

# Looking Up from Lockdown

In the Middle Ages we had the Plague. Reportedly Thomas Cromwell's wife and his two daughters died within a day when he was out on the King's business. Now we have Covid 19. As we all struggle to manage ourselves at this difficult time, we can think of the good which is coming out of such stringent times, as well as the bad. Don't sigh just yet please – keep reading.

A friend of mine, Stella Millburn, sent me a wonderful picture of a young deer leaping and gambolling in the waves by the sea. Stella said she had often seen deer tracks (*above right*) while she camped on the beach, but she had no idea that the deer came down to play rather than to eat (no munchies for them on the unbroken sands...). So can we ponder on the opposite of lock DOWN, which might be the freedom to fly upwards, unfettered and finding new ways of experiencing the world.

In Tuscany at the time of writing this, there have been 752 deaths, but none reported in the hill town of Barga where the residents always talk of *la buona aria*. Even in cities the air has become purer, more breathable, and while the streets may be empty our lungs may be expanding, so that we too can experience the energy of the lithe young deer – or at least more energy than we've been experiencing hitherto. Yes indeed, there are the down-sides too – many more domestic abuse cases reported, and how scary indeed to be locked up with someone who abuses you – and a downturn in mental health as those already teetering on the edge of depression fall down down down during the dreaded lockdown.

When will it end? When will 'normal' return? Will it ever return? These are imponderable questions and there is not one of us who revels in uncertainty. This is why we fill our 'normal' world with timetables, duties, oughts and shoulds. It may be about much more than making money, though that of course is something which becomes more problematic as economies dwindle. One can be overwhelmed by the conflicting advice and



*Deer playing in the waves, photo from a video by Anthony Martin*



*Barga, photo by Giuseppe Luti*

opinion riding on the surf around the Internet on technological waves. Frequent 20 second hand-washing is at least something all seem to agree on.

More and more of us are finding that it's better not to join this swell. This doesn't mean putting one's head in the sand, as some cynics may argue, but rather to revel in the friendliness of neighbours, the discovery that there are many little things which make up our world as well as the broad political sweeps.

Yes, there is kindness in this new world of ours. As the poet Philip Larkin said, *We should be careful of each other; we should be kind, while there is still time*. Larkin said of his home town of Lichfield in England, *God, this place is dull*. But there is something to see everywhere, and never more than in Tuscany, where he visited Vallombrosa in the mountain chain of Pratomagno. His words below may resonate with many of us now:

*So through the dark I walk, and feel  
The ending year about me lapse,  
Dying, into its formal shapes  
Of field and tree;  
And think I feel its faint appeal  
Addressed to all who seek for joy,  
But mainly me:*

*From those constellations turn  
Your eyes, and sleep; for every man  
Is living; and for peace upon  
His life should rest;  
This must everybody learn  
For mutual happiness, that trust  
Alone is best.*

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*Pollution-free Rome during COVID 19.  
Photo from video by Luigi Palumbo (www.invidio.it)*