fly, I LITERALLY DO NOT HAVE THE TIME, PATIENCE, MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL CAPACITY FOR A GLOBAL PANDEMIC RIGHT NOW!

I don't have time for the concerns of my friends and family, who are scared about their lives, children, jobs, the incoming threat to our health system and economy.

I'm already stuck in survival mode, permanently running on adrenaline, blankly going through the motions; I look haunted and cry daily, but only when I have time, and right now I don't have time!

And then suddenly, all we have is time.

So much free time. So much time alone.

Communal areas are shut down, meetings with support staff become video calls. As government advice changes, new rules are pushed through our letter boxes.

Suddenly the residents become more like fellow inmates, with undetermined lengthy sentences, our lives on hold, time suspended.

We joke that we're allowed out to exercise 'in the prison yard,' i.e. the car park; only one household is allowed out at a time, to comply with social distancing rules.

We're not allowed alcohol here so I cannot resort to starting 'Wine O'clock' earlier each day.

This is a blessing. I decide to use this time to be more health conscious, to look after my body as it has been through so much in recent months.

I slowly work through the trauma and pain of the life events that have led me to this place. Some days I throw myself into self-help like a hyper child in a ball pit. Other days I am brimming with creativity and I write for hours, or paint.

Acts of kindness sprout everywhere. I am sent encouraging words from friends, a friend sends me artwork to cheer the place up, another brings me plants and I grow French beans and sunflowers on my windowsill, a church gifts bouquets when I use their food bank, people donate to the refuge.

April Fool's Day passes with a feeling of unease, the world is so crazy right now that anything seems plausible!

Everyone on 'the outside' seems to tear through their 'to do list' with great enthusiasm, finally getting 'round to painting garden fences, rearranging loft spaces, baking all manner of atrocities, continuing previously abandoned projects, taking up new hobbies, pulling rusty bikes out of storage. This frenzy is increasingly hard to watch on social media.

I have no garden to maintain, no furniture to restore, my projects remain unfinished in storage somewhere, my books unread and mildewing.

I make do with what I have mostly, but sometimes I sit and fester, watching rubbish that I can't concentrate on, wearing the same clothes for days, the dishes build up and the bin overflows.

Easter passes.

Truthfully I enjoy the time alone, it is calm and I don't have to put anyone else's needs first, I have the space to listen to my own.

In my small room above the security office I channel my grief for the life I have had to walk away from, processing the ecstasy and pain of losing a love affair gone deeply wrong. Sometimes I feel like I will crash through their ceiling, a shrieking shambles of a human, reborn onto their desk.

But I manage to contain myself, respectfully keeping noise levels down, and I keep my leaping to online dance classes to a minimum.

Physically I lose weight, though I do not know how heavy the burdens I carried coming in here will be, whether they will merely have melted and reformed, taking up new space on the road ahead.

The world outside seems to spiral further into apocalypse territory, or at least the media will spin it that way, continuing to multiply fear and divide us like cells.

Countless mistakes and acts of sheer negligence from the government, corruption everywhere, poverty soars as people lose their jobs, race riots and protests explode, and I do my bit from the safety of indoors, with my phone as both my weapon and tool of peace. I read, write, educate myself, meditate, weep, validate the voices of others, sit in silence, observe and shake in fear.

I tell myself repeatedly that I am a survivor, I am safe, outside is no scarier than the inside of my head.

My birthday passes.

I'm offered permanent accommodation from next month and I'm scared. I've been suspended in this safe bubble, this snapshot, this pause, time is speeding up, suddenly the world is opening up again, a rapidly evolving and adapting society awaits.

I want to hold my mother and hear that everything's going to be okay. Because it has to be, I've not come this far, through this much chaos for things to not be okay!

But I have a cough I might have to get tested. Because the world outside is still on fire and some of us seem to burn more easily.

Soon I will leave this 'women's prison,' which is actually a palace, a tower for damsels in distress, learning to save themselves. I must walk out a survivor, not a victim, and I must live in hope for the same for this pandemic, that loved ones make it through unscathed. I will remain eternally thankful for the cocoon that lockdown has provided, the chance to rebuild myself. Although it is too soon to brag of butterfly wings, I have remembered how to let the light in. 🦋



Lockdown

A Place Where Healing Begins

Aileen Paterson

I **N DECEMBER 2019**, I was diagnosed with autism. I was 48 years old. Four months later the UK entered lockdown, just as I hoped my life might finally begin.

Lockdown, for me, has been about trying to come to terms with nearly half a century of misunderstandings and misdiagnosis, lost opportunities, broken relationships and a system that failed me again and again. I have finally reached a place where I might be able to rid myself of the unnamed curse I felt myself to carry, that caused all of my best efforts to fail, that seemed to make people hate me, though I didn't know why.

I belong to a generation which never understood what autism really was, with only those with learning disabilities and high support needs being given a diagnosis and support. Even now, there is little understanding of the impact it has had on my generation. Of how it destroyed our mental and physical health as we tried so hard to be normal, whatever that was, to hide our true autistic selves. We became invisible, shamed into silence. We learned to hate who we were and to accept abuse from others.

However hard I try to root myself in the present, my mind is called back to the past, to understand myself anew, with new knowledge and a kinder attitude towards myself. But also so much anger and

frustration. I ask myself unanswerable questions over and over again. What if? What if I had been diagnosed sooner, what would my life have been? I stare out of my window at the estuary below, watch the waves as if they might provide me with answers.

I have survived lockdown by immersing myself in art and writing and Zoom conversations with friends. I try to understand myself. I turn away from the news and social media, the daily death tolls and the prophecies of doom. I am beginning the self-discovery that most people start as children. I begin to ask myself, who are you really?

In the silence and my daily walks at the edge of the sea, I turn these questions over in my mind. As if the sea might reveal myself to me, as if I might discover a new self washed up on the shore, exhausted from a lifetime of trying to stay afloat.

I chat online with my autistic friends; now I am part of the autistic community, a place where I can be accepted as I truly am. I am part of the Scottish Women's Autism Network, which supports over 300 autistic women with meetups and online conversations. Autistic volunteers help for free because they know how much it is needed.

Together, we begin the slow and painful work of healing, of piecing together the fragments of our broken selves. We laugh and we talk and we try to understand ourselves, to see things as they truly are, to care for the unacknowledged and unsupported autistic women in our community. To acknowledge the pain and the trauma and the abuse we have endured, when no one else will. 🐛

Breaking News

Iona Barrie

UK in lockdown
The headline reads
No matter where I hide
I find it catches me

Turn off the TV, put away the books
Lock all the doors
Not going out anymore

Let the dread wash over my aching body
Knots tightening
Deep within my core

Oh, how I have been here before
Endless, empty days followed by nights of prayer
That I may be released from my flesh prison and freed from the confines of my mind

Rooted on my bed
When morning comes once again
Let me move! My brain screams
Yet my limbs remain motionless

100 days have now passed by
With nothing to show to another's eye
A sense of shame hangs over this house
Shadowed by the lingering regret of a life now lost



Shielding

Nathalie Mares

I AM AFRAID of leaving my flat, but it's not because of the virus. While everyone else is rightly concerned with contracting it, I have only one fear: my own body. Binge eating has been a part of my life since childhood, but the incessant lockdown messaging of 'get fit to beat the virus!', 'obesity link to COVID-19', and 'ration food to combat panic buying' now plays on a sad, repetitive loop in my head. I force-feed myself daily—part compulsion, part habit—and my body has acquired contours of flesh that I don't recognise. It is these that I need to shield.

As I stand in the kitchen, I inhale the comforting, malty scent of Edinburgh's breweries that drifts through the open window. I take in the impressive feast on the table before me: a jar of Nutella, a loaf of Warburton's Toastie thick white bread, a pack of Tunnock's Milk Chocolate Tea Cakes, a bag of Haribo Tangfastics and a pouch of Milkybar Buttons. Time slows. The evening mid-May light reflects off the confectionary packaging, casting translucent red and gold shadows around me. Dust particles transform into flecks of glitter that float lazily past in a golden haze. Entranced, I take my seat at the banquet. My tongue fizzes with anticipation, and I swallow down hard on the saliva flooding my mouth.

The aftermath is never pretty. Head resting in the crook of my arm, I jolt awake from the sugar-induced coma to the sounds of seagulls shrieking over a discarded Chinese takeaway. The anaesthetising caramel transfusion has evidently worn off. I squint, dry eyed and drowsy at the scene before me: a pile of wrapper carcasses. A dull pressure builds in my temples and burning citric acid threatens to emerge from my oesophagus. I force myself up. Lumbering into the cool, gloomily lit bedroom, I stand in front of the full length mirror. A puffy and pallid face with dim, sugar-glazed eyes blinks back at me. I lift up my right arm, as if to flex a bicep, but grab instead at the excess bulk; tributaries of purple stretchmarks spread across the



Peggy Bloomer, *The Weathered Tree*

swelling skin. I grimace. Reaching for a face mask, the familiar suffocating pressure begins to bear down on my chest, and beads of sweat form around the blue surgical fabric. I take in one long deep breath and exhale shakily, before turning to leave.

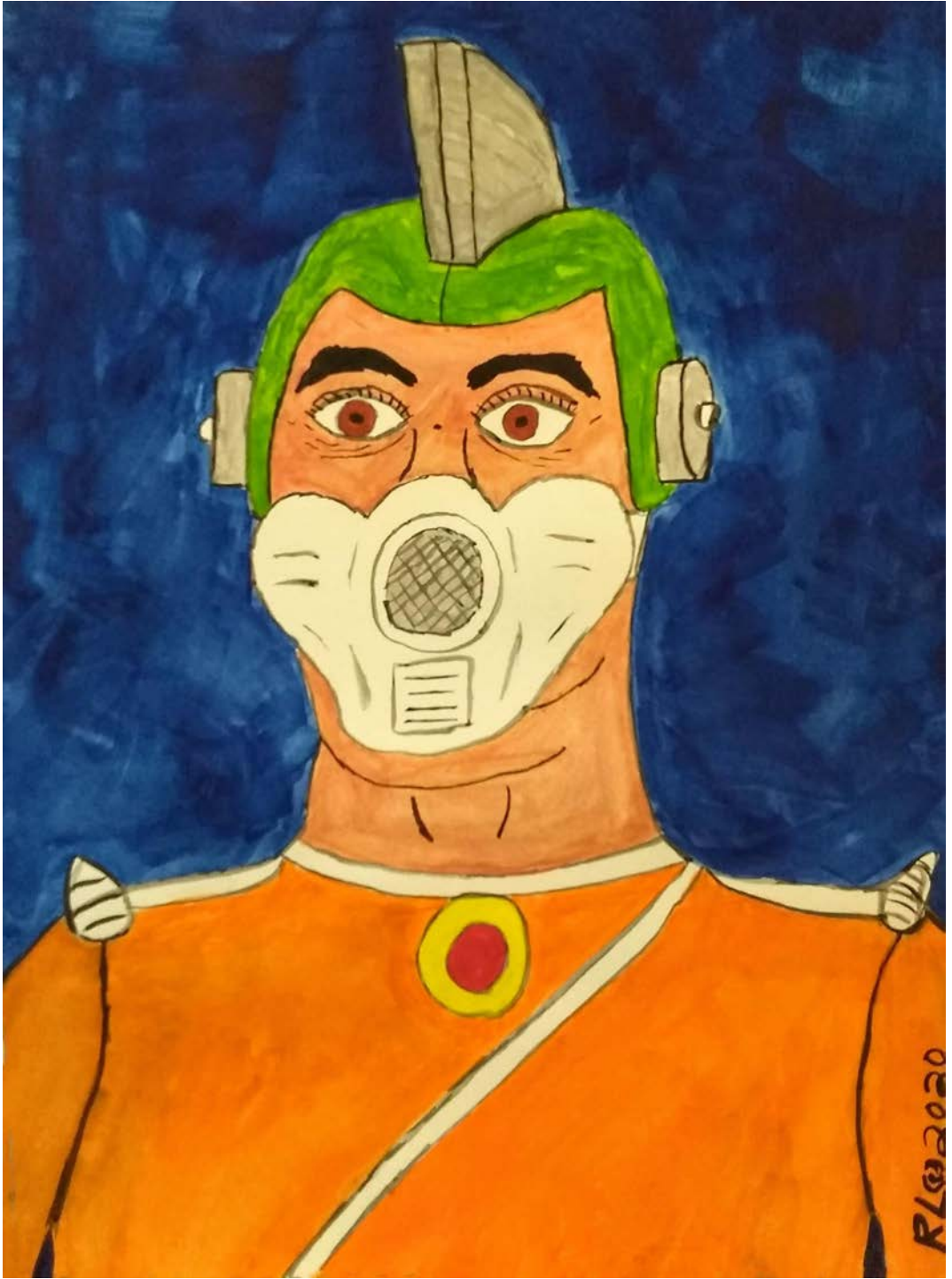
The seagulls screech and lunge at one another in the soft light of the sinking sun, fighting over the last few grains of egg fried rice. I give them a wide berth. Newsagents, betting shops and takeaways now have their shutters rolled down at all hours, and the regular group of red faced, surly men no longer stand smoking in silence outside the local pub. I scan the pavement ahead for any oncoming pedestrians, but am instead distracted by the white van approaching in the distance. My abdomen tenses. As it speeds closer, I make out three workmen in

