

Under the Rainbow: Voices from Lockdown

James Attlee

And Other Stories (Sep 7, 2021)

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Under the Rainbow is an amiable and elegant diary set during Covid-19 stay-at-home orders, when rainbows were displayed as a symbol of unity and appreciation with Britain's National Health Services workers. James Attlee reports from his neighbors' stoops, documenting their reactions to the health crisis, including some rightful scrutiny of the government's response.

Beginning in a lovely and hopeful manner, Attlee records his conversations with the people who decorated their windows and homes. Children with sweet explanations are juxtaposed with adults who criticize how the pandemic is being handled. These early sensibilities stand in stark contrast to the longer tales of struggle that come later, when the people have been impacted in more direct ways.

As the book progresses, its stories come to illustrate the larger experience of Covid-19 well. Attlee proves to be a keen observer who takes a light hand when it comes to adding context; throughout, he lets the people he's interacting with tell their own stories in their own ways. One health worker expresses appreciation for the public support, clapping, and donated snacks, but also address the deep impact of workplace hardships like under staffing, long hours, extreme new safety precautions, and the unprecedented number of patients dying on their shifts.

Another interviewee illustrates the heartbreak of divisions for reasons of physical safety, recalling how they walked in frustrated circles around the elder care facility where their parent was sick and quarantined. Watching ambulances come and go, but unable to communicate with the staff inside, who themselves were overstretched and unable to access tests, he could only stalk the perimeter, monitoring the place from a safe but desperate distance.

The pandemic stories collected in *Under the Rainbow* contrast a symbol of hope with harsh realities; the result is a moving picture of a historical moment.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (September / October 2021)

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