

Plague

The way we whisper the word; to say it aloud
confers a truth upon it, gives it a taste in our mouths,
a cross between sorrow and dread; we can work, play and strive,
navigate the storms that batter heart and mind,
but we can't tolerate this breath of fear that cloaks
the strong, hard ground, like a never ending fall of leaves.
And the old, with their milky eyes, anxious for light,
are the first to be taken. They understand the order of it
but still, they can't imagine their names carved into stone,
their dust dissolved in earth, their time of gone.
Then the weak, the young, occasionally a fine specimen.
Those who do, pray, secretly bargaining with their gods,
anxious not to vex the fickle, vengeful deities,
and those who don't, wonder if it's worth a shot
to hedge all bets, the just-in-case, panic loosened
like a startled horse. But still they celebrate,
sitting behind tight shut windows and doors,
how the dawn breaks and small birds sing their hearts out.

Lesley Quayle