fluorescent jackets squeezed into the front cabin. I see my body projected through their gaze—big chested, broad shouldered, arms splaying awkwardly at angles over the newly acquired padding. I clutch my rucksack around my belly as the van is about to draw parallel, praying silently that the men don't shout anything. The van passes with nothing more than a whoosh of air.

Harrison Park is revealed as I round the corner. I catch my breath at the sight. In the space of a week, the swell in the green buds of the trees has burst forth into clouds of cherry blossom. The Pepto-Bismol blooms look like something out of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, a fantastical array of candy floss set against a peach-tinted sky. I enter through the wrought iron gates and take a seat on a bench under the most bountiful tree, positioning my rucksack over my stomach. I remove my mask and inhale nature's earthy, fresh scent. The gentle breeze is a cool balm on my clammy skin, and my breathing begins to deepen as I listen to the soothing soundscape of birdsong.

I crane my neck back and look up at the canopy of blossom above me. Each bloom is an intricate array of blush petals, with miniscule pollen orbs balanced delicately on antennae-like stamens. Their outer edges are haloed by the salmon-pink glow of the setting sun, and deep yellow light cascades through the branches, encasing the bark in gold leaf. My eyes well with a surge of gratitude, and a warm shiver extends throughout my body, charging every pore and hair follicle with an electric tingle. And in that instant, I am swept up into its boughs, subsumed into its wood, and into all the wood of all the trees before it, and after it, and into one giant nexus of organic matter—into life itself—unfurling, for all eternity. And as this rare glimpse of transcendence cuts through me, I know that I have come home—home to the earth, and home to myself.

Later, on the way back to the flat, I still stop at Lidl and scan the barren shelves for my next sugar hit; the transient flash of intuition does not have any lasting effect on a lifetime of self-destruction. But in this moment, as I sit under the cherry tree, I experience a quiet sense of belonging. And as I wipe the tears collecting in the corners of my eyes, I remove the rucksack from my stomach. My t-shirt puckers under the folds of my belly and I am exposed: naked and raw. Panic automatically bubbles up in my chest, but this time it is replaced with the calm certainty that peace is possible, and that one day I shall shed my shield forever, just as I manage to do on this warm evening in May. 🐣



Ray Lopez, *Self Portrait Under Quarantine*



Debbie Kennedy, *Covid Burns*



Nothing (A Study)

Andy N

This is a poem about nothing.

It is not about the two women
that walk their dogs around the cricket fields
at 3.30pm every day at the back of me
and constantly talk about how great America
was back in their youth
and now under Trump
and who eventually gets in after him
will still leave a bitter like taste in the air.

This is a poem about nothing.

It is not about the people
who are standing outside our train carriage
on the way to my parents
minus masks and are saying
the virus doesn't exist
and has never existed
and was made up
just a way to control us further.

It has no shape or form
and its meaning is endless
changing at whatever time of the day
you decide to read it
whether on your phone
or graffiti painted under bridges
which may say one day Johnson is a god
and the next is a two-faced punk.

This is a poem about nothing

From going past towns
and cities I have never visited
on the train to work
to going past polluted rivers
covered in the laziness
of companies who pour their sewage
into which without ever really thinking
what they are actually doing.



Maybellene Gonzalez, *Wearing Rainbows*

It is not about sitting in deserted
waiting rooms in the middle of
a heavy snow storm
wondering if everything
will go back to the way it was
and you will soon be fighting
like you used to get a seat
heading home every night.

This is a poem that slips
into the most simplest of patterns
with the most minimum of fuss
whether you are sat there
at your local water reservoir
that is closed from general public viewing
or running away from security
who may see you there.

This is a poem is really about eternity
or after a while a whole series of nothings
offering no answer to
who is right or who is wrong
and where you are heading next
recreating endings out of beginnings
and spaced particles finally finding hope together
at the edge of a black hole. 🐛

four hundred thirty one dollars

Jessica Ripka

FOR A LITTLE MORE than \$431, you too could maybe keep your dad alive. You could reach him on his cheap cell phone that goes unanswered if he can't pony up the small renewal fee each month. You could hear his voice—once a smooth baritone you harmonized with as a kid; now rusted and chipped like a bicycle left for years in a yard. You could collapse into the nearest chair when he says he hasn't eaten in a week, can't keep food down, got to a hospital only to be turned away in the Alabama heat. *I thought I had the virus*, he'll say, and maybe you'll know deep down that the diabetes is clearing the forestry of his body in large brutal swaths.

For a little more than \$431, you too could arrange single batch deliveries of groceries to his motel. A ground-level room at the Destiny Inn located right off the highway. You could send the cops to do a wellness check at the room first—just to make sure he is where he says he is since you are never truly sure. The cops will confuse and bewilder him just like they are on your own television, but they won't charge you to make sure he has insulin. *I thought they would ask me for money!* he'll protest like a fugitive always on the run. You could change the subject by saying you've sent raw spinach, cherry tomatoes, chicken soup and blueberries. You could send almonds, too, but they will hurt his cracking teeth. For \$431, you could get a photo of the delivery confirmation from the Amazon Driver and it will be the photo of a closed door.

For a little more than \$431 you could pay a portion of his outstanding bill at the cheap motel located right off the highway because he is falling behind. You could lose sleep over how much of him you can bankroll and for how much longer—during a pandemic, during a nationwide shutdown, during your own hiatus of work and dwindling unemployment checks. Wonder how much of it matters when he



Kate Feinauer, *all of it*.

would never do the same. You could call him each day and hear his voice and spirits improve—the groceries doing their slow but mighty work. You could heave a sigh of relief that he is eating more than the hot dogs and string cheese he'd been living on only up until recently—the only foods he can afford. For \$431, you could get a text message from him that reads “I love you, Jessica!” and realize it is the first time you’ve ever heard him say that sentence in full. 🐾

One Way

Dedria A. Humphries Barker

A **AMERICAN SOCIAL DISTANCING** started way before COVID-19. Since slavery it has kept Black people remembering our place—drink here, live here, go to school here, work here. Along the way in this 400-year journey, the American psyche developed something called implicit bias. That psychological concept functions “primarily outside of a person’s conscious awareness” to call up stereotypes, positive and negative associations, and drive actions. It means Americans can be sleep-walking zombies when it comes to Black people.

I experienced that myself.

I was with my husband shopping. We were shopping during regular-people hours, not dawn patrol senior hours. To help stop the COVID-19 contagion, my store created one-way aisles. Kroger and Walmart came up with that to improve social distancing. One-way aisles prevent shoppers from breathing coronavirus in my face, so my reaction when this lady turns her cart the wrong way into our aisle? NO! Black Lives Matter!

COVID-19 sickens and kills African American Baby Boomers, like me, and those with co-morbidities, like my husband. The threat became more real when a major outbreak in our state—two hundred cases, so far—were traced to a university bar in our town.

Without thinking, I check the wrong-way stranger. Daring, perhaps, but I grew up in a family that made traffic stops for a living. My father, my grandfather, my uncle and my cousin— all Detroit police officers.

“You’re going the wrong way,” I say from behind my mask. “It’s easy to get it wrong because the signs are on the floor.” I point to the green arrows stuck on the floor.

The woman frowns and attempts a U-turn. Her cart, however, handles like The Hulk. She turns it as far as she can, reverses, then shoots forward so fast, I swear, the tires squeal.

She is the first person I stop to point out their error, but not the last because people are walking every which-a-way.

I also arrest a young Muslim couple. She's covered head to foot, while his naked toes stick out of his sandals. They have a little boy with them. When I speak to the mom, she looks up the aisle a few yards to the end. "I'm so close," she says, "I am just going to go on." And she does.

Clearly, I am a rookie. During slavery, patrollers questioned and detained Black people on the roads and punished them with shaming, yes, but also whipping and lynching in front of the whole neighborhood compelled to watch, and learn.

I apprehend shoppers until my husband snaps. "Stop," he says. "It doesn't do any good."

He thinks I am hassling people. Grocery marketing guru Russell J. Zwanka calls it "wrong-way shaming." Engaging customers is the point, Zwanka says, "not building more barriers than we have to."

So, I go non-verbal. Many people, mostly women, get my side eye—a signature Black woman move. Some hesitate, turn around or away. I wonder: why shame these people? Because even before my husband's complaint, I did not speak to every offender. Why those people? Was I under the influence of implicit bias? Probably.

Now that I think about it, that cooperative white woman resembled those in my yoga class, and church. The young Muslim couple looked like my struggling college composition students. I remember studying a tall white man, but said nothing to him.

That makes me think, of course, about police and the Black Lives Matter movement. Did I only stop people who historically get corrected, and let the white man—the American power standard—go?

So, I decide to be explicit. For some reason, my husband and I have two carts. On the coffee lane, I pull my cart alongside his so that like big rig truckers we block the way. Down the aisle, shoppers see our traffic jam and, without thinking, make the U-turn. 🐢

Exploring Emotions with a 6-year-old

Danielle Fleming

I. Anger

He could tell me what set him off and how the tension slowly filled his body making him stiff. How his breath rushed out in pants as his fists clenched. How his eyes narrowed and welled and his brain went dark. At 6, we are working on body cues and triggers.

Breonna Taylor died this weekend.

