

Contagion Story #1

A Short Story by Kim Kelln

I raised the shield and looked out on the abyss. Day 458 of quarantine and no end in sight. Or this is the end that I'm seeing; dark; dismal. The rain falling listlessly in big dollops, rebounding off the empty streets and splashing mud and oil onto the sidewalk. The clouds low and flat, menacing but lacking energy. The gloom settled on everyone after a year and this looked to be the rest of our short, short lives.

At least for those of us who still had lives to live. Our neighbourhood was one of the ones that was most impacted. Too many seniors; elderly and frail they like to call them. Bullshit! They're no longer young but still lively, active and with lots to contribute. We enjoyed yoga, tai chi and very competitive bridge with the Adelsons and Chans every week. It's just that everything's done on-line now.

The Adelsons, James and Moira, lived across the street. They were neighbours for 36 years; gone. One day we are having on-line tea with them; proper English, afternoon tea, of all things. No idea why such a thing exists. Baffles the heck out of me, but they seemed to get great pleasure in having us join them. One day tea and the next we see the ambulance at their door. James went first. Too young at 72, and Moira shortly afterwards, as was expected. A sad thing to die alone and isolated. At least it's not a lingering death.

Cecily and Tony Chan owned the real estate agency that was almost exclusive to this neighbourhood. Knew it inside and out and damn near knew everyone in it. Handled all the house sales as far as we could tell. If anyone was buying or selling, it was the Chans that were making it happen. We always wondered, half jokingly, how they managed to make a living because no one sold or moved away. I guess there were a few. Like the Hoffmans who moved to that upscale condo with assisted living; gone too, poor souls. They thought they'd be well looked after but those places were the hardest hit.

The streets are empty now. No one dares to venture outside anymore. Too dangerous, and since the change in weather patterns, just too miserable. Who wants to go walking in the cold and rain? Year round and it never lets up. Getting outside gives you no respite, only more stress and worry. No cars or trucks either. No places to go. At least no one has to risk their life anymore doing door-to-door deliveries. Robots doing it all now, including our weekly rations. A God-send, but I still miss being able to pick out my own produce and cuts of meat, At least we're not starving.

There's old Brewer. Waves through his window every day. I wave back. If anyone is old and frail it would be Brewer. I would have thought he'd have been one of the first to succumb because of his smoking and drinking. Poor man hasn't had a drag for a year now, maybe more, what with the rationing and then the outright ban. I suppose he makes up for losing that one vice by stepping up the other. Everyone thought he'd move out after his long suffering wife died but he's soldiered on, getting help whenever and wherever he can.

Our neighbours on either side of us passed early on. That frightened us, being in such close proximity. We enjoyed good relations with both of them. We'd have Ellen and Audrey over for barbecues all the time but we were only fence neighbours with the

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Walshes. The Walshes didn't approve of Ellen and Audrey's lifestyle, which is something we discovered to our embarrassment and dismay at one of our early get togethers. Other than that, they were a lovely couple.

There goes another ambulance. Not a lot of us left in the neighbourhood so we don't see many of those anymore. Looks like this one's going down to the Vickers place. Now they are definitely not elderly, but poor Liz was never in the best of health. Cronos I think. Laid her low from time to time. They'll both be gone soon. I'm tiring of these virtual funerals. At least we have enough liquor to hold a decent wake. Far too often we seem to be drinking ourselves into a stupor toasting the dearly departed.

I hear Maggie coming in from the kitchen. I look back and see the love of my life bringing two cups of steaming coffee. I never tire of seeing her in her cute bunny pyjamas and slippers. I break into a huge grin every time. It livens up even the dreariest of days. She hands me my cup of morning brew and snuggles up, resting her head on my arm.

"What were you looking at? You were transfixed; standing stock still in front of the window almost since I put the coffee on." She said.

I told her what I'd been thinking and she laughed. "You've always been the glass-half-empty person. Thinking up the worst case scenarios. That must be what makes you so good at your job. I'm not even sure why you went there now. No one needs to self isolate anymore, and everyone on our street came through the pandemic in tip-top shape. We're all a little frazzled, but I think we're doing fine. And where'd you get the idea about the weather? It's beautiful. A perfect day to get outside. It's so sunny and warm. I have an idea. After coffee why don't we walk to Forman's to pick up some snapper and we'll invite Evie and Audrey over tonight for an old fashioned fish fry?"

I put my arm around her and gave her a gentle kiss. She was always the optimist in our family; always seeing the positive in everything and everybody. Her glass was always half-full, even in the face of catastrophe.