

## Delight

In the throes of a pandemic

Every time I look up, there's another one, and another, rolling through the double doors, lying on a bright yellow stretcher or slumped over in a wheelchair. A man unaware that his cocaine had been cut with fentanyl quits breathing behind the wheel on the interstate. An enraged driver runs down two people in a parking lot, crushing one of their skulls. A veteran of two wars and covid-19 loses a battle with bacteria that have invaded his bloodstream. A tiny clot lodges in a branch of the carotid artery, starving a brain of oxygen. Unrelenting seizures. A bowel obstruction. Four more car accidents in the unceasing rain. In and out of isolation gowns, respirators, face shields. Caffeine. Alarms. The end finally comes.

I stay over to slog through my list of electronic charts, trying to remember and record every detail from hours earlier. Then, I walk out alone into the deserted parking garage, pull off my mask, and breathe in the cool, unfiltered air. Standing at the back of my car, I swap my soiled shoes for flip flops and drive home on mostly empty roads.

Home. When I unlock my front door, my dog unfolds himself from his bed and stumbles down the dark hallway to greet me with a slow wag of his tail. I drop my work clothes in a heap on the floor, shower, and finally tiptoe into my daughter's room. Her feet reach the end of the bed now, but as I close my eyes and stroke her hair, I feel the same smooth curls and rounded cheek that I did when I reached over the wooden slats of her crib. Her fingers, nails now coated in sky blue polish, still curl loosely around the same worn bunny, whose eyes have been re-sewn two, maybe three times now. Her lips part just a little when she sleeps, released for now from the tension of adolescent worries. I rearrange her covers and kiss her hair, lingering to breathe her in.