On Monday, I took the deepest breath and shuffled Uno cards.

He knocked over the math manipulatives and ran out the classroom.

We all work through anger in different ways.

Together we breathe from our bellies.

RIGHT Sophia Liu, *Nature's Nadir*



ii. **Fear**

He says he is not scared of anything, but he does not like spiders, ghosts, or the noises the house makes when it is too quiet. He hates clowns and says he would punch one if they tried to scare him. He asks me if he too will die while looking down at his cards. At the brown hands holding his cards. How can I tell him that that is fear?

How can I tell him that I feel it too?

iii. **Sadness**

He's seen Inside Out so he knows sadness can be blue. The waxy blue of crayons pressed onto paper. Blue like water. Blue like the sky or the new sneakers he wants but cannot have. Blue like rain like tears. His. Mine. Theirs. Ours.

He shares that a blue Jolly Rancher would make him feel better. Kids are resilient. I have one too.

iv. **Joy**

Ice cream. His mom. His family. His friends (not including Tyler who wouldn't let him play with his new car). Fortnite. Pizza Tuesdays. Basketball. His dog, Bowser. He says joy is happiness. Joy is feeling love like the sun, like the color yellow. Like dancing. Warm like momma's hugs and sweet like candy. Joy is being a class line leader or trading fruit for chips at lunch. Joy is the easiest for him. 🐶

Anthropod Dreams

Teresa H. Janssen

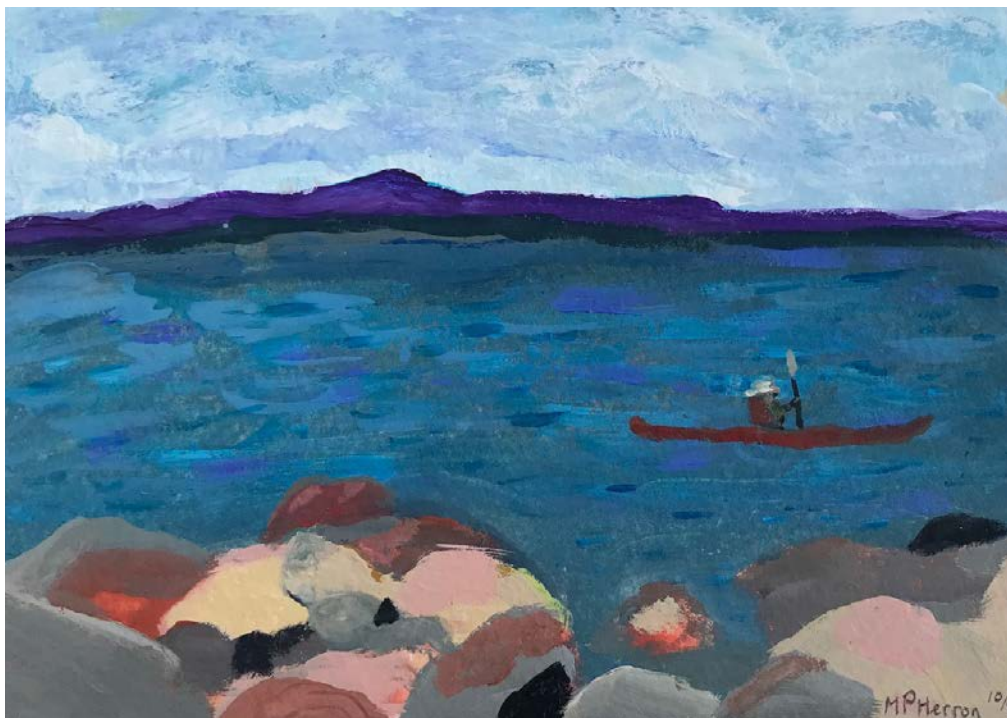
I**N MY DREAM** a couple of weeks ago, my husband and I are walking through a meadow. Ahead of us on the path, we see a black cloud and hear a sound like a buzz saw. Suddenly, we realize it is a swarm of hornets, those giant killer hornets that can decimate a beehive in a few hours and kill hundreds of humans each year. We creep silently backwards, then turn and run. I look behind me to see whether they are coming after us. The dream ends.

The following week I dream about ants. I am walking on my driveway and come upon a large dirt mound covered with hundreds of thatching ants. The next day, it has been run over by the UPS truck. I can still see the outline of the tire. Ants march over the colony, already repairing it. The following day, their hill has been squashed by the neighbor's riding mower. The ants, oblivious to the futility of their task, throng the ruin, rebuilding.

During these months of the COVID-19 pandemic, both the well and afflicted have reported vivid dreams and nightmares. With increased time at home, many are sleeping longer, moving through more rapid eye movement (REM) cycles, the stages that bring visual and emotion-laden dreams. It is during REM sleep that we process fear, anxiety, and stressful real-life events.

Dr. Diedre Barrett, a specialist in dreams affected by trauma, is cataloguing dreams during this pandemic. She has collected many dreams about losing protection and being trapped. The biggest thematic cluster has featured insects, perhaps due to the idiom "I've got a bug" or the tiny organisms in a virus.

In my most recent dream, I am wading in a murky sea, shreds of seaweed clinging to my legs. A crab with an oversized claw scuttles toward me. I try to walk away but am slowed by the weight of the water, as viscous as gelatin. The crab grabs for my foot. My heart beats wildly. I wake up.



The crab belongs to the phylum arthropoda, along with insects, arachnids, and other crustaceans. It is the spider of the sea.

A crab dream can serve as notice of challenging times ahead, of potential obstacles and difficulties in overcoming them, of the need to sidestep a situation, change course before one can move forward, or head in a new direction.

On most days during this pandemic, I have worried about my 91-year-old mother, my brother with compromised lungs, my son with a heart anomaly, my husband with asthma. I am awakened at three in the morning by the moon through my window, tense with anxiety. My coping mechanism is sleeping more, brooding, moving inward. My husband manages stress by sleeping less, filling his waking hours with chore after chore.

My dream seems a portent of the crabwalk, the emotional, mental and physical dance I have had to learn since the arrival of COVID-19: lost work, cancelled plans, too much time alone, too much time at home, social distancing, and donning a mask—my own shell-like armor. It pushes me to be as undaunted as a crab in caring for myself, family and community.

ABOVE Mary Pauline Herron, *Kayak*

Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung theorized that dreams have the important task of integrating our conscious and unconscious, with the goal of order and wholeness. A dream is a manifestation of intuition and imagination, “as simple and complicated as the dreamer himself.” Jung was careful in his interpretations. Dreams relate the inner truth—what the dreamer most needs revealed.

In dreams, the subconscious makes use of the collective unconscious—themes with universal meanings. Ancestral memories and images have become archetypes—perhaps as keys to survival. Jung believed that if individuals are working on a collective problem, they get collective dreams.

The synchronicity of so many dreams of arthropods indicates we are trying to comprehend the threat of pandemic as a culture. What have we learned? How can we better prepare for the next pandemic that comes around? And it will. My dreams suggest a need to begin again when this is over, to regenerate, to work together to build a new kind of ‘city’ that is safer for its inhabitants, a more just and equitable society. It is a more challenging mission than outlasting the pandemic. I contemplate my role in our repair.

Crab dreams can be a warning. In some cultures it is a sign of poor health. Yes, I am afraid of COVID, but is there more I need to attend to?

The English word for ‘crab’ is derived from the Greek *karkinos*, via the Latin *cancer*. Its use as a medical term is credited to the Greek physician, Hippocrates, who used the words *carcinus* and *carcinoma* to describe growing tumors of the body because the enlarged veins around the growth resembled crab legs.

I know that I am the best one to intuit the meaning of my dream, for as Jung said, a dream contains truth for the individual who dreamed it.

The end of June, I went to my doctor for a minor gynecological procedure. She detected a prominent blood vessel around tissue which may signify a potential cancer. When I study the image, I admit, the red swollen vein resembles the limb of a crab. It is time to attend to another unexpected obstacle in my path.

I remind myself that in many cultures, a crab is a sign of perseverance and tenacity. The resourceful crab is a signal to trust in the nourishment and regeneration of the universal sea and know that we are born with the tools we need to negotiate what lies ahead. In Khmer culture, to dream of catching a crab is to see all one’s wishes fulfilled. My hopes for our corona-beset world? Healing, renewal, and dreams to guide us. 🦀

It Is July

Brynn Hambley

It is July,
and the kids won't be going back to school,
and the beaches may be full
but not without expense.
I leave my house meticulously,
fourteen days between the leavings,
while my body churns its painful song
and I leak in between the seating cushions
of our couch.
How does a chronic illness know
when another passenger has docked
with its own symptoms and sensibilities?
So I live through my computer screen
and try to work (unsuccessfully)
through my computer screen
and sift through the "we've stopped hiring"s
on my computer screen
and the "someone else has died"s
on my computer screen—
the pictures through my window seem fake
and the studio apartment ceiling
remains smooth despite all the cracks we feel, and
each night I pray to make it to August September
October
November
but I wake up and still
It is July. 🦋



