

TOGETHER IN A
SUDDEN STRANGENESS

America's Poets Respond to the Pandemic

Edited by
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NOAH WARREN

An Apartment

After three extravagant nights—butter polenta topped with that bitter garlic rabe I love; the blog-inflected Four Salad Dinner (its buffo salvaged by the almond tart); then that all-afternoon tortilla soup, whose first ferocious drops gripped my tongue, and flushed my scalp, like a crush, or shame, but which held suspended, behind that burning wall, delicate drifts of flavor, each emerging as another faded, then fading in turn just as I recognized what I was tasting—tonight was my turn. You chatted as I chopped onions for my mother's beans, an anchovy sizzling down to undertone in the sofrito's fragrant oil. We split a glass of wine, another.

Now you're stretched out in the other room, playing on my phone. In a minute, or five, I'll rinse dishes, wipe down the splattered stove. In twenty, or twenty-five, I'll join you, and we'll talk more, or watch something stupid: *Hereditary* got you into horror, with the world outside so bad. Afterward, who knows: maybe nothing, maybe the game where you pretend to be a spy, and glide away when my back's turned, and wait for me to find you, and leap out the instant I do. The candle wavers. But for a minute longer, I rest, breathing, wandering quietly inside myself. Because a happiness that has nothing to do with me has collected the hours of my life, making them firm, and ours. Or rather, many different happinesses, and some with the power to parry fear.

ROSANNA WARREN

Naturally

I feel that Nature is played out as a Beauty, but not as a Mystery.
—Thomas Hardy

Rising in the dark for senior pandemic shopping, we drive east into the spruce-silhouetted dawn watching the sky stain slowly raspberry as the molten copper disk of sun floats up over the highway, a star, a continuous stream of thermonuclear explosions, one of billions in our galaxy, which is one among billions of other galaxies, our sun lighting our way down the exit ramp into the Walmart parking lot at 6:30 a.m. on planet earth. We fiddle our masks on over our mammalian noses, we glove our hairless simian fingers and palms. Avoiding our masked and fumbling hominid cousins, we forage along half-empty shelves for relics of what our sun has fired into vegetal cells. And find three elderly cabbages, lacking their outer leaves. Browned in patches, but solid. Their minerals folded into dense globed dictionaries we will consult and absorb studiously, in our retreat, for the next three weeks.