Dear Rae,

*One of the aspects of this course I found most satisfying was the ability to create something that feels complete. I enjoyed the challenge of crafting a chapbook full of connected short works. Finishing this project felt like more of an accomplishment than submitting final drafts of individual pieces or disconnected portfolios in other writing classes.*

I started this letter a week ago with the above, as I was putting my finishing touches on my chapbook. I was trying to put as much work in as I could before the last week of the quarter, when I knew things would get crazy. Well, get crazy they did, but not in a way I ever expected. I feel as though I’m writing this letter from the eye of a hurricane. If I had finished it a week ago, as I’d intended, or if I was writing it even a week from now, the tone and content would likely be very different. But the process of reflection is so entrenched in the here-and-now, in this moment, that I feel as though I must write from the headspace that I am in, which is admittedly not a great one.

 COVID-19 is taking over our world and my life. I feel a bit selfish writing this. The pandemic has yet to reach anyone close to me, and I’m so much better off than people worried about childcare with school closures, access to food with hourly-rate jobs closing or operating from home, or contagions within the close proximity of shelters. But I’m still upset. My study-abroad trip was canceled, leaving my spring quarter uncertain, even more so due to the fact that classes may still be remote. Friends and family are scared to travel home to Seattle, worried that they’ll be trapped here, or will unwittingly spread the virus when they leave again. Social distancing and isolation leave me spiraling, craving the exact human contact that I know is most dangerous.

 How does this all connect to my chapbook? I feel like my writing is an artifact, a preservation of a time when everything still felt normal. Even meeting with my small revision group, at the library since class was canceled, still felt lighthearted. The danger and fear hadn’t quite set in yet. Now, the emotions of loss and heartbreak I captured in my stories feel distant, even trivial, compared to the world-consuming crisis of now. I doubt I will always see them this way – it’s my current eye-of-the-hurricane mentality, likely – but that’s the impression I find myself left with.

 I’m still proud of what I’ve accomplished. I’m still excited to share these stories with others beyond myself, put them out into the world. I’m still happy I have them to come back to, when the tilt of the world’s axis feels steady again. I challenged myself with this chapbook to create a collection of short works, even though I had the option of one longer one. Brevity has never been my strong suit, but I feel that working on this project has helped me to refine my craft and to consider what is most important to my storytelling. Since my first draft, I’ve really tried to put myself in the mind of my narrators, capture their personality and emotions on the page alongside their stories. I’ve tried to be direct through indirect means, to skirt around my subjects in a way where I just manage to hit the mark. I’ve tried to use strange and specific language and imagery while not allowing the entire story to get caught up in my word choice. Like I said in my opening, I’ve tried to craft something that feels complete. I can only hope now that my work has paid off.

Zoë