

TWENTY

Celebrations put on ice: like a patient lying on a trolley. Unmoving. Play dates, for young and old, pencilled in for another day: *'when this is all over'*.

The daily score. Government graphs that rise and rise, like lofty spires; each one, unwelcome, a steep stairway to heaven.

Supermarkets: imagined threats, fear of shortages, empty the shelves of people's brains, the zeroes registering behind eyes of jealous customers.

Time on our hands – too much for some to fill – rattling empty spaces or bouncing off the walls of the thirteenth floor.

Weasel words, truths and untruths shift and fuse, like quicksands that serve to confuse. Firm exceptions made - Cummings and goings – like the man himself, repel.

Empty stages, pages of lines unlearned and left stage right – the ghosts of past performances daring to whisper, their voices, lost, echoing through The Gods.

We wrestle - no touch - with the idea of ...no touch. Do we have the measure of distance – donning the mantle of social dimension as never before?

The old -old *people* – diminished memories their only protection - left to shrink and fade. Betrayed, by...who, and why? Left to die.

The schools – the children – bubbles of a very different sort that do not float from place to place or reflect delight in the eyes of the small; but separate, as sure as walls of steel.

Choirs lose their voice, their songs and arias wrapped up and boxed, stamped as dangerous to the public good.

The motorway hushed and empty. Cars and lorries packed away, in a scene from days long gone, to come out another day.

Long summer days, sunshine carried on the wings of friendly winds, the jet- stream bent high above the clear blue skies.

Distant Spanish island: its pocket picked, February sunshine stolen, and smuggled home to flood months later from glossy holiday snaps.

Four chairs, surround a table where once there were only two – unscheduled family meals, diverting chat, swapping stories an unexpected bonus.

Swifts swoop high and low, an aerial display, a masterclass that fill the skies now that the planes have gone – their tails a V-sign to the kites.

Time to read... then read some more. To settle into the comfortable familiarity of a favourite chair, to start, and read until the end.

Acts of kindness, selflessness played out on every scale – in quiet solitude or trumpeted on the national stage.

New heroes – dressed now not in khaki nor draped in capes of red, but clad in scrubs, or whites, or simple homespun tweed.

Fitter than for years – circuits in the garden, press-ups, pull-ups, never ever give ups, brisk evening walks fuelled by talk about the this and that of lockdown.

Neighbours, rarely seen together, stand socially distanced shoulder to shoulder, to clap the NHS with hands, and pans, to let them know their sacrifice has not gone unnoticed.

So, at the end of this year

With questions aplenty

What score would I give it?

Say... ten out twenty?

499 words