

# Two Poems, Then and Now

The unhurried whispers  
They seem to rush at you with an unnatural cadence  
And remind you that they are here,  
They that fight with almost nothing  
But a mechanical lullaby of a ventilator  
Against a long, oh, very long, sleep

Masked from fatigue and feelings  
We try to wrangle some hope  
From cold beeps of monitors and trickles in tubes  
To stay the unseen sickle consuming  
The spirits of those that lie before us  
They who only yesterday were among us

The fulsome silence of emptied corridors  
Begs for answers from an invisible foe  
Deafened with echoes of grim steps  
We make our way through  
Closed wards and vacant corridors  
Hopefully to some end of this grand suffocation

*Dedicated to our healthcare workers who put others above themselves in the SARS outbreak, 4 April 2003. SMA*

## TTSH ICU

*Tan Tock Seng Hospital intensive care unit, after closure due to SARS outbreak*

*This poem was originally published in the April 2003 issue of SMA News.*

## 10 Years Later

*This poem was originally published in the Hobbit's Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/hobbit.sma>) on 22 April 2013.*

The heat of the gown that boiled off a portion of your spirit with every step,  
That sickly smell of wet ash that reeked from the masks,  
And the haunting cadence of laboured breathing interspersed with muffled speech,  
As you teetered somewhere along fear and hypoxia,  
And vacillated between sprints of survival and spent stupor,  
Since seared into every sulcus and fissure of your brain permanently.

There were no blows to parry, no bullets to dodge,  
Much less an enemy to capture or slay.  
It was a war of attrition as we clung to our calling,  
And also to our caps, goggles and masks,  
In silent desperation; amid the sick and the fallen,  
We who remained were just thankful to have lived yet another day.

There are wounds that heal and wounds that scar,  
And then there are those demons that visit you on nights so dark,  
There are no shadows and no screams.  
Memories laid bare, still raw and wrenching,  
They bleed every vessel and rape every nerve,  
Just as they always do, year after year.