

Verse off by Rima Kandhari

Every Wednesday I come in filled
With hope and trepidation,
At the end of the day I am thrilled
To leave with creative inspiration.

Imagine my joy to find out,
That words need not rhyme,
As long as Sarah doesn't pass out,
It will be no crime.

Shakespeare, Stevenson, Shelley,
All started from somewhere,
Who knows one day happily,
I will be right up there.

Every week I try to write something
Deep and meaningful,
But usually end up with something
Dodgy and doubtful.

Don't despair- It does not matter,
Again I am told,
As long as the character,
Is loud, honest and bold.

I realise none of my work may end

On the publisher's table,

I don't care about that, dear friend,

As long as you think I am loveable.

I have had a great day,

I am sure this is all you can take,

Thank you for listening by the way,

Now can we have our tea and cake.

Extracts from 'Finding Joy in Lockdown' by Rima Kandhari

Slowly, the morning walk became a routine and we extended it to an hour. It was April and the trees were covered in blossoms and daffodils were growing wild. I have never appreciated the changing seasons like I do now. Summer brought a variety of fragrant flowers and vivid array of colours, and Autumn was the season of changing colours with the leaves of my favourite maple tree turning bright red as well as the sound of crunching leaves and frosty mornings. In Winter, I could admire the shapes and patterns of the leafless branches. The beautiful and spectacular sunrises on clear days, with the varying hues of pink, purple and gold, lifted our spirits.

In January, much to our delight, we had a snow day when the world turned black and white. Snow has a way of bringing out the inner child- we had snowball fights and huddled up together with a hot drink after a cold but brisk walk.

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Sometimes, we came across a black cat and he would insist we stop and wait till someone else crossed before us- a bit difficult that early in the morning when nobody else was around!

We made some new friends in our neighbourhood. I got to make friends with all the dogs we met! After all, we humans crave for company. Everybody has been in a similar situation and were more than happy to chat with us and made our day. One neighbour is now a friend for life and got me interested in the history of our humble village. We even started to look forward to Tuesdays for our food delivery just to chat to the friendly drivers. We met some of our more local neighbours for the first time during the NHS clapping sessions and socially distant driveway parties. For the first time since moving into Cheam, we felt a sense of belonging and being part of a community.

Sounds of Whitehall by Sally Fox

The ancient building clunks and clicks, creaks and cracks, amplifying our modern foot-fall through its wobbling timbers, along its undulating floors.

Sounds have been added for today's needs. The need for coffee hums and whirs. The need for education adds to the ambience with reproduced sounds in the air; recorded bells pearl and ring, a disembodied choir sings deep red songs of ancient rhyme.

The sounds from outside worm their way through the thin windows and wattle walls. Today's world rumbles on. Buses mumble and snort along their route through the village. Cars take deep breaths and groan as they creep along the congested road. One day, maybe, electric traffic will take over to allow the sound of silence to fill our ears and clear our lungs.

A few days after Halloween I saw an extra little label in the Plague Room referring to 'Three Purple Tadpoles'

Three perfect purple tadpoles by Sally Fox

Three perfect purple tadpoles
longed to dance around May Poles
but all got quickly tangled
in too many flappy flag poles

Cheam fair came round yearly
in the midst of sunny May
the tadpoles wriggled purpley
but they couldn't find the way

They stopped to rest and slumber
on a rotting fallen log
but before they could continue
each had turned into a frog

The May Queen came to find them

giving each of them a kiss

so before they could continue

each had turned into a prince

A few more miles to Cheam fair

happy dancing could begin

round and round and round the May Pole

in a perfect purple spin

DOORS by Louise Taylor

As I walked down this long corridor, I noticed that signs had been painted on every door. One read “Mind your Head and Step. Low Doorway” and, “Please use Other Door”. The next door, painted black, said “Wheelchair users only” and “Please use Other Door”. Opposite was a big glass door, through which I could see a brightly lit white-painted wall with the promise of a café stencilled on it. I tried the cold metal handle, it wouldn’t turn, before I spotted the forbidding grey painted sign – “Please use Other Door”. So, I back-tracked and tried the other way. Here was a low door with one round brass door knob. That looked hopeful. Until I read “Please use Other Door” again. I was beginning to feel just a tad ill at ease. How do I get out? How did I get in? Walking towards what I thought was a glimpse of daylight I came to another closed door. This one didn’t declare “Please use Other Door” but “Baby Changing”. Outside a long line of children, carrying screaming infant siblings, queued, hopefully.

Boots by Louise Taylor

The boots in the attic take me back. Take me back to dad polishing our shoes. Take me back to the grandfather I never knew, calling my mother Boot-button Eyes. Take me back to the beautiful Victorian doll, an elderly neighbour gave me, now hidden from sight in a box under the stairs.

The beautiful brown boots, so small, so full of infant energy. Hopping, skipping. No, they were too wee, these little brown boots, for a child of skipping age.

Take me away in my imagination to a smiling child, held safely in the encircling arm of an older sibling, as together they ride up and down, up and down on a carousel horse at a fair.

Little brown boots, lovingly polished. Little feet and toes held snug in the buttoned-up boots. A child, its hand held by loving others, walking on wet grass. Escaping to jump in puddles, stroke a wet dog. Sitting by an open fire as Autumn leaves fall.

A sick child perhaps who never grew up, like my uncle Eddie? Hope not.

Jumping feet. Pottering feet. Manure on the soles. A cobbler tapping in tacks to renew them. Who wore these little brown boots? Where are they now? A child's laughter. Free.

A Window by Nicky L-G

A window open to the street

overloads all my senses

Focusing on shady and leafy green tree

Makes me feel at peace

Alive and vibrant sounds

Punctuated by occasional birdsong

But buses travel up and down

It's a real contradiction

Occasionally there is a pause

A reprieve, a respite

From the onslaught of traffic

But it doesn't last for long

The view from the window reveals

Opposite a church with steps

Which helps me feel closer to

A reverant and holy place

But where is the quietness
That a holy spot could offer?

How I long for
A window with a peaceful view
A visage which opens up my senses
In a way that I need
Peaceful, quiet and still.
Welcoming sounds
Not sounds that grate on the senses.

Nauseous by Nicky L-G

I was in my house, but it wasn't mine. After all these years, I knew. I always have had a niggling feeling there was an entrance to another space behind the shower. I didn't really want to explore, what was behind the door. An overwhelming temptation to leave things be. Imagining all sorts of things, snakes, insects, stuff I was really scared of.

I circled round, back again, loop the loop, a circle of eight, I squeezed into the narrow passageway and found, a space. Boarded up. Derelict and neglected.

Smashed in, broken down. I tore it down with a hammer. The divide came down quite easily. Surely this can't be real. But it seemed to be. I opened the door and the tight dark, dank, dirty space led into a further room. Like a 'spit and sawdust' public house, with a drab and grimy interior. Lacklustre. At a glance, I gleaned the customers were all male, middle aged chain smokers sat at grey tables and chairs! Nobody looked up when I peeked in.

Still what a discovery! A whole new room! I had a whole new room in my house to explore and this was a reason to rejoice.

Oh, mother of god! but the floor repugnant. Shiny, sticky, slimy, on my bare unshod feet. Offensive to all my senses. Like a newbie skater I was rigid, scared to move.

I rolled over and came to. Nauseous.

The sunlight of my days is gone, by Steve Brown

Epitaph, Gravestone near Whitehall

From you, words were sweet honey.

From you, magic dripped from your fingertips.

Now is the void.

Now is the way I have to live.

Not all is looks and beauty,

Though to some it is.

Now, I have no compass,

I am set adrift