

## Pandemic Musings

Beneath the dreary scene: gray rain and tired trees outside the not-quite-energy-efficient window, on a bench whose recycled planks once protected a pickle factory, sits a phalanx of stuffed animals staring at me and deciding whether to comfort my boring despondence or roast me and pair my bland flesh with the half-consumed bottle of organic cab sitting on the counter behind me

## Pandemic Musings

I shared with you my fear: if economics  
assumes human nature is greedy,  
then can systems and markets outpace avarice  
to prevent the collapse of civilization? And you reply:  
Do not despair; we can incentivize anything.

## Pandemic Musings

I have died three times  
in my dreams I have been shot in the face  
My parachute didn't open  
A fork was driven into the top of my skull  
While I was shopping at Yorktown mall  
Maybe I am a miracle  
Or maybe Justin Horowitz was wrong about dying and dreams  
After all he used to say Bon Jovi was better than Def Leppard

## Pandemic Musings

With impeccable posture stands the vacuum cleaner.  
I often think it has lasted longer than we anticipated.  
I celebrate its steadfastness in performing a noble duty:  
Gathering the pieces of us that our bodies have dismissed and forgotten.

## Pandemic Musings

In my life I am trying to make good lists,  
Take the right notes, and remember the names  
That will need to be shared in proper circles.  
If I could wash my car weekly, shave daily,  
Carry a handkerchief inside my versatile, blue blazer,  
Then perhaps the slow soul-purge, the death crawl of ennui  
May toast to my industriousness and ingenuity.

## Pandemic Musings

Life in the margins:

What looks like a radiator or maybe a lawnmower engine, a plastic shopping bag, extra large fast food soda cup, gnarled trees that look unkempt like industrial age teeth, weeds - tall, mostly green, huddled and undignified, an athletic shoe, soulmateless - once white and officious- how fast the gentleman must have been running to lose his shoe between the road and well manicured athletic field and how fortunate he was to not have to search in this twilight land, the dysphotic earth between worlds of seeming order where chaos gives quarter to the cast away - I swear I once watched a lone snow goose stuck here never leave, as if the margins refused to give back such a loquacious visitor. It froze in the spatial gloaming and surrendered to its grand Assumption.

## Pandemic Musings

She was an English teacher, now a gynecologist and mom to my daughter's friend; both girls enjoy skiing and, so, are at the slopes. Her knees are no longer sturdy enough for such leisure, no doubt the result of training years ago to be an elite division one field hockey player. I brought work to do, but this impromptu encounter is more interesting, as I know from past conversations that her work is as much about justice and grace as it is about claims, and labs, and exams, and insurance. Years immersed in narrative inform her practice of listening for clues, of being present and appreciating each patient's story. After delivering babies for years, she is now a savior to those who cannot live with their assigned sex at birth. Fifty percent attempt to not live with the wrong genitalia, wrong voice, wrong saunter. Fifty percent, I say, should be enough to build empathy in all of us. Fifty percent move past ideation. Fifty percent. And one hundred percent need love. Deserve love. I start to cry and look toward the slopes. Bright flecks move elegantly down the white slippery strips framed by furry green flanks - pine I suspect. We passively look for our beloveds until we can come back to the conversation. Her colleague calls and wonders if a mother injecting testosterone into her child warrants a call to Children and Youth Services. Potentially lifesaving testosterone. Another friend struggles with whether or not she should mend genital mutilation while fixing fistulas in Africa. It turns out repairing fistulas is excellent training for building a vagina. Restoring dignity in third world countries helps people stay alive with their dignity in this absurd first world. And in both worlds only the arrogance of misguided piety would dare to suspend the worth and dignity of another. In my ire I summon Hitchens and curse the clutch of sinister hysterics and pray for lingering perdition. I look back out to the slopes for hope. Maybe I can find a loved one gliding toward me. I tell her she most certainly has a book to write. She tells me she has three to write and points to her head. "They're all up here."

## Pandemic Musings

Mostly I remember the holy burnt toast on which  
Mary's face appeared - a miracle: eyes glancing downward, forlorn  
Or sleepy, maybe even disgusted about what we had just done  
Before we finished in time to make breakfast.



## Pandemic Musings

Something strange, apocalyptic about my gate, eight toes, twinkled, curious, carefully feel their way toward the corner of the window so that I may make a home and watch these things in the yard, forgotten or unappreciated and is there a difference? Several five gallon buckets, a gardening table, and rusted patio furniture fit only to accommodate moss and my peers. I admire utility and the worth of things left to languish. In my corner I wait, quiet, soulful, like embers for a wayward breeze, until. With each dawn and sweet sparrow song I tidy the place up, tighten the lines so that when six legs gets lost or forgetful or excited, I can work my will. Until then I admire the forged yet forgotten.

## Pandemic Musings

Blackbird, red-winged, like medals, promoted to guide the lost to the divine, but I wonder what such pride makes of the fact that dichotomy is a ruse and the unity of all things is a far more appropriate paradigm to frame our understanding of and interaction with the sacred. All is one, love is all, the rest is illusion - shadows from the flames that dance on the walls - the heart of existence is the interconnection of all things - thus, death too is an illusion, for love and energy are indestructible.

