

Coronavirus Lament

Here's what I miss:

Crowds. Big ones. Waiting for the light rail on the Fourth of July and everyone's sweet with sweat and booze, one mass of hoots and hollers, and you're reminded of what it's like to be part of this big world.

Seeing someone you know on the street. Stopping. Chatting. Maybe you get jostled from behind, so you have to move closer, but that's ok, they understand. Maybe you hold their elbow to keep from falling, they grab your shoulder. You touch.

Hugging. Squeezing a friend because you've missed them, you've thought about them, and they just passed their nursing exam, and the only thing you can do is hold each other, even if it's only been five days. Now, it's been 45.

Though it's hard to believe, lines—even the ones where it's impossible to see the beginning or end. Because now, as my brain is racked with nostalgia, standing in them doesn't seem so bad. You could look at the flowers.

People—watching, savoring them. Admiring outfits, laughing at silly walks. Streamed on screens, they aren't the same. You can't absorb the vividness of eyes, empathize with the slouch of shoulders. Sink into tiny crevices that appear around your friend's mouth when she laughs.

The logical brain says this will be good in the end. Lives saved, priorities assessed. Boundaries reset.

But for a moment, I want to mourn.

This is what I'll remember:

Outdoor cafes. Knocking knees with tablemates. If your purse strap slips off the back of your chair, someone stops to pick it up.

Choosing to stay in on a Friday night. Alone. When silence is savored, solitude something special.

The library. Slipping past a kindred soul in the stacks who's too engrossed to notice, but you get it, you read that book.

A dance party in the summer—the kind that I worry I might never look forward to again. When they shut down the street and the DJ stands on rickety aluminum above the throng. The beat shakes the window frames, and people heed the Pied Piper's call.

We move and twist and churn any old way we want. We push together closer and closer, but we don't care, because we didn't think, then, about disease or six-foot separation or social

distancing. We want to be close to total strangers and still be free because isn't it great just to be alive.