

Deep Breath

You've really let yourself go
inside this vanity trap where we
need to wear cyber labels⁴

to decode our hands right from left
so we'll have somewhere better
to land than backwards. Never try to

control a control freak, especially a
robot urging himself into human guise
for some Promised Land.⁵ Because we're

all organs on a preordained menu for
unwed diners outside a conjured escape
capsule. There's something wrong

when no one else but you are breath-
ing, as you wonder what flirting has
to do with spontaneous regeneration.⁶

⁴ rebrand.ly/njkoy7

⁵ rebrand.ly/wpai3q

⁶ rebrand.ly/cporm5

Into the Dalek

I've been holding Clara's coffee cup for only
a millisecond but it's gone polar – why?
As Aristotle, that Big Fella probe, gets rocked

not by Socrates, but a Dalek mother ship
simmering with her brood in the asteroid belt.
Dalek Rusty's⁷ my recurring nightmare, so evil

he's morphed into good – moral, even –
though, when pushed, he excuses
morality as an engineering malfunction.

To analyse his algorithms we miniaturise
for the most dangerous, sludgy backstreets
of the universe, tricking his antibodies

to find the triadic leak that's compelling
him to babble on about beauty in a star –
until I've triggered him to reconfigure:

exterminate! – *EXTERMINATE!!*
Was I a good man before your slap, Clara,
or a better Dalek? The Master⁸ would preach

that Daleks are works-in-revision, just like
Heaven – an endless star-trail to perfection.
And how could a time lord become a good *man*?

Not for a lack of strumming!⁹

⁷ rebrand.ly/nlfode

⁸ rebrand.ly/xopbff

⁹ rebrand.ly/h8opaq

Robot of Sherwood

Maybe I'd be better sorted as a legend
rather than a good man, after all. There's something
to be said for saving damsels in distress,

or scaling mildewed castles with a born-again
Robin Hood who can't help laughing at blood.
While Clara doubles Lady Marion's¹⁰ threads

Robin and I fence off between his sword
and my trusty spoon, and then by arrows
on targets split in twos, fours, ad infinitum. Was I

jealous to blurt "shut it, Hoody, you long-haired
ninny!?" Jealousy is 20-20. But I've uncut my hair
for duels ever since, with comet friezes of silver

for that winning fantasy series¹¹ touch.
While my Lady Marion will never
stop challenging impossible heroes

which, I guess, is why I keep her safe
in the Tardis and at lead, at least in one
of my hearts – it seems back-talking

time lords braces her to believe in
herself without the opiate of illusion¹² or
the faked news of a Prince of Thieves.

¹⁰ rebrand.ly/e0q07q

¹¹ rebrand.ly/rf0b58

¹² rebrand.ly/97gg3t

Listen

Why do people talk aloud
when they know they're alone,
skipping heartbeats in the dark?¹³

Thinking you're awake when the cupboard
of your mind is shadowed, crowded with
outlines from the replicate nightmare

that shivers us back to a unison childhood:
the creaking of mattress springs as we lie
stock-still; the untranslatable groans

of the floorboards echoing our worst fears;
and then the speechless form that rises
under the chilled blanket of our silence.

I whisper at shadow-beings prone to hide
behind the banging pipes¹⁴ of our doubts.
What phrases will they riddle to

bon voyage the lingering humans left
in the universe? But Clara, as usual,
invokes a wisdom to calm: it's me, young,

my back to her, trying to fend off my mantle
as future time lord. "Fear," she says, stroking
my sweaty scalp, "doesn't have to make you

cruel. Fear can make you kind!" Though I
usually rankle at orders,¹⁵ I'll do as I'm told
and accept that uncertainty as our constant,

¹³ rebrand.ly/0nra5i

¹⁴ rebrand.ly/74igv2

¹⁵ rebrand.ly/2rdux7

in the Tardis that makes dark companions
of us
all.



Photo: bbc.co.uk; brainknowsbetter.com