

(Excerpted poems drawn from each of the Four Fascicles in *Maven Reaches Mars*, including *SILO: Where I'm Coming From*, *SOLO: Inner Space Probes*, *SO: Family Orbits*, *GO: Where We've Landed*)

GRAMPA NEVER WASTED WORDS

the few he chose
considered. Pithy.
Ripe. He collected
golden kernels in
tall grain elevators
where he took in
what local farmers
brought, weighed it
saved it up, always
on the look out
for rare sparks
that could ignite
all those particles
rising to the top
of each silo's high
big-boned frame
to hang up there
suspended
in close hot air
until he felt the time
to share was right.

EMILY'S FASCICLES

Between 1858 and 1864, Emily Dickinson gathered almost nine hundred of her poems into forty hand-stitched booklets known as the fascicles, each averaging between sixteen and twenty-four pages in length.

She first took up botany
pressing petals and leaves
she labeled and left behind
on pages presaging the poems
she would bundle in packets
she called her fascicles
stitched by the same hand
that freed the root-bound
from earthenware pots
in her glass conservatory
itself a narrow fascicle
of the heart that held her
collected light and unlikely
exotic loves just as she held
all others—seeds really
sealed in packets about
the size of her two small
hands folded together
in dark satin lap to hold
germinating life ready
to unfold break open
waiting to become food.

"YOU'RE TURNING YOUR HOUSE INTO A GO-BAG"

says our son, serving coffee from Brazil, tea from Japan and a bite of last night's chocolate cake. All in storage bags, like a stash of lately legalized cannabis. Spoken or not, our topic is terror, trade-offs, unknowns. "Go-bag?"

"What people in New York keep in a closet, in case," he says, his twins asleep in their cribs, his own father defending his plan to finally clear out the basement to refill it with water jugs, canned goods, jerked beef.

Grandpa has fallen in love deeply and helplessly with these two little nightmares who deprive us all of sleep wake their parents with endless unexplained wailing gnaw at their cocoons, flannel sacks to keep them safe.

One is cautious, cries at odd clowns, bugs, big trucks. The other buoyant, carefree, falls twice for laughs. For solace, they offer toys, broken crayons, hugs. We're all Go-bags full of twin fears, comforts, hopes against hope.

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HOW VIRULENT

the sub-microscopic virus
potent and dangerous, yet
so mind-stretchingly tiny
maybe 100 nanometers
when one nm (short for
"never mind" or "nothing
much" in cell conversation)
is merely one billionth
of a meter long
and it can of course go
viral, as they say, coming
as it does, from the Latin
for "toxin" or "poison"
and having no cells itself
no living walls to contain it
so that it must invade
yours, feed upon your cells
dine on your DNA
to make even more virulent
invaders, the smallest and
simplest of all life forms
if they are life forms, or just
bits of information, armed to
embrace your cells, break in
with invisible waves of hungry
homeless, uninsured, unpaid
unmasked spit, snot, and tears.

(Featured poem 7-11-20 in Pandemic Poetry and Prose: Writing in the Time of Corona)