

Please Remind My Mother It's Not My Fault

That my body has betrayed us more times than I have fingers and toes. That we've spent the last four Valentines in the same dirty, linoleum-floored waiting room. That all the open signs were dark on the drive home. That the United States doesn't have universal healthcare. That I wore thin, yellow, paper masks to school. That my sister hates how the living room smells like paint thinner when I'm done with the treatment. That when the technician showed us the x-ray on the lab's tv, my lungs were shriveled up and glowing. That blood draws leave bruises that last for weeks, even after hemoglobin levels go back to normal and I'm no longer anemic. That I have a resting sad face. That doctors' offices don't have the glossy tabloids with the *who wore it best* columns anymore. That old men don't think it's funny when I get seen in the emergency room before them. That bacteria build up resistance to antibiotics and become unkillable superbugs. That I'm becoming a hypochondriac, solely because Google is free and I like staring at pastel infographics about all the grotesque ways it could be worse. That some days I can't ignore the pounding in my skull. That COVID-19 didn't give her the customary 3-4 business days notice before killing 600,000 Americans. That her genes were faulty. That mine are too.

my sister and i in genesis

once when she thought we were sleeping
our mother whispered our creation myth
into existence our ears pressed against the door

we listened as she sat with her god
at the dining room table and told him
how in the beginning she had nothing

but a pack of her unfiltered cigarettes
and our father's crocodile tears she let dry
out in an old jam jar from the tarry ashes

she formed our minds cut our bodies
from the carton filled our synapses with salt
and our veins with tap water and breathed

life into our paper doll lungs she named you
cain and me abel because she was eve
and she had always wanted daughters like us

daughters who would bend in the wind
and turn on each other the door muffled
the rest but you swore you heard her

pray that when the time came
my cardstock skull would be no match
for the pebbles in the garden