**All Closer Together Now A Group Poem by Chapter 1**

Another day, the same day as before, some radiant, others lacklustre

Dull or bright, leap out of bed, put on your trackers, forget the make-up, the hair do

Don’t let lockdown disconcert but beat lockdown, down

Open the windows, joy is the green earth, the bewitching mantra of the birds

Check into Zoom to exercise, have enlivening connections with your book and writing groups

Delight in sparkling conversations with friends, family and say I love you. Have a glass of red wine

And when you feel dispirited, Spotify Fleetwood Mac, belting out, “Don’t stop thinking about tomorrow,

Don’t stop, it’ll soon be here, it’ll better than before, yesterday’s gone, yesterday’s gone”.

In lockdown we are allowed

to walk over the forbidden

golf-course,

this great, green space

with its springtime trees.

The greensmen, usually grumpy,

give smiles and waves,

welcoming my trespass.

On a plain unembroidered sky

Trail-less birds stoop and fly,

Whilst silent foxes ply

Ways through gardens,

As insects taste sweet spring

From breathing blooms

Giving hope of what

Quiet change may bring.

The hall clock used to be silent. Now, each clunk coincides with my heartbeat.

Which quickens on the announcement of new, daily figures.

The postman used to whistle along the path. Now, just the rattle, slide and flutter of envelopes.

Too much, add to basket, hungry for an outside connection.

Birds would chirrup from the ancient Whitebeam.

Now, an orchestra of melodious warblers from every tree.

Overhead would rumble, as striped contrails lined the skies.

Now, an occasional, chilling thrum of a helicopter watching us exist.

This terraced house, this square of ill-kempt garden,

my new every day.

Finite perhaps, yet felt around the world as white picket fences are silently smashed

by a predator unseen and discriminate,

and accusations burn like the mounting funeral pyre: this is all too late.

Were it not for the sirens, the unheard gasps of death and grief,

I would relish this time to lie back in the sun, eyes shut,

a blank canvas, dark, peaceful,  that remembers what it is to care.

Vulnerable

Waiting for herd immunity

You don’t know me

I have your letters and your texts

I am no one to you

One of the few

I reject your assessment of me and

will not be assigned a label of vulnerability

Useful! I’m useful. I’m a repurposed person.

Not scrap anymore, locked in the loft of other people’s minds awaiting timely disposal.

I’m now refreshed, reborn. Repurposed. A new freedom, a phoenix.

A Volunteer helpline coordinator! No training necessary. Really?

“Good morning, helpline here, how can we help?” Foxy. Ferreting out needs, and then,

“Yes, we can do that! Lockdown? Yes it’s awful.” In my dressing gown. In the living room. Unwaged. Messy hair. No make-up. Just a voice. I smile. They feel it across the miles.

Connecting people. Payment in words is enough. Me, them, the volunteer.  All happy!

The world from my window while the battle rages

Out there, medicine and science against the aggressor

To uphold our styles of life and freedom of wills.

Our static companions enthral and excite

With their seasonal temporary splendour

Machines stilled, birdsong still, us calm us,

We exchange to walking, jogging, cycling.

In isolation today we are all closer together now.

Is this panic I feel, as I stand in the queue

Silent, gloved, masked and 6 feet apart

As the queue snakes around outside the food store, the focus is shop.

One by one, we’re released at the door like rats in a maze.

Who coughed, who was that, which aisle is he in?

All hopscotch to make the next move.

No ones speaks….. no one squeaks.

This ‘is’ panic I feel.

I wake from my dream of plastic gloves,

Face masks and detergent, with a Covid band

Tight around my brain. I feel my heart-rate increase,

Then take a deep breath and smell the spring air

Laced with pollen through my open window.

The sunlight cuts like lasers through the shades

 And I hear bird song. Nothing has changed for them.

The immense power of nature continues regardless.

Trapped on the treadmill of tedium
I trudge raging onwards
No ground gained, none conceded
Covid confined, choice curtailed
Human touch cancelled
Fossilised in amber
Memories mocking
A living, supine scream.

Sky’s clear of aeroplanes

Fresh air

Birds singing

Scents not smelled

For years

Boy racers zooming

And hooting

At clap for carers time

Tales of conspiracy theories abound

Some folks believe

Others don’t I’ve found

5G towers erected whilst we were stuck indoors

Some folk believe the hype

Others say there are flaws

Whatever the reason for this dreadful to do

Some good news –

Nature is replenished and starting anew!

The silence is deafening, the darkness is blinding,

The scent of aloneness overwhelming.  A new life

For ten weeks so far for many, in trepidation of the living.

Isn’t it the dead we’re meant to fear? Isolation is a haunting

Made of nightmares, so few understand

The daily hell I spent trapped in. Now we are the same,

But once lockdown is ended, who will remember

Those of us still forced into isolation?

First thing: dew on the hedge, grey cat skulking by the wall, silent street.

I count the seconds between cars down on the main road –

20…25 … 30 – and this is morning rush-hour.

In the park, the oak is in full flourish. I wash

My hands in its clusters of gushing, fresh leaves

But people I pass on the footpath are kept at two arms’ length.

When the church clock strikes 8 on Thursdays, we emerge from our houses

Smiling and clapping, all neighbours, the lucky ones.