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Life of/in a pandemic

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Life of/in a pandemic

Lockdown

Almost five months of maternity leave
are past.

The irony of those early days, weeks, months
a voluntary lockdown of sorts
to bed down, to bond,
to recover, to rest,
to nurture our wee family.

The hopes of meeting more, doing more,
rendered insignificant.
And while the opportunities to meet and do
increase too in other spaces,
Our world becomes very small overnight.
We keep within the bounds of this small world
to protect the larger one we inhabit.

Diagnosis

I speak to you on the phone.
Something is not right.
As a precaution, you self-isolate
down in my late grandmother's relatively untouched house,
worried about my mother, her pre-existing conditions.
But I am worried about you.
About what you tell me you are enduring.
Down there, alone, in that unlived-in house.

Fatigue.
Insomnia.
Delirium.
Altered taste
and smell.
Loss of appetite.
Loss of weight.

I call my mother and sister
back in Northern Ireland,
frantic,
urging you to be seen by the out-of-hours doctor.
The brief phone call,
you set off,
alone,

to a covid assessment centre twenty miles away
only telling us en route.
Endangering yourself,
to not endanger them.

When you emerge
beyond,
you talk repeatedly
about seeing the wall,
backed into the corner,
no escape.
About your certainty of never seeing
your grandchildren again.

That crack in your voice.
That look in your eyes.

It haunts you still, Dad.
It haunts me still.

Death

in memory of my great-uncle and great-aunt

You bought us those intricate, delicate coasters
for a wedding gift.

Baby loves to play with them, making me anxious,
in case they would shatter.

In England they play with your lives, making us anxious,
for you too could shatter.

What are they doing in England?
What have they done?

Both gone within two weeks of each other.
So utterly avoidable.

Your lives were intricate, delicate too.
Your children in the US
unable to say goodbye.

Development Review

“Does your baby recognise a friend?”
We have not seen anyone properly in months
Our daily walk around the village dedicated to your sleep.
My heart aches that we must skim this question.
That the health visitor does not need to know
For we cannot know.

Video Call

We aren't quite sure how you will react
seeing daddy in full PPE.
But you smile and wave,
a new trick of yours,
and light pierces the
loneliness both phones occupy.

Return to work

To leave you at someone else's house
to return home
to return to work
without you.
So knee-jerking.
So desolate.
To feel disgusted with myself.
To make hot tea to be drunk hot.
To feel hot tears on my face.
Both leave a bitter taste.
To know I need to do this.
Do I?
To know I am a better mummy for being able to continue my work.
Am I?
(How important do I think my work is?)
To not know what I know.

Covid Test

At just ten months old, we must
drive you to another county in Scotland, to a
designated area of a park-and-ride car park
directed by the military.
To carry out a covid test in the
back of the car.
Ten seconds becomes a lifetime.

Birth

“That was brutal.”

My brother-in-law recites these words
both before and after.

Brutal before

To leave you at the hospital door

To go into labour
alone.

Brutal after

So many there to avert potential disaster

To go through labour
crowded,

after seeing so few for so long.

And yet safely he emerged from the beyond,

you guiding him

from that world to this.

I hold you, sister, nephew, from afar.

First birthday

The leaves of the season

adorn the ground and a cake

to feed twelve when we are only three!

To share socially distanced.

Family on screen sing,

turning the leaves of your book

together

apart.

Long Covid

There's that tiredness that catches you off-guard

Like an old friend coming for a surprise visit.

But this old friend is unwelcome,

knocking the wind out of you,

leaving you

breathless and foggy-brained.

Vaccine

I am in the kitchen,

kettle in hand,

when your text comes through.

“First covid vaccine done.”

Those four brief words
are barely seen
before they blur
the tears coming from
somewhere unexpected
buried
down
over this almost year,
a place where
relief and anguish,
despair and hope
mingle.