Hyewon Cho, *Escape*

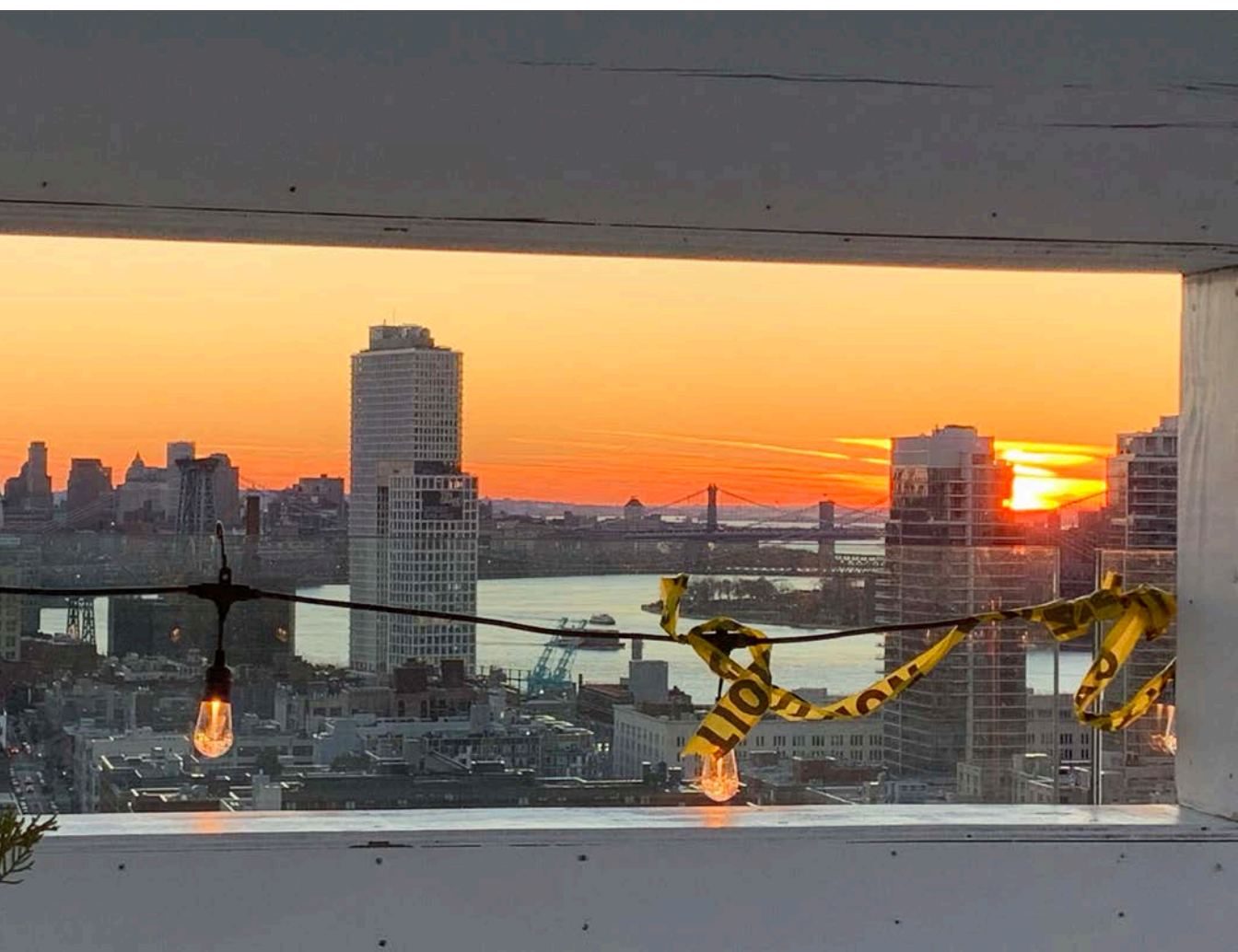


MUSIC Priscila Hernandez and Peter Zbronski, *On the Other Side*

The New York We're Losing

A Letter to Pete Hamill in the Pandemic

Alice Markham-Cantor



Brackets Kaplan, *Caution Tape*

August 6, 2020

Dear Pete,

I grew up sixteen blocks and sixty years away from you. The first time I read your essay *The New York We've Lost*, I was a teenager in Brooklyn and your words hooked under my ribs and pulled. Anyone who's lived here knows that New York is forever losing something. Shops close and reopen in an endless cycle: parking garages become coffee lounges become Caribbean restaurants become empty caverns that still smell faintly of espresso and jerk chicken. To walk down the streets of a lived-in New York is to see a thousand half-smudged cities layered on top of each other, like photographs that were pressed face to face and forgotten and now, even if you managed to peel them apart, one image would be marked by flecks of the other. Manhattan has always been a ghost town.

That first time I read your essay it made me nostalgic, just as you intended, for your New York, Ebbets Field and organ grinders—but I was also nostalgic, even then, for *my* New York. I was only a kid, but growing up here means feeling like you're too young for the party until finally you're old enough but the party's almost over. I was already missing a Brooklyn that had long supplanted yours, when our neighborhood had Italian and Chinese bakeries, coffee shops with writer's circles and dubious mafia connections, that cinema that served slushies on Flatbush Avenue before it bloated into an American Apparel—which soon withered itself. Blink and you miss it.

I reread *The New York We've Lost* the day after your death in a different world. You published it in 1987 in *New York Magazine*. Now, I work as a fact-checker for *New York Magazine*, and for the past two days I've been helping to compile a list of the ways in which the city will never be the same again, by which I mean a list of the small businesses that have had to shut down permanently as a result of the coronavirus.

There are more than 3,000 of them and counting. 3,000 doors that won't open onto 3,000 nodes of pulsing conversation, desperation, anger, connection, celebration, 3,000 new for rent signs that only the out of towners will be able to afford. And that, of course, doesn't even begin to mention the more than thirty thousand New Yorkers who have died. When I try to write about them, words fail.

See, you and I both know that New York is a constant convulsion, the snake who sheds her skin and sells it as a novelty, but this time I'm afraid. It used to be a

city of slow death, with room for improbable resurgence, the lost city spreading like a low flame over a map that didn't want to burn.

This was a bonfire. Dizzy's Diner, orange yolk spilling across white plates; 88 Lan Zhou, noodles pulled straight from heaven; Bluestockings, as much a home as a bookstore. Cocoa Bar, where I served stale cake and good espresso, and the overpriced restaurant on 5th where I played card games with a movie star and almost vomited on him after my first taste of oyster. And the Forest Hills Diner. And Record Mart. And the Upright Citizens Brigade theaters. And the Cottage Restaurant. And 200 Fifth. And Empire Coffee and Tea. And that jam shop I always passed and never went into. We think we'll have enough time.

And then you died, Pete, a great distiller of the city's stories taken from us as it all fell apart, and I reread *The New York We've Lost*, and, absurdly, tasted something like the bitter rind of hope. Because the world whose loss you lamented was gone before I was born, but I still knew it, if only as a fossil in the sidewalk. Listen: you wrote about them.

Farrell's, the bar where your father drank at the corner of Prospect Park—it's still there, closed right now, because it's not exactly the kind of joint that pivots to making take-away cocktails, and to be fair I've never actually been inside--but when a new bar opened across the street a few years back, do you know what we all called it, without discussion? *Not Farrell's*. The city is defined, always, in opposition to what is eroding but refuses to die.

Perhaps most stupid of all the stupidities inflicted upon the city in the years after the war was the destruction of the trolley-car system. Within the limits of my own Brooklyn hamlet, we had eleven separate lines: on Flatbush Avenue, Union Street, Bergen Street, Vanderbilt Avenue, Church Avenue, 9th Street...¹

My home block sits at an angle with the rest of Park Slope's grid system, bending away from its neighbor. I never understood why, in a town so strapped for real estate, they hadn't filled up the empty space between my street and the next, and then someone told me: *they used to park the trolley cars there*. Every morning since lockdown started I've walked out into that rhombus of green sandwiched between brick and brownstone and been grateful for the trolleys—though I never actually checked to see if it was true. I don't plan to.

A Nathan's opened on the corner and the Eighth Street Bookshop closed and the street changed and everybody went away or died. They became part of the

*Lost City, along with the San Remo, where Maxwell Bodenheim wrote poems for bar change before he got himself murdered.*² In the 1930s my grandfather's older sister had an affair with Max Bodenheim. She got pregnant, had a back-alley abortion, and died. She was a dancer. Her name was Sophie, but they called her Spo.

Pete, if your lost city had its threads so tangled in mine, so many years later, then maybe New York isn't unraveling at all. It's been hard to believe some days—April, when the sirens to Methodist Hospital never ceased; May, when walking the dog down Union Street meant passing ranks of coffins; June, when curfew outlawed the city's siren call, the New York night itself. Yesterday, calling up businesses to see if they were closed for good and listening to phones ring, and ring, and ring.

Whatever happens next will have its anchors in today. When we begin to fill the empty spaces where people and homes and restaurants and bookstores have been spat out like bloody teeth, maybe we can build a kind of progress that doesn't look like it did before, that doesn't mean more venture capitalist firms and real estate agencies and organic nail salons and Whole Foods and hotels. If the New York that comes out the other side of this pandemic is going to be anything like the one you wrote down, we have to remember who, exactly, are those who have always made the city what it is: the laundromat workers and delivery guys, the sandwich builders and subway drivers and organizers, the buskers and the breakfast cart ladies, the refugees and the newspapermen.

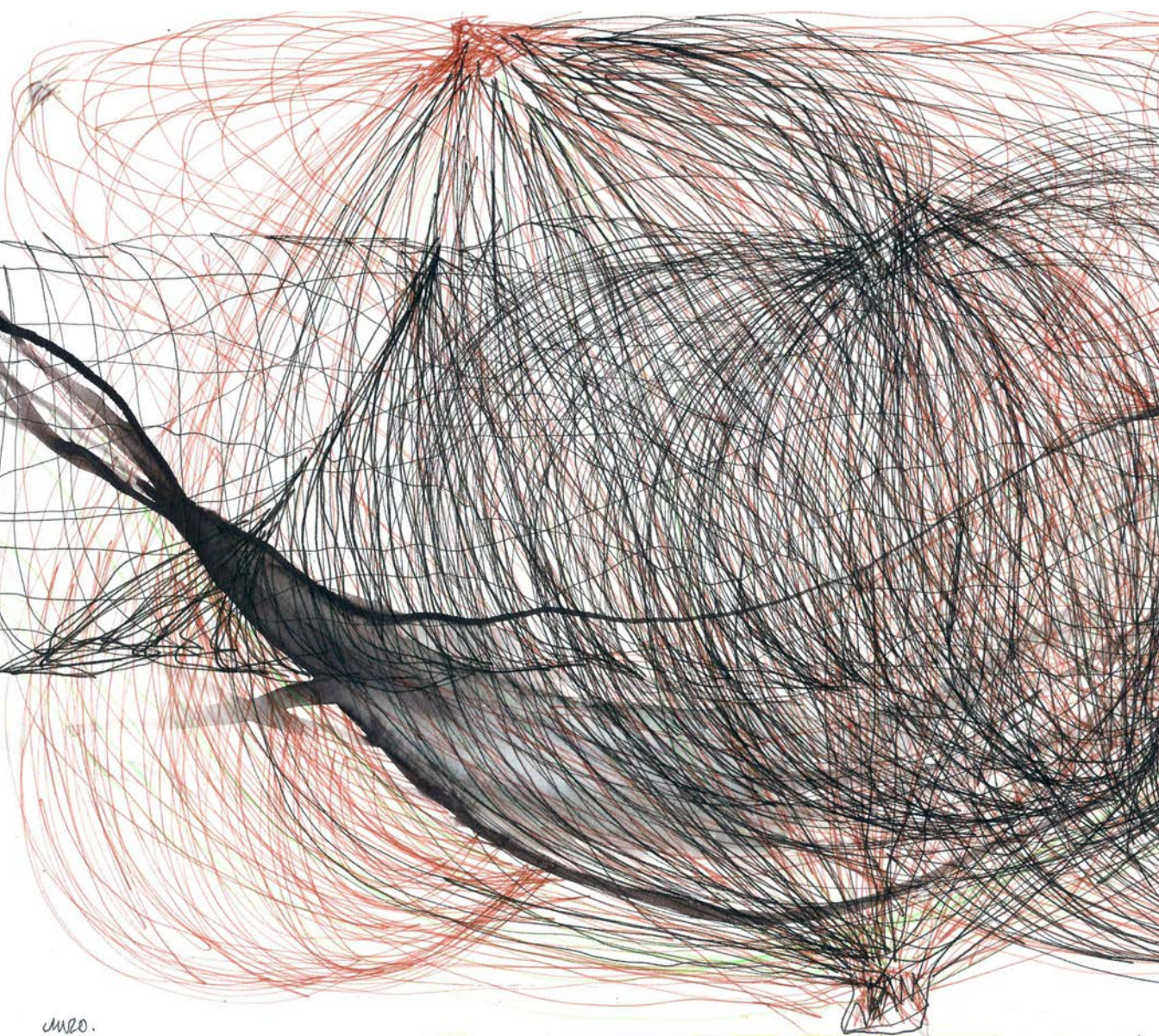
Your Lost City was only ever golden for some people and so was mine. But here's the hope I've bitten into: whatever New York comes out of the crucible of unemployment and eviction and infection could be one that stops ignoring quite so many. New Yorkers are good at dreaming of the past, but we're even better at dreaming of the future.

