**PART OF A STORY, NEVER THE WHOLE OF IT**

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I risked a move to a small valley but not much more.

There, I made a wall of books.

I hatched solitude. I joined with two dogs,

both old now. And then the solitude became the law.

Now, every morning I look up a map of deaths

and of new people at risk of death, and of my County

and of all the counties of my friends.

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Memory:

*Dad, can you help me buy this Door’s album?*

*Sure, I know someone who will hire you now,*

*not make you wait to turn 16.*

Suddenly, I was a chambermaid at the Buckingham Hotel

where a man in his thirties once took me to a nearby town

and bought me Sperry Gold Top boat shoes.

After work hours I spent time in his room, me on one bed

cross-legged. Him on another. My new Docksiders on the floor.

Behind the heavy maroon curtains

he didn’t touch me and yet, I knew

he wanted something from me. His unforgivable

silence

rained down, hard, so hard the awnings shook.

His gaze like fire on my skin.

Oh solitude, was it then I started to crave you?

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Quarantine.

I love the sound of your queenly name

but you have tainted my lovely solitude

with your mandate. Now silence is a chore,

separation feeds fear. Each morning

I have a thermometer for breakfast.

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When the planes flew into the buildings

and fire blew out like a breath over Manhattan

I stood at my bedroom window, the Hudson River

the only thing between us. Below my window,

as is natural for humans, men and women in tears

moved closer to each other. Even this who didn’t touch

were leaning this way and that to be closer.

When the first tower disappeared,

I threw up on the glass.

The suddenness of it. I counted to ten as it fell.

It required, from my body, an equally sudden response.

This plague seems to require less,

just stay home, just use technology to connect.

But what happens to our skin? Mine, for one,

*burns* for the other.

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In response to these many hours alone,

memories rise from each decade, I look at pictures,

I re-think every decision. The air even, thickens

with old kisses, while in the yard, the first bluebird

rests its glorious sky-body on a post.

What else will I remember from this plague?

A map each morning the colors of flame,

neighbors wearing masks and gloves in the grocery store,

a silence I dreamed of owning forever, how

it no longer comforts me in the same way, how it makes space

for all the moments of my life to walk into the room,

look at me askew, and deliver another piece of the puzzle:

this one loved you, this one used you,

this one desired you, this one abandoned you,

this one died, this one died, this one died.