

“I’m smiling under my mask” by Liliana Green, Chicago

I’m smiling under my mask

Inspired by “Say Thank You Say I’m Sorry” by Jericho Brown

Who is the girl with the orange and pink hair,
who I compliment every time I go through the Starbucks drive-thru.
I only ever see half of her face.

Who is the man who stands at the intersection
between Hollywood and Sheridan.
His suit coat and top hat, fitted with a plume,
always dapper and singing his own tune.

Who are the girls at the track meets,
always oversharing and bonding over nerves.
We exchange compliments and lace up our spikes,
becoming best friends for a fleeting moment before we sprint away.

Who was the father who sacrificed his shoe
for our volleyball, stuck high in the branches at the beach.
We could only thank him briefly– we had to
retreat back to our separate set ups to maintain distancing
in the pandemic.
All the interactions cut short and sweet,
I long for the day when we can openly embrace one another,
sharing smiles instead of elbow bumps.

But for now, we squint over our masks at the world,
like we need sunglasses to see the state of the
globe.