There was an old Russian Jew who made shoes in a dark little shop on Flatbush Avenue by the train. The shop's gone now, but he was probably there when you were a young man. When he saw my first tattoo he scolded me within an inch of my life. "No no *no!* Good Jewish girl, can't now be buried in the graveyard! Why you have done this?" I told him I didn't want to be buried at all. His face changed. He winked, pushed up his sleeve, and showed me a single dot inked into the wrinkled skin of his wrist. He whispered, "Me neither." And I meant cremation, but I think he meant immortality. 🐛

1. Hamill, P. (1987, December 21–28). The New York we've lost. *New York Magazine*, 20(50–51). <https://nymag.com/news/features/48277/>
2. Ibid.

The Messiah Braves the A-Train

Joy Feinberg



ML0.



I

My father won't stop talking about death. Every time my mother calls, she enumerates the new fears he's conjuring in the small quiet of their upstairs bedroom. One night he doesn't know who she is, lost in a fever-induced hallucination he won't remember tomorrow.

After my friends jump ship on a sinking New York, I have a lot more free time. Which is convenient, because preparing a home for Passover is a full-time job. The laundry alone can take days. In the second week of April, as my mother concocts new tricks to get my grandmother to eat the one applesauce a day she can manage, I—too terrified to get on the subway—walk the 30 blocks to the only branch of my bank just for singles to wash the kitchen towels. It's two cycles before I'll let them anywhere near the Passover food.

Fittingly, it's the Jews who get me into this mess. My mother picks up COVID at her synagogue's Purim services. By the end of the week, my father and 89-year-old grandmother, who still lives with us in my mother's childhood home, have all tested positive. For the first time since leaving Brooklyn to move into one of the old German-Jewish apartments in Washington Heights, I feel like I am living on an island.

The diagnosis means that I can't go home for Passover, but it also means a lot of things that are much more important, so I don't talk about the Passover bit too much. It is what finally allows me to cry though, unable to get the terror and the anger together enough to properly weep when my mother first called me from Urgent Care. Somehow, just the thought of all the cooking I'll have to do is enough to circumvent the certainty that if I cry about it, it will suddenly be real. That's how much work preparing for Passover is.

II

In my house we undertake the labyrinthine version of Passover. We burn all the bread, we clean behind sofas and dressers that haven't been moved since this time last year, we change our toothbrushes, our combs, our pillowcases. When the holiday begins, we turn off all electronics and do not pick them up until sundown two days later. No phones, no laptops, no Zoom.

Confronted with my apartment oven that may never have been cleaned for Passover before, I use Grease, Ajax, two bottles of the Trader Joe's all-natural all-purpose cleaner I got on sale in January, and half a can of the most caustic oven-off my bodega can legally sell, before I will deign to call it good enough. All through the first Seder, I can still feel the ache in my upper arm from trying to scrub burnt remains out of the back left corner.

Everything feels scarier in April. When you tell people your family has it, friends talk to you like you've already buried your parents. I'm not proud of the fear that clings to my pockets and molars but I suspect it's baking its way into my best attempt at my great-aunt's Meena recipe. I do not watch the news. I take baths every time I feel anxious and spend days with wet hair. Ostensibly living alone for the first time, I hear ghosts in the hallway every night as I climb under the covers and leave the living room light on for company.

Somewhere between bleaching the kitchen floors and beating the rugs, I climb out onto my fire escape and try to talk to God. I stand at the doorway of God's bedroom and ask to crawl into a cosmic bed where maybe I'll manage to fall asleep. In the faint glow of 2AM New York City, unable to ever go completely dark, I watch the shimmer of God in the face of the moon and the words don't fit. The wind twists the hair at the back of my neck and I call it divine embrace. I wear my mother's jean jacket and it is almost warm enough.

When my grandmother's tests come back positive, even though her symptoms are mild, the doctors want to send her to a hospital. My grandmother says they will get her into a hospital when they are moving her body into the morgue. That's how my mother convinces her to eat her daily applesauce when she lacks the appetite: bullheaded spite. When I call her before Shabbos her voice is too weak to talk, but she texts me a series of emojis: a rose, two dancing girls, five yellow hearts and the sun.

III

My father talks to me on the phone like he is dying, and I tell him Elijah the prophet is coming to the house in just days, so he will have to hang on a little bit longer. I tell him maybe this is the year Elijah comes bearing the Messiah like we were promised. He asks me if I think in the days of the Messiah will we still have to scrub out our toilets for Passover.

I wake up at five in the morning to be one of the three people allowed in the Dollar Tree. While shopping for a frying pan I will use only one week a year, my mother calls me to tell me my father is in an ambulance to the hospital, his fingers gone white. I ask her, while I have her, what's the brand of Matza Meal we always use to make the Kreplach. On the phone, her voice is collapsing. She will have to move the refrigerator to check for breadcrumbs behind it by herself, now that my father is in the ER. When I get back to my apartment, I cover the counters in contact paper with shaking hands and listen to the Beatles album we always kept in the car growing up, over the sound of the neighbors having very loud sex.

For work I craft projects to explore impermanence with six-year-olds, and on the phone my friend tells me that some days we just wake up feeling weird and bad. She has a baby in the hours before Passover and they don't let her husband into the hospital with her. We FaceTime after her son is born. His face is so red it looks bloody. She says she can already tell he has his father's nose.

IV

It comes together, like it does every year. The floors are all swept and mopped and swept again; the cabinets get taped off. While the sun is still rising, I burn a tin of sourdough scraps and call my parents, who are not allowed to go outside and so are flushing their bread down the toilet. My father asks me if I'd like the blessing parents traditionally give their children before the Seder. I hold my phone on top of my head like it's his hands and the speaker is too far away for me to hear the familiar Hebrew words. At sunset, I turn the phone off.

Through no effort of my own, I cry at the part of the Seder where we read that God redeemed us from Egypt for this very moment. When God says, By your blood you shall live. When the Rabbis tell us: you are alive right now only to do Passover. I eat the horseradish I grated myself with the back of a vegetable peeler, and my matza balls taste like my mother's. When the Seder is almost over, I open my bedroom window onto the fire escape and let Elijah in. 🦋

The Sound of His Voice

Jennifer Shneiderman

LISTEN FOR THE SOUND of my husband coming home from his ER night shift. I make coffee, empty the dishwasher, and throw in a load of laundry. I'm still using rags instead of paper towels, although paper towels are plentiful in the stores again. Recovery from the sight of empty grocery store shelves is long and uneven.

The house alarm chimes, I grab my coffee cup and scurry to the bedroom. My husband comes inside and heads to the living room where he has his own refrigerator. He uses paper plates and separate flatware and mugs. He collapses in our home office where he sleeps on a couch and watches TV. We communicate via text and cell phone.

While my husband sleeps, I quietly venture into common areas of the house. I wear a mask and clean every knob, drawer pull, handle and latch with disinfectant. I use my sleeves or the skirt of my robe to open doors. Six bottles of hand sanitizer are stationed around the house, liquid sentry soldiers standing at attention. I wear latex gloves to collect my husband's paper plates, plastic flatware and contaminated laundry, his scrubs relegated to marked reusable shopping bags. I finish my chores as quickly as I can, and retreat.

I used to love the sound of my husband's voice. He's a big guy with an oversized mustache and a booming voice. He has an infectious laugh and he revels in belting out country music songs. His voice used to mean he was present, and all was right with the world. Now, every time I hear him talk or sing, I cringe. A cough or a sneeze stops me in my tracks. Loud voices spread the COVID-19 virus with great efficiency.

Tonight, I am reading a new study, published in the British Medical Journal, reporting that the virus can travel 26 feet. Twenty-six feet. I feel time, loneliness and fear measured in particles and viral loads, stretching and elongating. The night passes, and in the morning I make coffee and listen for the sound of his voice. 🐼

Depth of Longing

Clive Grewcock

It has become easy to stand in the middle of silence,
Looking up to the sky, not seeing its depth
While I cast my mind's eye
Beyond the boundary and down the lane.
I spend more time in the silence of my garden
As I search for the distinctive, syncopated twist
Of shoes on rough, dry, stony ground.
The now familiar stride and scrape. Today,
The expectant excitement doesn't come—
Just a sense of youthful disappointment.

The open space suddenly closes in,
I miss my friend.

All we gave was a comfortable 'hello'—
At most a comment on the obvious weather,
Giving the impression that this is our territory
And we have always enjoyed our private ritual.
Not so.
An enjoyment only since the world went quiet.
This morning, no 'hello,' just the feeling of departure.
I stand silent and wonder,
Contemplating the depth of the sky,
Whether he was an apparition of my longing. 🐜



John Timothy Robinson, *Living-Room Desk and Flower*



heavy.

Rianna Andrews

[16:02]

them: YES! so true! and how are you?

me:

It carries the weight of a left hook to my
gut.

A blow that blind sided me, even though it's
harmless in intent.

[16:04]

them: Are you okay?

me:

(also) me: I'm go... .. (delete, delete, delete. Should I really lie?)

How do I say

no?

“No, I am not fine, and I’m not sure how to—” or just
my mind draws blanks
from my brain unable to thumb words,
arrange characters to try and summarise the thousands
of memories that are on a loop, on no designated course.

I want to tell you,

but it’s not that I can’t, it’s that

I don’t think that I can, or that you’d want to stick around to listen.

Lately...things have been hard to handle,

and being stuck indoors I can’t escape what

happened to me that night three years ago, when I was in his—

[22:17]

*me: I’m good! Just trying to keep myself busy in lockdown,
you know how it is :) 🐦*

The Bank is on Fire

Joe Manus

T HIS FEELS LIKE being caught in the five second frozen ache before you walk into a burning bank to rob it. In that moment, you are witness to your whole life lived and your whole life unlived. Even the most seasoned incidentalist would not be able to escape the moment's big picture. This year I can not decide whether to go in or stay the hell away from the bank. The whole world is on fire and the whole world can not catch its breath. The oxygen is too scarce and too expensive, and the flame's fervent fire is burning it up faster than it can be replaced. Do I even walk near the bank if I am black? Do I wear a mask if I do decide to rob it? Will there be any money in the teller drawers when I get inside? God, will there even be any will to try when the courage boils upward? Will there be police that want to protect me or kneel me to death? Will I make the flames grow hotter and higher with my pressured presence? Is it possible that I have something to offer? The one time I really could use a body, the bodies are all dead or quarantined. I can't breathe so I may be immune or I could already be dead. I think I am going in.

