



Two Weeks

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Fifty faces,
around the conference room of my clinic,
lit by the large monitors,
fighting to stay awake.

The pandemic seeped out in the news.
Terrible images from China:
The whistleblower doctor,
young but with oxygen flowing into his nose,
a selfie before he died.
Italy: hospital hallways
crammed with older sick patients.
New York: lined faces of young health workers,
marked by masks worn eight to twelve hours at a time.
Here in Minnesota:
A full room in the clinic early on a Monday, no masks.
This would be the last time we would meet
together, so many, so close.
I wondered,
which of these fifty people would not survive?

Two weeks—
beginning at the time a droplet carrying virus enters your nose
and latches onto a cell;
a few days later fever, then aches and a cough,
then oxygen,
then a plastic tube
pushed down your throat,
then a ventilator blowing,
then
nothing.

There was a lot of nothing
in those early days of the pandemic—
empty roads,
no children in the parks.
The airplanes,
that had paused conversations every two minutes,
stopped flying over.

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Birds chirped.
 Kids slept late.
 The internet creaked
 with the strain of Netflix and Zoom meetings,
 an endless torrent of ones and zeros.

The grocery stores had scattered empty shelves.
 I struggled—
 to fill my cart only every two weeks,
 to plan for meals
 two weeks at a time—
 scrawled out on the chalkboard
 on the door in the kitchen.

“There are not enough of those for all of us,”
 my coworker chastised, seeing my surgical mask.
 I ordered cloth stitched masks with a pocket for a filter.
 “Arriving in two weeks.”

I called my parents each day
 for the first time ever.
 They were ill, scared, and in
 two weeks they might be gone
 forever.
 No one was coming to the rescue.

We, as doctors, received cheers,
 me in the cul-de-sac
 around the corner from my house.
 My neighbor invited the block to
 listen to her sing Brazilian songs capped by
 a serenade and cheers for the
 health care workers—my neighbor Travis,
 a nurse at the psychiatric ER, and I.
 I shifted uncomfortably,
 knowing all we could offer was
 “Supportive Care.”

We could only hang on.
 But for what?
 Slow, quiet nights,
 cooking a new dish,
 playing “Pandemic,”
 watching “Contagion”—
 pretending that the corpses
 were just fantasy.
 Quietly hoping for
 two more weeks.

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