**What I Will Say**

Emma Moran

My dad says to me, “Remember this. One day your grandchildren will ask you what it was like, living through this. Remember it all, so you can tell them.”

I try to think what I will tell them. I will say, there was love and there was anger; there was closeness and separation. We stood on our doorsteps cheering for strangers when we couldn’t kiss our boyfriends or hug our parents. We collected life-saving medication for neighbours we never knew needed it; we wouldn’t pick up a mitten dropped on the ground, for fear that we would kill the person who found it. We had to live like that wasn’t an exaggeration. We watched our own movements like we were in a fiction, spitting and swearing against rules that were too strict, then watched the news and knew they were too weak. We were extreme in our mundanity: we became heroes by filling our days pulling up dandelions, hanging washing in the sun, baking cupcakes with our children. We couldn’t share a sofa with friends we saw every week and we telephoned people we hadn’t seen for years. We tried to calculate, constantly, if there was anything more we could do, or anything less.

Times had changed. The quality of time had changed. Hours extended and compressed. Two hours talking to your sister passed in ten minutes. Ten minutes extended into days, as you listened to the clock counting out the seconds you couldn’t sleep through. Every plan was ripped from the calendar, a torn-out snapshot of what those months were supposed to be. Some of them would be stuck back in when the pages started turning again and some of them couldn’t be rewritten – only their rubbed-out pencil imprint was left in a forgotten diary of what might have been, in a different time. We tried not to mourn these, because there was always much deeper mourning to be done, by someone else until it came to

us.

People built fortresses out of plans. I will write those letters, I will train the dog, I will learn to speak French, I will learn to knit, I will learn, I will learn. We would try to learn. Guilt weighed against pleasure, in every moment that we enjoyed a slow breakfast, listened to the afternoon birdsong in the garden, laughed with our neighbours over the fence. We noticed what we’d been missing, and we missed what we never normally noticed. We felt freedom in stepping off the normal track, but we knew this freedom came at a price. We had no idea how much of that price we would pay.

Perhaps I will be able to tell them what we learned; how we changed. How we became better caretakers of each other, because we remembered those who didn’t come through with us. I reply to my dad, “I will remember. I don’t know what I’ll have to say, but if I’m lucky enough, I will remember.”