-end- 🐛

RIGHT Adrienne Holton, *Growth Through Ruins*



Anachronisms

Ceridwen Hall

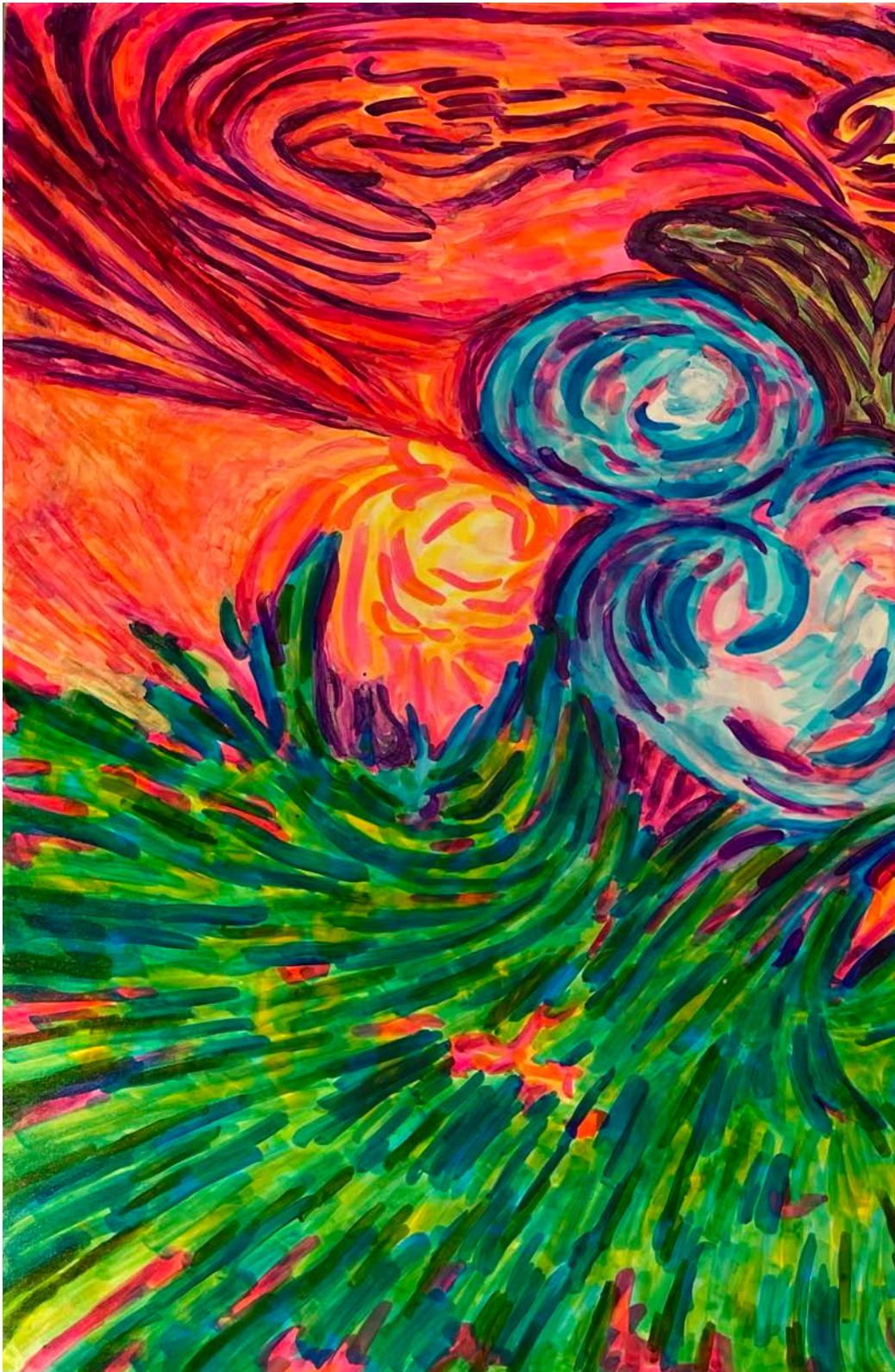
I'm repainting my childhood shelves sea green to hold
the theory of our remote present—televisions submerge
us, flat-screens replacing periscopes, but with gaps

in the livestream when experts speak, technical hiccups
to pivot around. Every surface is a risk. I must mask
to resupply, then decontaminate. Makeshift protocol

conquers familiar routines; the paint fumes reek
of newness. Death tolls mount when I break
for lunch, climb hourly. I lose track of the exact

day and decade, recede or speed ahead by running
circles where I learned to walk. Gardens bloom
tidier than ever, but the kids are summer feral

already. Adults I once babysat are returning
home for the duration—the old crew—we blend in
by volunteering for dangerous errands, planting
sunflowers. This year’s graduates gaze from lawn
signs put up to mark time. We need evidence
the past is past (repeating) so my father frames
holiday photographs, tells again his grandfather’s
story of 1918—how he survived the virus
that widowed his future wife; we too descend
from it, living consequences. I’m cloaking
the shelves tomorrow in transparent gloss. 🦋



Do Walker, *Hey-Are You Okay?*



Sublimations

Maggie Wang

I haven't left my house in four months except
to bring my sketchbook to the top of the hill

at the end of the road, where the fog melts away
into the fields, and kneel in the damp earth,

reassured the birds won't judge me for my
uneven hand as I trace the outlines of the

mountains on the other side. Sometimes, I stay
for hours and wonder if the mountains move

with the clouds or if the sunlight doesn't seem
to pluck up some grove of maple or beech and

plant it back elsewhere. Other times, I look out
over the valley below and ask myself who

strung the first ropes across the crevasses in the
shadows of Chimborazo and Carstenz, or who

stood at the ends of the Golden Gate Bridge
before it became a bridge and set the rivets

into their beds. Still other times, I lay my head
on the boulder crowning the hilltop and feel

the sun breaking against my neck and picture
Friedrich, sketching rocks in the Elbe Sandstone

Mountains, keeping true to their shapes but
already picturing how he will rearrange them

in front of his easel when he returns to Dresden.
But most times, I simply let my body lay its

fingerprints in the ground, not needing to dream
of those peaks where the birdsong doesn't reach,

not needing to invent a landscape where the
Earth has already laid one out for me. 🦜

Lockdown Days

Vroni Holzmann

These are our days.
We get up, me around eight or nine.

The kid when I wake her,
twelvish or late in the afternoon.

I usually bring her breakfast in bed
cereal and a bowl and a spoon;
also milk and a smile.

When I get up,
I usually work like a weasel.

For lunch
which is in the middle of the afternoon

we sit outside
in our little front garden.

That's if we're lucky
and the weather plays along.

Thank you sun.

Early eve one goes for a walk
and the other for a little cycle.

A couple hours of walking around the city
and a ten minute bike ride around the park.

Why is my bit of exercise
so much shorter than hers?

Lazy cow.
At night I go to the pub in my kitchen.

We phone it in
so the virus can't spoil our fun.

My pub is in my house
one phone call away from you.

See you soon
at the Topsy Angel.



Inhabiting

David Radavich

Is it over yet?

Not hardly.

Like birth was

and still is

alive and on-going.

We can't venture

out as ghosts

seeking light,

seeking the lost love,

seeking flesh again,

warming the fingers.

No, this is invisible

like the insides

of cake, promising

a sweet taste

under the vibrant

message of celebration.

Our virtual party

sings a dislocated song

countries apart,

our faces look

back disembodied,

as real as we get. 🦋

A Blessing

Hazel M. Cherry

Blessed the hands we hold through emojis and Zoom screens
Blessed be that yearning to do what is innately human - connect
Blessed be FaceTime first dates
And masked trip to the grocery store
Blessed be tempers in 6ft apart store lines
Blessed be our smiles hiding behind masks
Blessed be the hands of
First responders and front-line workers
Blessed be homeless hands that still beg for quarters
Blessed be our eyes
For we have seen the glory of resilience in humanity
Blessed be our grief
For those whose actions are careless
For racism
For poverty
For COVID-19
And the intersection of all of these
Blessed be our Trans and disabled family
Blessed be our protest
Blessed be our desensitize hearts
Blessed be our need to be better
Blessed be our heightened anxiety
Blessed be our loneliness
Blessed be our weariness
Blessed be our earth that rejuvenated while sheltered in place



Will Fortier, *Golden Sunlight Over Soothing Waters*

Blessed be our demands for dignity and reparations
Blessed by our tears and worn feet from marching
Blessed by our “sick and tired of being sick and tired”
Blessed by our imagination to find a new way 🐘

①

March 28

NOW
is a
GREAT TIME
To START
A
Utopian
Art project.

#QuarantineCineGra

Contributors

Laura Altshul is a retired educator who tutors and serves on non-profit boards focused on providing educational and arts experiences for New Haven's children. Her three books of poetry are *Searching for the Northern Lights*, *Bodies Passing*, and *Looking Out*. Her poems have appeared in numerous publications and won several prizes. She and her husband, Victor Altshul, co-lead the New Haven Chapter of the Connecticut Poetry Society and have given poetry readings throughout the state.

Rianna Andrews is currently completing her MA Theology degree from the University of Edinburgh. She is a part-time singing/songwriting plant mum with many dreams, and an ambitious poet. The pandemic has inspired her to renew her adolescent love of the art form. She often writes on themes of youth, love and mental health. Her poetry has also been featured in *Wildfell*, an online zine.

AZA Allsop is a healer, scientist, and artist deeply rooted in the energy of the African Diaspora. He studied Biology, Philosophy, and Music at North Carolina Central University, received his MD from Harvard Medical School, PhD from MIT, and was an Emerson Scholar at Berklee College of Music. He is currently a resident in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University. He teaches mindfulness and co-founded Renaissance Entertainment, LLC, a company that combines music, science, and community to enable wellness.

Dedria A. Humphries Barker is a writer of creative non-fiction. She is the author of *Mother of Orphans: The True and Curious Story of Irish Alice, a Colored Man's Widow* and the essay "Was My Father Just Another Pig" published in the anthology *Black Lives Have Always Mattered* (2017). She has attended artist residencies such as the Can Serrat International Artist Residency in Barcelona, Spain and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

Iona Barrie is a determined, passionate individual who resides in Scotland. She works within the third sector alongside attending The Open University. She is studying for a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing.

LEFT Martha Willette Lewis, *U#1, March 28, 2020: Now is a Great Time To Start A Utopian Art Project*

Timothy Berrigan is a Literacy Advisor at the Brooklyn Public Library working in adult and community literacy. He holds a MA from The University of Maine, and his work has appeared in *Columbia Journal*, *The Maine Review*, *Really System*, *The Scores*, *Gilded Dirt*, *SPAM Zine*, and *Cabildo Quarterly*. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Peggy Bloomer has lived in Connecticut for over 50 years. Her design practice has been with industries and marketing firms where she has worked on many projects from brochures to digital production including websites, videos, and podcasts. Peggy is an adjunct instructor of graphic design and media communications at Quinnipiac University, Manchester Community College and several Connecticut State Universities. Her art and photography often focus on the marshy shoreline landscape that surrounds and nurtures her.

Ace Boggess is the author of five books of poetry—*Misadventure*, *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So*, *Ultra Deep Field*, *The Prisoners*, and *The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled*—and the novels *States of Mercy* and *A Song Without a Melody*. His writing has appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Rattle*, *River Styx*, and many other journals. He received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts and spent five years in a West Virginia prison. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His sixth collection, *Escape Envy*, is forthcoming from Brick Road Poetry Press in 2021.

Kathy Bruce is an environmental visual artist whose work explores human forms within the context of poetry, literature, and the natural environment. She received an MFA from Yale University and certificate from The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Ms. Bruce is the recipient of numerous grants and awards including a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship, two Fulbright-Hayes scholar grants to Peru, and a Ford Foundation grant. She has exhibited her work in the US, UK and internationally including in Senegal, Taiwan, Denmark, Peru, France, and Canada. Social Media: FB Kathy Bruce Artist, Instagram Kat2bruce, Website KathyBruceArtist.

