

POEM

Days of Plague

In the stifling air laden with black
miasma, and the caseous effluvia
of so many ringed with rosy sickness,
the dying, the dripping, the better dead,
a thin, soot-smudged hand and arm
crane, sweep up and out, dashing a bowl
from a nurse's hold.

It is a heavy porcelain bowl,
not too fragile, and does not break
immediately,

but lands on the pine floor.

Then the sound of the spinning, rolling bowl
making small thunder across uneven boards
followed by silence for a dusty second,
as the bowl wheels through space,
strikes a washstand earthenware base.

The smash says clearly: This is termination.
Something final has happened, is over, and done.

Pockets of posies rise up
vie with the infirmary smell,
the hovering odour of charred bodies,
but are defeated by both.

Lightning hammers and strikes,
splits the night,
slaps the nurse's spine as violently
as the hand that struck the bowl gone to ashes.

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