

POETRY SELECTED BY ANNE STEWART
A LONG POEM BY CAROLE COATES

Mourning in the Second Year

there is a difference she said
between *he died* and *he is dead*

lockdown locked down locked up locked in locked away with a man who is nowhere everywhere
nowhere over a year now and he's still dead

sometimes she says

I want anguish again
the pure clean pain of it in the early days
when it was a high note filling the house
in early lockdown when the world was mute
and the blue days of May went on and on
and silence overwhelmed me and sadness
had no boundaries and I would walk alone
with nothing but words and sorrow

not this turbid undistinguished grief

dark stinging rain
and a plague outside
while she's inside
living with a dead man

no she says not with
but next to
a hole in the air
shaped like a man

who keeps I must say
all the Covid rules
he doesn't breathe
on me or touch me

and as for social distancing
he's isolate as the pole star
or the moon

Because they were old and careful of each other they would call out are you all right are you ok
where are you and the sounds would go up and down the stairs of the tall house and down to the
cellar where are you are you ok are you all right if she was in the bathroom a long time he would
say in a low voice standing outside are you all right are you ok and if he was upstairs captured by a
book she would call where are you are you ok are you all right up to the attic and down to the
cellar up and down are you all right are you ok where are you winding through the tall house

Where do sounds go?

She thinks they may be stored in silence
which is not absence of sound but fullness
repletion silence crammed thick

jammed with noise the house a reservoir
of unforgotten sounds air not silent
but full of sounds she can't hear

his whistling ribbons silently through all the rooms

she's afraid of music but sometimes

Dance with me, invisible
which is like embracing air
in the faintest hope
the off chance
that someone might be there

she talks to the house

morning she says to the kitchen hello darling to his desk
sorry to the upset chair here again now to her bed

Good luck mate to the wood bug on the wall

she listens to water and air and the sound of the sea in her ear
while the house has its own conversations

Songs the treadmill sings
at 3.7 km/h don't don't don't don't don't
at 4.0 km/h eyes wide eyes wide eyes wide

she tells the treadmill it's all the days they stay dead then gives it a chorus of Hail Glorious Saint
Patrick because it might be March outside in the plague world which is always scurrying forward
speeding up snowdrops and crocuses coming and going and daffodils rising up lying down all
rushing to some ending while here inside a stillness and silence so heavy it must be thick with
soundless calling

Why is loneliness so much like waiting?

Lockdown locked down locked up locked in locked away with a man who is nowhere everywhere
nowhere over a year now and he's still dead

she saw the moon once
its borrowed light withdrawn
become a ball of mud

At 4 am the BBC World Service told her that mammals were originally nocturnal because dinosaurs
used up all the daylight is this why she's still awake

sometimes she's drifting in a great water flotsam among weeds surges pulling her here and there
sometimes bumping against someone and they drift together for a while then a current sends him
away

the old life gone a new one not begun

(after he died the tea cloths became very clean)

How can she write about death?

*Remember me when I am dead
and simplify me when I'm dead*

an old woman in an old house
with an ordinary grief
for an ordinary death
in the coldest spring
tries to write a poem about death

a psychotic boy she thinks vulgar in a cheap suit

“over here over here death cries –
the body and no body and nobody
and now the box of ash

nobody no body
will turn towards you
in your bed again”

The last words of Henry James when confronted by his own death were
So here it is at last, the distinguished thing

Pretentious old fart she says

one crow is still pacing the roof ridge opposite backwards forwards are there snowdrops yet
she'd like to pick some such respectful flowers or maybe they've gone it might be tomorrow
now or last week or next week it's the same but maybe the flowers change

She suddenly remembers his delight in small pork pies

WAKEY WAKEY she shouts at the box of ashes

*Human ash is not soft and smudgy like ash from wood or paper but hard and granular like one of
those gritty beaches that have not yet become a good place for a picnic it trickles through your
fingers but it is not sand bone ash is not ash it is tiny particles of bone*

male weight 6 lb.

*Each sample of cremated remains is entirely unique
the signature that identifies them as belonging to one person
all the unique habits and environments and experiences of a lifetime
leave a distinct elemental fingerprint on the skeleton which is present
in their ashes*

hickory dickory dock
stop that she says to the clock

she goes out of her house and looks through the window

it looks like an ordinary house