Amie Campbell is an emerging poet based in Austin, Texas. She enjoys spending her time with her children and rescue dog and trying to keep her succulents alive. She has been published in Indie Blu(e)'s anthology, *SMITTEN*, antilang's *Pithy Politics*, and the online literary review *Evocations*.

Joni-Rae Carrack is a theatre-maker who specializes in puppetry and biographical performance. Inspired by her own experience with Generalized Anxiety Disorder, she aims to manifest hidden, yet tumultuous, internal experiences into physical, collective, and moving art. She holds an MA in Advance Theatre Practice from the

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. She has created the performances *To Learn to Float* and *Do You Mind?* which toured in the UK and internationally and was featured at the NYU Forum on Theatre and Health in 2019.

Hazel M. Cherry is a body-positive, sex-positive minister, poet, and educator. As a womanist, her work centers on the well-being and liberation of black women. She holds a Master of Divinity Degree from Howard University and is currently working on an MFA in Creative Writing at American University. To stay up to date with her work, follow @ladyproclaimer on Instagram.

Hyewon Cho attends Korean International School in Seoul, South Korea. When she is not making artwork, her hobbies include walking her two-year-old collie and experimenting with old film cameras. She is currently building a portfolio for university.

Peter Chua is a Singaporean poet displaced in Glasgow. He discovered poetry writing while in lockdown. He works in public engagement and is a volunteer youth mentor. He hopes to continue creative writing.

Samantha Clark is a visual artist and writer born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1967 and now residing in Orkney, Scotland. She studied Fine Art at Edinburgh College of Art and the Slade School of Art. She completed an MA in Environmental Philosophy and in 2017 she received a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of St Andrews. She has published essays in the independent magazine *Terrain.org: Journal of Built and Natural Environments* and the *Dark Mountain* journal. Her first book *The Clearing* was published by Little, Brown in March 2020.

Michael Dawson is an artist living in Edinburgh, Scotland. He makes dense, vibrant paintings and images on paper, wood, and canvas with mixed media (mainly acrylic and oil paint sticks) to explore contradicting themes: what is inside and outside, wealth and poverty, primitive and sophisticated, acceptance and rejection, justice and injustice, spiritual and material, inner and outer experience, and the real and the imagined.

Maureen Denny came to photography in her late 50s. She creates original works of art by altering pixels of her self-portraits. She finds it easier to express her feelings visually than linguistically. In some pieces, she finds that she only realizes what the message is after the work is completed.

Celia Donovan is a writer based in South West Scotland who spent lockdown registered as homeless and residing in a women's refuge. She talks and writes about mental health and the human experience with unapologetically raw honesty. She won an award at the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival and was featured on the Scottish Book Trust and Scottish Poetry Library websites. Additionally, she has performed on BBC Radio Scotland. She is trained as a Write to Recovery workshop facilitator with the Scottish Recovery Network.

DubbleX describes his typeface artwork as "somewhere between cuneiform and hieroglyphs." His aim is to capture the movement of the letters in the mix. In his pieces, he includes a phrase or quotation to catch viewers' attention, leaving it to them to ponder the meaning of the work and the markings. His work can be found at dubblex.blogspot.com.

Desiree Dufresne is a self-taught painter who uses acrylic, oil, and found items to explore emotions, memories, and lived experiences. She holds two degrees in history and works as a language arts teacher in Los Angeles, California. Her artwork has been featured in several fine art publications including *Abstract: Contemporary Expressions*, *Deluge Literature and Arts Journal*, *The Raw Art Review*, and *Prometheus Dreaming*. More of her work can be found at desireedufresne.format.com.

griffin epstein is a non-binary white settler from NYC (Lenape land) working in education, community-based research and mental health in Toronto, Canada (Dish with One Spoon/Treaty 13). They have been featured in Glad Day's Emerging Writers Series, and their poetry has appeared in *Grain Magazine*, *The Maynard*, and *Plenitude*, among others. griffin plays music in SPOILS, makes weird video games with shrunken studios, is a member of an eco-grief art collective with Shannon Quinn and bryan depuy.

Matt Farr is a Glasgow-based artist and two-time Blue Peter badge winner for both drawing and writing. Matt's practice involves taking cinematic images and transforming them from their initial intent, exploring his own experience of the limitations of masculinity in relation to mental health. Website: www.mattfarrart.com, Instagram: @mattfarrart.

Kate Feinauer graduated from California State University, Long Beach with a degree in Creative Writing. She works in a criminal courtroom as a clerk. In her free time, Kate often documents life in whimsical sketches.

Joy Feinberg is a fourth generation New Yorker. She studied history and art at Wesleyan University and, in non-pandemic times, teaches children how to fall in

love with museums. A writer since childhood, she was most recently published in an edition of the *Vagina Monologues* highlighting the experiences of religious Jewish women. She is committed to learning every craft available, and is currently working on pottery, hoop embroidery, and herb gardening.

Danielle Fleming is a poet, social worker, and dog mom. She writes and lives in Louisville, Kentucky where she works as a therapist, often using stories and poetry in her work with clients. She can be found on Instagram as @havendf or twitter @danismalley10.

Will Fortier is a painter living in New Haven, Connecticut. He writes, “As a child, I spent all of my summers down at the beach. To this day, the beauty of mighty crashing waves inspires me to pray and to paint when I’m feeling down or lonely. This gives me hope, which is so vital to us in this dark world.”

Alfred Fournier is an entomologist, father, and community volunteer living in Phoenix, Arizona. He coordinates poetry workshops and open mics for a local nonprofit. His poetry and prose have appeared in *The New Verse News*, *Deluge*, *Plainsongs*, *Lunch Ticket*, *The Main Street Rag* and elsewhere.

Anna Gergen is a writer living in the Bronx, New York. She has participated in the Juniper Summer Writing Institute and attended the Vermont College of Fine Arts Postgraduate Writers’ Conference in August 2021. She attended Columbia University as a student of creative writing.

Maybellene Gonzalez is an autistic artist and poet living in Brooklyn, New York. She holds a BA in Creative Writing with a minor in Studio Art. She believes that creative self-expression is crucial to processing emotions and engaging with others. Her art and poetry have been published in *Poetry South*, *Wall Street International* magazine, *The White Fish Review*, and *Art BreakOUT*. Her artwork has been displayed at Arts Unbound, Chestnut Gallery, and One Art Space. She was the subject of a “Brief but Spectacular” profile on PBS NewsHour. When not creating, she enjoys reading, reviewing YouTube art channels, and watching “The Golden Girls.”

Clive Grewwcock is a writer, husband, and father based in the Scottish Highlands with a particular interest in language, the way it can evoke a depth and emotion through creativity and learning about people. “Poetry has a wonderful place in our world,” he writes, “not necessarily in a shouting way but with subtlety and asking others to invest and bring something of themselves to the work.”

Ceridwen Hall is a writer and educator from Ohio. She is the author of a chapbook *Automotive* (Finishing Line Press). Her work has appeared in *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and other journals. You can find her at www.ceridwenhall.com.

Brynn Hambley is a queer and disabled playwright, poet, freelance writer, and arts educator based in the New York City area. She graduated from Sarah Lawrence College's MFA program in Theatre in May 2021. Her most recent project was a reading of a Russian translation of her experimental play, **Antidot**, by the company Vibrating Body. www.brynnhambley.weebly.com.

Lyall Harris is a writer and visual artist. Her writing has appeared in *The Minnesota Review*, *The New Guard*, *The Raw Art Review*, and elsewhere. Her poetry has been a finalist in numerous contests, and her paintings have won awards such as The George Hitchcock Prize from the National Academy Museum (NYC). Her book art is held in over fifty Special Collection libraries, such as those at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Yale, and Stanford. She holds an MFA in Book Art and Creative Writing from Mills College and a BA in Art History from Northwestern University.

James Hatzopoulos is a poet and teacher residing in the San Francisco Bay Area, California. His poems have appeared in *Wildroof Journal* and *Cathexis Northwest Press*. He holds a BA in Philosophy from Kenyon College and an M.Ed. in Secondary Education and Teaching from Harvard University.

Margaret Hawkins is a writer and educator. She is the author of several novels including *Lydia's Party*, as well as a memoir about family mental illness called *How We Got Barb Back*. She currently writes a column for *Visual Art Source* and has written for other publications including the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *ARTnews*, *The New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Art & Antiques*. She teaches at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Loyola University.

Gloria Heffernan is the author of the poetry collection *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List*, (New York Quarterly Books). She has written two chapbooks: *Hail to the Symptom* (Moonstone Press) and *Some of Our Parts* (Finishing Line Press). Her work has appeared in over seventy journals including *Chautauqua*, *Magma (UK)*, *Southword (Ireland)*, *Columbia Review*, and *The Healing Muse*. She teaches at Le Moyne College and the Syracuse YMCA's Downtown Writers Center.

Priscila Hernandez "GrowwithHER," is a London-based artist. Her work explores mental health and its connection to social contexts. You can find out more about her

work through Instagram and Twitter @growwithher or through her website, www.growwithher.com.

Mary Pauline Herron comes from strong women, pioneers and homesteaders on her father's side, and intrepid immigrants from the poet Sappho's legendary island in Greece on her mom's side. Growing up forty minutes outside of New York City, she often went on forays into the city's cultural landscape. While in elementary school, Mary was granted a scholarship for a studio art class at the Hudson River Museum, and in high school she received college credit for her studio art. Always the rebel, she successfully aced her Elementary Ed MS thesis with her submitted art quilt.

Ruth Hoberman is a writer from Chicago currently residing in New Haven, Connecticut to be near her daughter and her family. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *Smartish Pace*, *Rhino*, *Calyx*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review* and her essays can be found in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *The Examined Life*, and *Ploughshares* (forthcoming). She is a professor emerita of English at Eastern Illinois University, where she taught for thirty years.

Adrienne Holton is a metropolitan Atlanta artist whose subjects of interest include nature, perseverance, and survival. She has won high placements in professional photography competitions. Her artwork can be found at www.adrienneholton.com.

Vroni Holzmann is an artist born in Rosenheim, Bavaria and now residing in Edinburgh, Scotland. She is a trained cabinetmaker and a street pianist. Not only has she traveled across Europe with her piano, her classical recordings have been published on three albums. Her latest album "Glow on the Horizon" came out in 2021. As an undergraduate, she studied Photography and Film & Television. She holds a postgraduate degree in Composition.

Shurouq Ibrahim is an Arab-American English instructor residing in Ohio. She has lived between the United States, England, and the West Bank, Palestine. She enjoys writing poetry about her everyday experiences as a female, Arab, American, Muslim, Palestinian human. Her focus is on the taboo (mental health, divorce, and domestic violence) in Arab and American culture.

Teresa H. Janssen, a life-long educator, has an M.A. in Linguistics from the University of Washington. Her nonfiction has been named a notable American essay, finalist for *Witness Magazine* and *Bellingham Review's* literary awards, and has received the Norman Mailer/NCTE creative nonfiction prize. Her writing has appeared in *Anchor Magazine*, *Zyzyva*, *Tiferet*, *Lunch Ticket*, and *Cathexis Northwest Press*, among other publications.

Brackets Kaplan (pronouns: they/them/their) is a first year MD/MPH student. They are a New York City native, who continues to be awed by the city and its everyday wonders.

