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Exactly Here the Marvel Spoke

Memorial of a Plague Year: March 2020 – March 2021

You staggered from death to death.
 You dragged yourself from the silent window
 where an old face looked out and knocked
 with twig-like fingers at children trying to shout
 in through the crystal silence. “Grandma”—
 babushka, aljida, babcia, nani, dadi,
 abuelita, nana, bobe, bà, nagymama,
 nona, pãtti, giagiá, avó...the cries broke
 on all the walls and forbidden doors
 of well-meant homes of rest. How you longed
 to go in, to sit by them, hold them, each,
 in their dying! How you longed for death to be
 again as it should be: the dying one among us.

And exactly here the marvel spoke: your eyes
 grew clear: you were holding them. In your shattered
 longing you grasped them. The dividing plague
 could not divide. We remained one. We still died
 with the dying, they still lived with us. In yearning,
 in dreams, in truth, we hugged the fallen silent head.
 And then, worn out, scarred, from the crushing labor,
 the sweet duty of companioning our dead,
 we go back to daily things, our daily bread. And later,
 working, aching, we notice through our pain
 we’re slowly happy again. Broken, we find
 a silent bearing of the dead inside us,
 like a child newly conceived, like an immense
 and beneficent idea, gift of refreshment to the world.
 We just begin to glimpse it, a new health—
 we can’t yet trace it clearly, but the work
 inhabits us with passion at lonely desks,
 or in companionable walks, in living rooms
 and discussion halls, laboratories, councils, factories.
 We work, we see another world. Our dead
 are with us now more wholly. With them within us
 we’re going to know them face to face again
 as we did before on the poor beloved earth.

So we go forward through our home—Toronto!
 meeting place—and every tree and corner,
 every shop window that our grandmother knew,

every neighbor who once loved
 to talk with her, who always stops us to recall
 the same tender story, is a star now:
 a star of soft radiant memory. A star of light
 from the past for today,
 of light from the dead
 for life.

I wish I could put my arm around your shoulders,
 be beside you. Soon! For now, though, plague
 still stares between us. And yet
 we don't have far to go to reach the utmost sobs
 of the splintering universe
 and with our hug
 bring them all back together, assemble them here
 for a parliament of loves. What's beauty in sorrow for,
 what's poetry for, if not to bring us near
 while we're alone until
 our lips and hands touch? I can gather all
 because I listen. I can hear
 you,
 speak with
 you,
 hold
 you
 in my heart. You are more
 than the helpless universe. We reach and bring
 everything that has burst, broken, died,
 left us, fled from us, everything
 frozen in the space of death
 back into the loving quiet
 of a brook returning in late winter
 to the young life of purling water. It's March!—winter
 kisses spring. We don't have far to go—only from dusk
 to morning—to gather the fragments of disaster
 in music and tears. I see, hear, love
 the men and women all around me,
 I'm with them—here I am—I hug them
 in the body of my song.