

SAYING GOODBYE DURING A QUARANTINE ●

Catherine Stansfield

It was a closed-casket and closed-door service.
An immediate family affair. We sat in every
second chair, so there would be no whispers.
Father wore a mask as white as his collar.
As he spoke, we could not see the curves
of his mouth, so he traced the words syllable
by syllable with his gloved hands—
a mime with holiness and sound.

Most of us cried, but we couldn't touch our faces,
so we wore our grief in the wetness of our cheeks.
Our bodies remembered the calming
presence of a hug and the warmth shared
between two sets of hands joined,
but our backs were already heavy
and our necks were bent from struggling to
remember the bellow of a laugh now lost.

We could not hold the ones
who needed to be held the most.
The hymns we sang were a siren's song—
longing to stretch out and fold around
loving arms. Our voices broke when we
realized, one at a time, that after the burial
the one we yearned to meet the most
would always be at least six feet away.