

Invisible Transformations

Pari Shah

This piece is inspired by my experiences of being a human *first* and a social worker *second* during a global pandemic. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic struck each and every one of our lives, and it brought about an abundance of grief, profound isolation, and a call to action to create change in our broken world. As a social worker, I juggle many identities: doctoral student, adjunct instructor, and therapist. Similarly, in my personal life, I am a partner, sister, daughter, and community member. Through a personal loss in my “chosen” family this past year, I learned that the most important role I carry is *being human*. My chosen family is a group of four families who have molded into one extended family, one in which we have always practiced collective care for one another. Our loss reminded me how persistent and all-consuming grief can be, and that I, as a person in the helping profession, must ground myself in caring for the humanness within myself.

When we care for others, we often lose sight of how to care for ourselves. This past year has forced many of us to open our homes to our work while simultaneously experiencing life as we knew it from the sacred place which we call “home”. While all our boundaries were broken, we spent this past year transforming our homes into dynamic spaces, one of the biggest challenges I have ever encountered. All change is not visible; it is the invisible transformations, or the transformations that occur within our imagination, that are the utmost powerful. We used the power of imagination to turn bedrooms into classrooms, kitchen counters into conference rooms, and couches into therapy chairs. We did all of this with a deep grief in our hearts, and I hope that this poem serves as a reminder to you that, as you endure these continuous invisible transformations, I *see* you.

Invisible Transformations

Pours hot coffee.
Commences commute to work
Upon the lengths of her 12-stair highway.
Unmutes

The pandemic shut the doors to my therapy practice
Yet opened the window to boundless connections.
Telemedicine, they said, would be the future
But why did no one say, teleconnection, would be all we have?

Sessions no longer are held in shared space
Rather sessions are carried through the wavelengths between me and you.
Rapport is built upon internet connection
Bandwidth breaks our boundaries.

The screen before me is a direct portal to you
But why do you feel so out of reach?
The therapy continues
While the world stops.

As the therapist, the eyes looking back at me see my office space.
As the therapist, I only see my bedroom.
At the end of a session, our work is paused
As quick as the click of a mouse.

My invisible transformation ensues
And my commute takes only the speed of light.
Now, I am the client
Peering into my therapist's bedroom.

They did not tell me that grief would not get easier
Even when I became a grief therapist.
Tears still strike me when I work from home
At least now, I can turn off my camera and cry.

Losing a loved one
To mental illness,
Makes me feel like I failed
Since I am a therapist.

Another invisible transformation occurs.
As the instructor, students look back at me and see their classroom
As the instructor, I see my bedroom.
Who knew knowledge could ride wavelengths too?

Being an online instructor gave me superpowers
Teleporting from [breakout] room to [breakout] room.
Making lessons appear out of thin air onto screens around the world.
What superpower will make us feel connected again?

Once again, the invisible transformation arrives
As I am now the student.
I peer into my instructor's bedroom
And their superpowers weave our connectedness.

There is beauty and tragedy in invisible transformations.
My chair has become a pew at my childhood neighbor's wedding.
My desk has become the podium at my chosen little brother's funeral.
How can one place be everything?

Well, because there's a magic in invisible transformations.
Mutes

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