

## **The Quarantine Quatrains:**

### **A new Rubaiyat by Malcolm Guite**

**1** Awake to what was once a busy day  
When you would rush and hurry on your way  
Snatch at your breakfast, start the grim  
commute

But time and tide have turned another way.

**2** For now, like you, the day is yawning wide  
And all its old events are set aside  
It opens gently for you, takes its time  
And holds for you — whatever you decide.

**3** This morning's light is brighter than it seems  
Your room is rafted with its golden beams  
The bowl of night was richly filled with sleep  
And dawn's left hand is holding all your  
dreams

**4** Your mantle clock still sounds its silver chime  
The empty page invites an idle rhyme  
This quarantine has taken many things  
But left you with the precious gift of time

**5** Your time is all your own — yet not your own  
The rose may open, or be overblown  
So breathe in this day's fragrance  
whilst you may  
To each of us the date of death's unknown.

**6** Then settle at your desk, uncap your pen  
And open the old manuscript again  
The empty hours may tease you  
out of thought  
Yet leave you with a poem now and then.

**13** Some days I am diverted by a call:  
The soft computer chime that summons all  
To show a face to faces that we meet  
Mirages, empty mirrors on the wall.

**14** Alas that all the friends we ever knew  
Whose lives were fragrant and whose touch  
was true  
Can only meet us on some little screen  
Then zoom away with scarcely an adieu.

**15** We share with them the little that we know  
These galleries of ghosts set in a row  
They flicker on the screen of life awhile  
But some have left the meeting long ago.

**16** We used to stroll together on the green  
Who now divide the squares upon the screen,  
The faces of our friends, so far apart  
Tease us with tenderness that might have been

**17** Some day we'll break the bread,  
we'll pour the wine  
And meet and kiss and feast beneath the vine,  
Till then we'll sweeten solitude with verse  
And yearn through pain, and watch each day  
decline.

**28** They say the Lion and the Lizard keep  
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried  
and drank deep:  
But now in every corner of the world  
The wild things flourish whilst the cities sleep

**29** For when they see our influence abate  
The banished creatures soon  
resume their state:  
Blithe dolphins sport along the grand canal,  
Coyotes call across the golden gate.

**30** The grass grows green in every city square,  
The little foxes, once so shy and rare,  
Saunter our streets and boulevards by day  
Whilst birds and insects throng the cleaner air

**31** How soon the tide of nature has returned  
How soon renew the forests that we burned  
How soon they seed and repossess our streets  
Those precious plants and animals we spurned.

**32** Perhaps in all this crisis, all this pain,  
This reassessment of our loss and gain  
Nature rebukes our brief authority  
Yet offers us the chance to start again

**33** And this time with a new humility,  
With chastened awe, and mutual courtesy;  
To re-accept the unearned gift of life  
With gratitude, with joy and charity.

**34** Perhaps we'll learn to live without so much  
To nurture and to cherish, not to clutch,  
And, if I'm spared, I'll hold the years I'm given  
With gentler tenure and a lighter touch.