

THE ACTUAL

By **Shannon Banks**

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Part One: The Dying

She texts.
What a relief, it's one percent.
Just underlying health conditions.
A big deal over nothing.

She goes to the beach.
He visits his friend, for a quick glass of wine.
They fly, they dine, they gather.
They scoff, they shrug, they roll their eyes.

The numbers grow, up and up, extending
our range of reason
Until we can no longer hear.
BBC. CNN. Press and commentary.
News and fake news.

They are numbers
Caveated with dismissal.
They are old.
They are sick.
They have underlying health conditions.

Part Two: The Shielded

I breathe slowly through a surgical mask.
The fluorescent light, like an angry wasp, incessant.
The needle in my hand drip, drip, drips. Chemicals
that simultaneously kill and protect.
Stopping the angry cells
but not the angry thoughts.

I am a mother to a child, a wife, a friend
A business owner, an entrepreneur
I am a name, a voice. I am tired.

We are parents.
We are children.
We have underlying health conditions.

I stay home. Shield. Shelter.
Days become weeks. Weeks
become months. I dream
of slow motion car crashes and saying goodbye.