Living in the Apocalypse

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Cover Page Footnote
September 11, 2001, New York City, early morning

"I wonder now only when it will happen . . ."

--Sharon Olds, "When" from The Gold Cell

You wonder not when, but where you will be-And you think only

of the ones you love-a shiver through the spine, the gun cocked hard

below the ear, the solar curve of a woman's belly-

The end of the world.

II.

The Manor House at Sunset

"(The building falling) looking like a Victorian lady sitting down with her great skirts."

--Dr. Lisa Jadwin, Professor of English

Sometimes, we can keep what we aren't ready to have . . .

still numb,

two days after the world began its descent, I am told what I saw . . .

An English manor. Sunset.
A room that is tight with furniture-cherry or oak. Great windows looking out towards a green lawn. A fire is gentled, and a book is open on the arm of a chair. The early evening
stars are still at their dressing tables, the sun is retiring,

and the earth is not yet ready for its end.

The lady would like to sit. A complicated matter of posture and gesture is necessary to make it safely to the bottom. Her back stiff, her breasts out, and her great skirts pooling at her feet like the smoke on the last august horizon.

III.

Rochester, Park Avenue, 7 pm

Every day of this week feels like the last day. The cars roll silently down this stretch of architecture and trees, carrying the secrets of a city. Residents have been seen weeping in their cars on East Avenue. No one honks anymore, no one cuts anyone off, their movements are cautious like the flames of candles and the early bedding of the sun in September.

The custard shop is usually busy, but today a man sits on a counter and waits for no one. Patrons at a restaurant wear American-motif clothing, and the conversation is a whisper caught in the trees and terraces, gossamers of words floating down the block.

Every day of this week feels like the last. The world rolls quietly onward tonight as it did the night before. And the night before that.
Those are the days that are easy
to imagine having happened. The ones
that pass their silence on
to the next. Tuesday, Wednesday,
Thursday, Friday is quiet on Park Ave.
And even the man who comes
with the clouds must pause
on his way to listen.

IV.

The Pit (I)
(for Nate)

It's been three weeks
since the end began
you tell me
that there are still

fires
burning at the core.
I can't think of
anything else.

You tell me
that thousands
must have been burned alive-

that they were screaming
all the way down
to the bottom.
Several circles

into the pit.
I can't think of
anything else

Lately,

even my dreams
are the soft and supple
flesh-the quick
and impossible flame.