Ronald Kelly is a Southern-born, semi-scholarly writer with one foot in fiction and the other firmly planted in truth. Since receiving his BA from the College of Letters at Wesleyan University in 2019, he has carried on his lifelong attempt to become the titular character of “Anne of Green Gables” by becoming employed. Ronald spends his free time practicing muay thai, reading manga, and attempting to build a community of Wesleyan expats in West Philadelphia.

Debbie Kennedy is a visual artist living in Scotland. She made her piece “Covid Burns” while watching the news one day during the pandemic in 2020. “To me Covid has amplified all the things that cause friction and division in our society,” she writes. “These are indeed scary times.”

Martha Willette Lewis is a visual artist, curator, educator, and radio presenter based in New Haven, Connecticut. During Covid she turned her house into a magic lantern theater and created QuarantineCineGram, a project that went continuously for 244 nights, projecting a new original message each evening virtually and actually. These messages are now documented as a video, and as hand-made prints. Martha’s work has been exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, The Tricycle Gallery and The Oxford University Botanical Gardens in the UK., and in the USA at The DeCordova Museum, The New Haven Museum, and Central Booking Gallery, to name a few. She has degrees from The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art and Yale University School of Art. www.marthalewis.com, Instagram @marthawlewis and @quarantineCineGram.

Sophia Liu is a high school student from New York. Her work appears in or is forthcoming in *Sheila Na Gig*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *Bitter Fruit Review*, *opia*, and elsewhere. She hopes that you have smiled today.

Ray Lopez was born in Brooklyn, New York and studied art at Kingsborough Community College. He works in acrylic, watercolor, marker, ink, and some collage, and he participated in the Studio program at HAI (Healing Arts Initiative). Says Ray, “I hope to make art for the next 50 to 100 years.”

Joe Manus is a lifetime resident of the U.S. South. He was educated in the public schools of rural Georgia, receiving his high school diploma in 1992. Joe is an award-winning furniture designer. He believes in living the best and the worst of the human experience and writing about it.

Nathalie Mares graduated from the University of Aberdeen in 2016 with a Masters in Theological Ethics. Since then, she has been living and working in Edinburgh. Whilst 'high-functioning,' she has struggled since childhood with eating disorders and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. She uses creative writing as a therapeutic outlet. When not actively battling with the above, she enjoys listening to true crime podcasts, dog-spotting in the park with her fiancé, and browsing home décor items on Etsy.

Alice Markham-Cantor is a writer and fact-checker in her hometown of Brooklyn, currently working for *New York Magazine*. She has been published in *The Nation*, *The Appeal*, *Impakter*, and *HuffPo*, and is working at present on a book on witch hunts and inherited narrative. She is a member of the Feminist Research on Violence collective and a birth and abortion doula.

Anna Martin is a visual artist and writer, native to Baltimore, Maryland, and currently based out of Salt Lake City, Utah. She is an avid explorer and much of her artwork is inspired by her travels, nature, and science. Anna's work has been exhibited in various galleries and museums, such as the Rosenberg Gallery, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Urban Arts Gallery in Salt Lake City, and A.I.R. Gallery in Brooklyn, NY. She has also been published in various art magazines including *Grub Street*, *Litro*, and *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*. <http://www.vacantia.org>.

Andy N is a writer, performer, podcaster, creative writing workshop tutor, and experimental musician from Manchester, England. He currently co-runs a spoken word night and is a regular contributor to the *Sunday Tribune*. He has published four poetry collections including *the streets were all we could see* and *Run away with me in 7 words*. He is the creator/editor of the podcast *Spoken Label* and co-runs *Reading in Bed*, *Comics Unity*, *A Nature's Way*, among others. He assists with *Printed Words*, a quarterly online/paper creative writing journal. His official website is onewriterandhispc.blogpost.co.uk.

Amy Nicholson lives with her family by a waterfall in northwest Connecticut. Her garden is wild and wonderful, a source of eternal inspiration. She often needs to abandon pruning shears for the sake of pen and notebook, leaving her little time for weeding. Find more of her musings at amynicholson14.wordpress.com.

Mette Norrie is a Copenhagen-based visual artist and writer with an MFA from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. For more of her works, visit www.mettenorrie.com or follow on instagram @norrieart.

Aileen Paterson is a lifelong prose and poetry writer. Her work has been published in a variety of anthologies and magazines. She has twice been shortlisted for the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival Writing Awards. Her writing reflects on the healing power of nature, love and loss, and connections and disconnections. She is currently studying to be a facilitator in the area of writing and wellbeing.

Surbhi Pathania is a Doctor/Researcher from Jammu and Kashmir, India. She is currently working as a Postdoctoral Associate at the Yale School of Medicine in the Department of Psychiatry. Her interests include mental health, art, and petting puppies.

David Radavich has written several narrative collections. His latest, *America Abroad: An Epic of Discovery* (2019), is a companion to his earlier *America Bound: An Epic for Our Time*. Recent lyric collections are *Middle-East Mezze* and *The Countries We Live In*. His plays have been performed across the U.S. and in Europe.

Katherina Radeva is a Bulgarian born artist, scenographer, and theatre maker based in the UK. Her award-winning designs and theatre works have toured the world. Her drawings, which often depict theatrical scenarios, have been exhibited in Europe and the US. Katherina's drawings are often raw, hard hitting and bold depictions of a state of mind. www.katherinaradeva.co.UK.

Jessica Ripka is a writer, audio producer, and musician currently working in film in Los Angeles, California. A Tin House Fellow and Transom Story Workshop alumna, her writing has appeared in *Pidgeonholes*, *Prometheus Dreaming*, and *The Helix*. She has been a finalist for both *Creative Nonfiction Magazine* and the *Iowa Review's* 2019 Creative Nonfiction Prize. She is currently working on written and audio memoirs centering on themes of identity, religion, and mental illness.

John Timothy Robinson is a printmaker and poet of the Kanawha Valley in Mason County, West Virginia. He has published many of his print and photographic images. His primary medium is Monotype and Monoprint process with interest in collagraph, lithography and etching. Recent work may be found in numerous publications including *North American Review*, *Curating Alexandria*, *Red Flag Poetry*, *Montana Mouthful*, *Gulf Stream Literary Magazine*, *Genre: Urban Arts*; *Signature Print* and *Months to Years*.

Andrew Salisbury is a 20-year-old artist and designer based in Rhode Island and New York. Through his art, he hopes to speak to the truth in a way in which others can empathize and realize for themselves. His art is generally abstract as he tries to interpret the signs presented in the observable world. However, "Still Waiting"

was created at the peak of a self-quarantine; thus he felt the images needed to be familiar in order to convey the air of uncertainty and stillness of this time.

Jennifer Shneiderman is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker living in Los Angeles, California. Her work has appeared in many publications including *The Rubbertop Review*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Writers Resist*, and *Bright Flash Literary Review*. She received an Honorable Mention in the Laura Riding Jackson 2020 Poetry Competition. Her ER doctor husband is on the pandemic front lines.

Katrina Simonsen uses narrative to inform her work. A number of elements influence one another to tell a story in a single frame or through a series of images. Graphic works, prints, and sculptures concerning systems such as neural networks and other patterns in nature are among her most common visual themes. An emerging artist residing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she can be found on Instagram @pursuingkairos.

Mary Snyder is a painter working with acrylics. She uses painting to process past trauma. Her art has been featured in the Bailout Gallery website. She lives with her husband and cats in Hamden, Connecticut, where she and her husband own Replay Records.

Herman Sutter is a teacher/librarian and volunteer hospital chaplain. He is the award-winning author of *The World Before Grace* and the blog *The World Before Grace (and after)*. His works have appeared in *Saint Anthony Messenger*, *Touchstone*, *blonde on blonde*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Iris*, and elsewhere. His comic epic *Constance* received the Innisfree prize for poetry.

Ahrend Torrey enjoys exploring nature in southern Louisiana where he lives with his husband Jonathan, their two rat terriers Dichter and Dova, and Purl their cat. He holds an MA and MFA in creative writing from Wilkes University and is the author of *Small Blue Harbor* published by the Poetry Box Select imprint (Portland) in 2019. His poetic influences include Anne Sexton, Cavafy, Etheridge Knight, Jack Gilbert, James Wright, Jane Kenyon, Jim Harrison, Langston Hughes, Li-Young Lee, Mary Oliver, and Walt Whitman.

Do Walker is a self-taught painter of pictures. He loves wet-in-wet color application (even with markers!) using expressive brush strokes and is grateful to have viewed many Impressionist Master pictures. Do breaks from Impressionist use of light to focus on energy within colors. In essence, Do paints energy.

Maggie Wang is an undergraduate at the University of Oxford. Her writing has appeared in *K'in*, *Shards*, *Rigorous*, *perhappened mag*, and others. When not writing, she enjoys playing the piano and exploring nature.

Rhiannon Weber earned her BA in print journalism from Louisiana Tech University. Her works can be found in *Obsessed with Pipework*, *Blue Collar Review*, *The Storyteller*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *POEM*, *The Orchard Street Press*, and *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*.

Rex Wilder's poems have appeared in *Yale Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Poetry*, *TLS (London)*, *The New Republic*, *The New Criterion*, *Ploughshares*, and many anthologies, including *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond*, and Knopf's *Together in a Sudden Strangeness*, which gathers American poets' first impressions of the pandemic. His poem in this issue was inspired by Rex's mental breakdown, hospitalization, and subsequent recovery in 2018. He is an Executive Board Chair at The Maple Counseling Center, which provides affordable mental wellness for the community.

Carol Clark Williams is poet laureate emerita of York, Pennsylvania and a rostered artist for the Arts in Education StART Something. She teaches poetry workshops in high schools, senior centers and support groups. Her poems have been published in print and online journals.

Cassandra Windwalker is the poet of the full-length collections *tide tables and tea with god* and *The Almost-Children*, as well as the author of several novels. She has lived in the U.S. South, Midwest, and West, and presently writes full-time from the Frozen North. She keeps company mostly with ghosts, literary characters, unwary wild animals, and her tolerant husband.

Peter Zbronski WANZAN, pronounced "One Son," is a music producer currently living in Switzerland, with origins from Poland and Germany. In touch with music since his teenage years, he became obsessed with art and production. Influenced by Hip Hop since an early age WANZAN currently adapts his favorite genres, striving for experimental and new sounds through the collective of L'etHER.



This moving and profound collection of essays, poems, and images amplifies voices that would otherwise go unheard as they narrate our generation's shared trauma. They reveal the devilry of a virus that always complicated and sometimes destroyed life. While the opinions of public health experts and privileged commentators have flooded the airwaves, the stories of people living under more difficult circumstances even pre-COVID have been harder to locate. In *The Perch*, we can recognize the authentic costs of fear and loss. The courage of these writers and artists is matched only by their creativity, generating a volume that is both sobering and uplifting, an invaluable document of a perilous moment, testimony to the resilience that often-marginalized people can achieve in the face of crisis.

—**ANDREW SOLOMON**, author of *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*, and winner of the National Book Award

This stunning issue of *The Perch* is full of insight, sensitivity, compassion, wisdom, grace, and palpable humanity. Reading it helped me process a lot of what I've been feeling in the last year, and I think it could help you, too.

—**ROBERT KOLKER**, author of *Hidden Valley Road*

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