## Pandemic Musings

Brene Brown tells me to recognize and honor the interconnectedness of everything  
If I want to bravely transcend the world's version of me...

I remember my friend Paul, physically forgettable, tall, pale, thin,  
Slinking about with elegant indifference, would play MARRS and Weird Al while  
We ate his mom's homemade Chex mix - over-seasoned and larded with  
Boring Cheerios and cheap peanuts.

Sometimes I would throw the football with his dad, Steve, in their backyard  
While Paul played Mega Man on his NES - my parents would not buy me a Nintendo.  
I would watch him play for hours when I was not running routes for Steve and fielding his  
despondent adulation - he did not appreciate video games or  
Paul's reluctance to move his limbs.

Once, during a startling hail storm, we sat in Steve's garage and counted the seconds between  
Lightening flashes and thunderclaps - my mother told me Steve was asexual and that Paul's mom  
felt spurned - the beads of ice ticked and tacked as smooth glass marbles do when Shaken in their  
velvet purses - so clean the hail sounded, tick, tack, I wanted to hold some, cold And clean in my  
hands, but Steve would not let us leave the garage.

Paul and I would make toy guns out of his K'Nex pieces and before we could go 'kill us some  
Russians', Paul would lose interest and rather play Duck Hunt or Mike Tyson's Punch Out.  
I would watch.

Sometimes we made board games with place names from *Labyrinth* - we agreed this was the  
greatest movie ever made. Sometimes Paul's sister Katie would watch movies with us. She was a  
year younger, taciturn, healthy, strong. I wanted to see her naked.

## Pandemic Musings

I do not trust anyone who isn't willing to say *fuck*

I remember Kurt Cobain ended his letter with the poorly scribed sentiment: you will be better off without me

I wonder how he knew, but I empathize

The search for relevance or utility is like rolling up the bottom of the toothpaste tube and the disappointment in knowing you will have to wait to brush away the accumulated residue of poor choices

I might offer up a redneck *fuck it* and continue to slowly destroy myself with economically and vapidly produced beer

My soul magnifies love's austere and lonely office; cars can be automated now and I remain in despair

Watch the news. I put my money on destruction. To live with any dignity is to celebrate indifference or to forget what really happens in those dank places that light never finds and hope spurns

We can fly to space and still abduct and kill 5 year old Kansas boys.

## Pandemic Musings

What if you weren't always on my mind - what if there were small times when I wondered, wandered off - would it change anything, would it burn faster, would it slow dive and break waves and unwind - would you feel stronger, speak louder - would you sleep any softer, would you be able to carry a tune - would you be able to downshift, kill the lights, and breathe? This is a life of sighs, I take deep breaths - mutter unkind words meant for no one. Sometimes I wish someone would hear and hold me accountable.

## Pandemic Musings

What can be done safely?  
I shop for yogurt and dignity and connection  
Yet slog about with my lonely cart,  
Incredulous to humanity's ability to  
Wash their hands properly and stay  
Distanced from their irresponsible cousins.  
I swear St. Helen slumbers inside my mask  
So hot and furious, dreaming of violence.

## Pandemic Musings

In the event of a pandemic:  
Pull into parking spots backwards,  
Gather paper products, rubbing alcohol, dry yeast,  
Buy seeds and acetaminophen in bulk,  
Disregard your neighbor unless she offers wise  
Counsel or spirits of the brown variety,  
Disinvite your holiday company,  
Incentivize isolation,  
recommit your allegiance  
To science, tell people there is nothing they can do  
For you to love them less, celebrate electronic goodwill,  
Toast to the apocalypse.

## Pandemic Musings

Nature's only promise is to be authentic. It cannot contrive for it only lives in love. And so it can create from what seems like nothing perfect pulchritude. And since it only loves and creates, any meaning it graciously extends is merely an invitation to find meaning. Any declared, discovered meaning is not meaningful but a manifested need for expediency or the product of our exhaustion. Nature in its authenticity is absurd. It is meaning. It does not have meaning. It asks us to fold ourselves into its perfection, to be as we are meant to be, to resist extraction and to wait. Waiting is joy when love is ever-arriving. And so we are always waiting and always receiving. Ecstatic. Peaceful. Quietly, we are life. We are life and love.



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I contrive and slowly die  
Cell death it turns out is also Existential  
I used to dream the same dream when I was febrile  
Tethered to a pole placed in the middle of a frozen lake  
I would fly in a circle and nearly miss a fishing shack  
Before slamming against the ice as I came to a stop  
The fall would break my bones and I would lay there  
And wonder if the boys playing hockey would stop  
To see if I was still alive

## Pandemic Musings

What would I make of this mess if my bones were hollow  
If my binocular vision was not so strong  
but the periphery came in crystal and clean  
If it only took an octave to share my fear  
And four toes to hold on for dear life

## Pandemic Musings

Where did all of this get us?  
Shaky knees, cue-ball eyes and ruminations  
Of the apocolypse  
Maybe my last meal should be peanut butter sandwiches,  
Raspberries, cold, and mint iced-tea  
When they come for me, I hope the scene  
Is not blurred by some poetic rainfall  
or the wet courage of vulnerability.