

Without Her

She died at Christmas, so she missed the virus and this anxiety we've been breathing for months. She had a funeral. And a gathering in a wine bar afterwards.

Since then, life has shrunk like a garment we washed wrong. Reduced to details. The pattern of nasturtium leaves. The cat throwing up a hair ball in a pool of saliva on the kitchen floor. Dough rising. Voices in the street outside.

Spring without her feels wrong. She'd have loved the birdsong, tulips and no planes in the sky. Been frightened and amazed at how life could still surprise.

The daily tide recedes, leaving the floor strewn with Lego, slippers, tools, books that have sat on the shelf unread for more than two decades, cans of beans used as weights, washing piled absent-mindedly.

Upstairs, they're making things out of wool and egg boxes like they used to, ice lolly wrappers left on the edge of the bath. I don't know where I'm going and turn circles like a tethered boat, knocking against the harbour wall.

I dig with her old garden fork, tapping the winter out of the soil, flicking cat shit into the hedge. Making space. Turning the light earth over to dark. Watching the worms.

My daughter has to write about the Water Cycle. Evaporation, Condensation, Precipitation. Arrows point the way from the sea to the mountains and back again. Round it goes. And falls on my beans.

There's an argument about who gets to use the computer;
"Can I use Granny's old one?"
Why not?

I go and stare at the beans again and I can almost see their glossy green necks uncurl in front of me, bent in prayer or ready for execution.

Just before this happened, the Council came and cut all the branches off the tree I look at from the kitchen window. One day it was full of birds and green, the next mutilated and empty. There's a bewildered jay that keeps swinging past, caught out every time. Like me, it keeps forgetting.

I'm glad she escaped before it all started. She managed to leave the world while it was still familiar.

“I can’t make it print! It’s not connected to our printer!” shouts my daughter from upstairs.

On the other side of London, sheets of A4 curl to the floor, images of The Water Cycle falling slowly onto the sunlit carpet.

WORD COUNT: 398