

may day in plague time

by olivia sudjic

May Day in plague time
Leaving my flat
I lose muscle memory
Like I lose passwords, forgetting I cleared history
My shadow dislocates on the kerb
Blue gloves with ghost fingers
Shedding invisibly
I step off the pavement — into nothing

Suspense is old news warmed up
Now it is summer, revision season without end
Young royals make zoom calls
And police dye the water the colour of hearses
Polyglot Prime Minister speaks his dead languages
Quotes Cicero
Makes sacrifices
Of unskilled workers
Refrigerated vans, some carrying bodies
Wait at unpeopled crossings

Lambeth walking, straight talking city in negative
Bus shelter advertising cum archaeology
cum has been around for centuries, so it's not
necessary to italicise it
I come to the river for rhetoric

**Bird parliament
St Thomas' Hospital
Like our blonde body politic
Gold sovereign, now tender
Baby daddy is clapping so he has immunity**

**Under railway arches lined with mosaics
Past *Europe: A Prophecy*
That glittering snake likes to lie in the sun
Now it seeks cover, cold-blooded
You know the Blakes sat here naked, under their apple
tree
Catherine the 'clean-hands operative' when William's
were inky
Illiterate, she signed her wedding contract 'X', like a
ballot
Out of the tunnel and into the light again**

**An ambulance rests
Soft head on the wheel
Behind railings they are still sleeping in tents
The sights are the same but my senses are changing**

**In Archbishop's Park the playground is netted
An alien like in the Pentagon videos
Another headline is breaking, speaking in tongues
Invisible friends call to each other
So much birdsong in urban environments**

**Is it only that we have been muted
Or are there more birds singing than sirens?
We're no prophets — stopping to listen without
understanding**

**Still as the sun sets behind Old Paradise Gardens
Stop working, pens down**

**My Yugoslav grandmother left me a small jug
Held in common
No other instruction
It was an instrument for speaking the language of birds
Learn a new language this lockdown!
Fill this with water and put your lips to it**