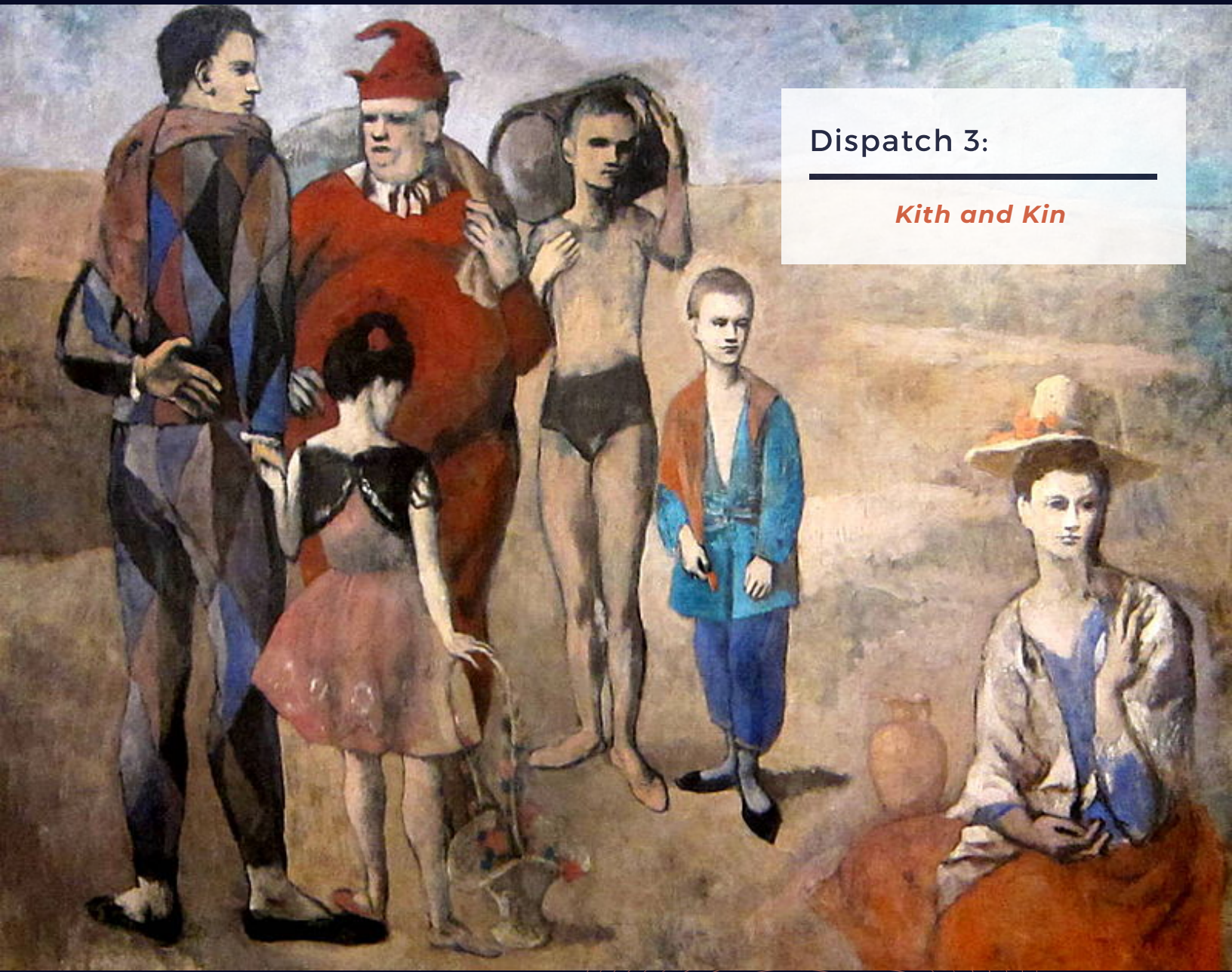


DISPATCHES FROM AN/OTHER PLACE



Dispatch 3:

Kith and Kin

Family of Saltimbanques, Pablo Picasso, 1905

Dear students,

Family is complicated. Never more so than now, as we weather the quarantine alongside families of blood, or choice, or circumstance. Families of birth bind us to the past, to history, land, culture, memory; later in life, those we choose, are the avenue to possibility. By the people we collect around us, we gesture at the life we hope for ourselves. We try to recreate the families we grew up in, or escape them. We find comfort in the structure of partner and children, or claim our place in the larger family of artists (as Picasso did, *above*, [eschewing the demands of his own complicated ties](#)), or insist, a la Whitman, [that family is nothing less than the whole of human kind](#). They are the people with whom we share the beautiful intimacy of daily routine, the epic and the mundane, the best of ourselves and the worst, and in return, hope only for a steadfast gaze. Today we celebrate family:

If you're still recovering from the text-heavy edition last week, take heart: this week we focus on images (and, ok, a couple short poems). First, photographer and writer Sally Mann, whose 1992 [collection of photographs](#) entitled *Immediate Family*, captured life on her family's rural Virginia farm:

"Out of a conviction that my lens should remain open to the full scope of their childhood, and with the willing, creative participation of everyone involved, I photographed their triumphs, confusion, harmony and isolation, as well as the hardships that tend to befall children — bruises, vomit, bloody noses, wet beds — all of it."

It is precisely this candor and complexity that make the images just as stirring nearly 30 years later:



Picnic, 1992



Gorjus, 1989



I recently read Mann's [memoir](#) *Hold Still*, and found it moving, hilarious, cerebral - one of the best things I've read about the creative process, family, and connection to a place. An excerpt is [here](#).

Larry Towell is a Canadian photographer known for his photojournalism in places of political conflict around the globe. Yet it is his remarkable photographs of family life, [*The World From My Front Porch*](#), that are his most enduring:



CANADA. Lambton County, Ontario. My oldest son Moses TOWELL eats a wild pear while Ann sits behind the wheel of a 1951 pickup truck.



CANADA. Lambton County, Ontario. 1993. Ann TOWELL kissing Noah TOWELL on the kitchen table when the western sun comes into the only window that faces the setting sun.



CANADA. Lambton County, Ontario. 1996. Naomi TOWELL carries her two-year-old brother home after swimming with him in the river rapids of the Sydenham River,

Finally, the promised poems. In "Family Vacation," Judith Slater wonderfully captures how many of us may be feeling right now during quarantine:

Four weeks in, quarreling and far
from home, we came to the loneliest place.
A western railroad town. Remember?
I left you at the campsite with greasy pans
and told our children not to follow me.
The dying light had made me desperate.
I broke into a hobbled run, across tracks,
past warehouses with sun-blanked windows
to where a playground shone in a wooded clearing.
Then I was swinging, out over treetops.
I saw myself never going back, yet
whatever breathed in the mute woods
was not another life. The sun sank.
I let the swing die, my toes scuffed earth,
and I was rocked into remembrance
of the girl who had dreamed the life I had.
Through night, dark at the root, I returned to it.

Finally, a throwback to the 1780s with this piece from Elizabeth Hands, which I found funny, familiar, and surprisingly resonant for the quarantine:

On An Unsociable Family

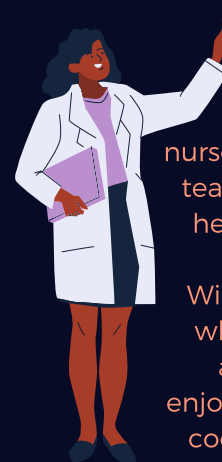
O what a strange parcel of creatures are we,
Scarce ever to quarrel, or even agree;
We all are alone, though at home altogether,
Except to the fire constrained by the weather;
Then one says, "Tis cold', which we all of us know,
And with unanimity answer, "Tis so':
With shrugs and with shivers all look at the fire,
And shuffle ourselves and our chairs a bit nigher;
Then quickly, preceded by silence profound,
A yawn epidemical catches around:
Like social companions we never fall out,
Nor ever care what one another's about;
To comfort each other is never our plan,
For to please ourselves, truly, is more than we can.

As maddening as families can be at times, these images and words offer a welcome reframe. The tenderness in Towell's photos, the splendor and grit of Mann's, made me look at my family more gently. Hands's wonderful tableau of domestic life made me grateful for people to share yawns and companionable silences with. And Slater's desperate impulse to run away, be free, that too felt familiar - but just as much, the quiet return.

Enjoy your families this week.

Be well,

Tamanna Rahman
your friendly neighborhood nurse practitioner



Tamanna Rahman is a psychiatric nurse practitioner who joined the CAPS team in January 2019. She completed her nurse practitioner training at Yale University and holds a BA from Williams College in American Studies, where she studied social movements and literature. Outside of work, she enjoys engaging in activism, gardening, cooking and baking, and hanging out with her Russian Blue cat and giant Newfoundland dog.