

TIFFANY MIDGE

sheltering

a: YOU ARE CHOPPING onions for yet another pot of lentils, hips pressed up against the kitchen counter, when first you hear it. The sound of mewling. Barely audible. You put down your knife.

b: One year earlier, on fellowship in Kansas, you are returning to your Airbnb from your walk. You see your house and yard down the street within view, but something looks peculiar. As you come closer, you can make it out: a vulture feeding on a possum's corpse.

c: Plague doctors of seventeenth-century Europe wore black masks that resembled the beaks of birds.

a: It sounds like a kitten in distress. So you turn to open the front door, to step barefoot up a slab of concrete stairs and scan the yard, the street, the park across the way. The mewling again, you tip your head back and see it.

d: Researchers proposed bats as the most likely reservoir for SARS-CoV-2. However, there are no documented cases of direct bat-human transmission.

e: In the months before your mother's death, an owl visited her back patio for several days in a row. There are many ways to interpret this.

b: The dead possum is in your yard, just steps away from your bedroom window. How long has the possum been there? As you move closer, the vulture is spooked and flies away.

c: The half-foot-long "beak" of these sinister-looking masks were filled with perfumes and herbs. It was commonly thought that the perfumes and fragrant herbs protected the wearer from diseases. The medicine of the time believed that the black plague was contracted through poisoned air. The perfumes were thought to fumigate the air.

d: This suggests that an intermediate host between bats and humans was involved. The research also suggests that SARS-CoV-2 is similar to strains of bird flu.

a: A black bird. In the top branches of the tree in your yard. It is making a fuss, about what you can't begin to know. Except that the similarity between "corvid"—a class of birds, among them crows and ravens—and "Covid" isn't lost on you.

e: Today Waubgeshig Rice, the author, posted that "the crow is black and can only say 'kaa.' Which is the Ojibwe word for 'no.'"

b: The day before the dead possum and vulture, you visited KU's butterfly sanctuary. Monarchs migrate to warmer climes just like birds. They can travel from fifty to a hundred miles a day. You observed newly born butterflies in a large cage structure. Their collective sound—wings pulsing; a rhythmic rush of air.