

## Pandemic

I

Coronavirus? sweet hermitage, this illness to lockdown  
as a dungeon to a castle, closed order to a church. Blessed  
captivity, bones like the bars of a prison. Breath  
crushed like I'm being slowly snuffed out. This sick room, home  
sanitorium constructed from hopes, regrets and apologies,  
confessions, last pleas and remorse, as I prepare for my deity.  
Make up after break-up, after years of neglect, not even  
a call, we await the best reunion of all. And meanwhile I fall  
prodigal daughter before the possibility of divinity, perfect  
excuse to disappear, death an invisible temptress, tantaliser  
I can't resist. Death, the foil against which this life  
seems most futile, material; wretched beside death's eternal  
dream, the promise that permits our escape from this handful of  
dust, this compromised endless existence, daylight disrupting  
our one place of sanctuary, sleep, once chance at oblivion  
each day without fail, harsh master, granting us no reprieve.  
Oh to be a flimsy wreath instead of this cumbersome flesh,  
a ghostly sprite on a gothic tower, drop of rain, a tear  
on a rose draped bower, winged being  
without need of sustenance or attire.  
Oh to part ways with the daylight and the days that I loved  
not enough, wasted, thrown away as if each page of the diary  
a tribulation instead of a party, a celebration.  
To depart, take leave from the stage where we strutted  
and fretted life away, backing out of every chance, hanging  
as if on the edge of the dance. Shadows leeching on.  
Time to leave, slip away before we're noticed,

found lacking, slacking, dragged back, to endure  
the humiliation of going over a bad report,  
failure and shame measured out  
against the merciless eye  
of each other. Time to take the chance.

II

Dulce decorum est. Dulce dulceest decorum. Dulce dulce.  
Sweet and honourable to die in a hospital which may one day  
pull the chord on our ventilator and stuff us in a mortuary bag.

Blue and cold and no dear one to say farewell. Death by corona-  
virus, a factory process, another carcass on the heap.  
Dulce decorum est. Dulce dulceest decorum. Dulce dulce...  
dulce...sweet to hear the voices of angels and friends, visitations and  
in the darkness, dark night, a white light and here at least  
plants, fresh ginger and lemon infusion, the kettle, the porcelain,  
geraniums from the terrace, the reliability of my thermometer and  
clock to count breaths. And, reflecting on photosynthesis,  
I wonder about the plants as a natural oxygen supply. Hypothesise  
they could keep me alive. And the window is open, and I wonder  
if I could just survive. And no one expects I will die. No gravitas,  
last words, or keepsake to take to the grave. Don't they  
know I went through death's door and stand at his bed?  
And don't they see how it feels to be stranded between? Hovering  
moth-like between this life and the next, stateless, the white light of  
daybreak to my left and the red glow of the bulbs of the geranium  
ablaze with petal and fragrant red shimmer in the East.  
And how long to wait?  
I've done it all.

Watched the YouTube videos that describe  
what it's like to die.

III

To die to sleep perchance to dream, or not to dream... ?

Perchance. Perchance to live or die? Pain again. Pains  
like knives stabbing at my chest. Such pains that finally,  
after days of this suffering, weeks now, I call 999...

But please just be a little scare. Let my lungs fill up with air.

May the Doctors see me home. Safe.

Sound. Treatment to bring me round. Perchance to catch  
the rope that someone throws into the sea.

For as life seems to race from my grasp, face-masks in place  
as I subject myself to x-rays and watch for the result,  
for the white patch of deathly pneumonia, I find I am running  
to life as if towards someone I love.

And if with the wings of a dove I could fly  
from death to life at will, making brief visitations,  
as if there's no mortal partition, perhaps somehow I can  
bring glimpses of heaven down to this mortal coil.

At hospital the doctor checks me out. Sends me home.

And the verdict is muscular pain, no damage left by corona-  
virus. No trail of dead-cells, no evidence I was ransacked  
by this dark virus, just partially collapsed lungs, and essentially  
I am fine. And the virus gave up and crawled away,  
invisible, insidious, to some other unsuspecting host.

Stealthy gate-crasher, arriving unannounced and departing  
without any sign of farewell or footprints on the floor.

IV

29 May. Mind still feeling blurred.

I think we can feel like we are in a altered state if we are ill and our usual routines are forgotten. Still in disarray as I unpack my 'hospital bag' and stash clothes away. And I wonder if I had covid-19. and how I hovered somewhere between and feel now like I am being dragged across a train track in front of an oncoming train and beaten up, but tomorrow I expect I'll be fine. And still the sun shines.

**Maria Clare Heath**