

Once

by [Mark S. Burrows](#) in the [August 11, 2021](#) issue

Look, it wasn't always like this.  
Once, we presumed we knew what  
was at stake, what right was and  
wrong; we imagined this had to  
do with something as old-fashioned  
as truth, and as durable, presuming  
we all felt this separately, together.  
Once, we assumed we belonged  
to each other as a natural duty and  
an inborn right, not thinking how  
it might all go wrong, how even  
something as simple as our breath  
might unwittingly harm others  
through the stealth of an unseeable  
virus, and how our silences assent  
to what our eyes refused to see;  
once, we thought the world would  
be as it is—just or unjust—without  
regard for what we might or might  
not do and how we longed to be,  
once. It was always like this.