

Cock-and-Bull-Story

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Anecdotal Evidence of a Lockdown

The last scrunched up tissue paper was rolled into a ball and stuck to the window. A collage of rainbow colours splashed across a dormitory village's left buttocks, on one of two landmark hills for all to see from a socially accepted distance. Here was a rainbow - when it was still raining.

*The huge house they were cooped up in sat on a restful street at the corner where not many passed. The rainbow tissue paper collage which spelled out to others to bypass their feelings of isolation, and to just smile, remained on the window like a seagull's uric acid sh*te stain.*

All would be well with remembering the pot of gold on the other side of the rainbow. Just don't cough near someone unless you want to be ostracised from society forever, and be shamed for being utterly selfish and truly self absorbed. The pot of gold is for those who follow the rules! Ok, not rules, restrictions! Hold on, isn't that the same thing...

Actual Evidence of a Lockdown

Lockdown checklist: toilet paper, broadband connection, copious amounts of red wine, cork screw, teeth whitener for the aftermath, sun tan lotion, a requited love for poetry, a healthy dose of conspiracy theories to blank out mainstream news, and a new love of resenting an already inattentive and passive aggressive partner.

Sigh.

I don't pay much attention to the mainstream news, drowning out instead the sound of Boris Johnston's amateur dramatics that he does actually care about death tolls, to looking at Jon Snow's brightly coloured socks instead. I then sneak away into my healing white coloured heaven bedroom as my 3 young children play outside in our privileged-massive-garden with their furloughed daddy. As small children, they are unaware of a pandemic or lockdown, but only know that people are wearing masks to disguise their human emotions. I touch the top of my smooth silver Macbook, skimming its shining surface and contemplate. It was now, or never.

I can now utilise this bulk of extra time to finish my play ‘Culture Clash’ at the age of 38, after starting it age 23 when studying drama at college. The protagonist, a journalist, ironically had the same occupation I once had, following my bygone days of the theatre. Fitting really, considering that watching the media frenzy of fear mongering was a muckraker’s dream to sell stories of news. Armchair journalism at its finest. Even more excuses or editorial reasons to not actually speak to people or leave the living room. For reporting could be done from working at home, without the need to waste time to unlock every office door with a card door entry system before actually getting to an office of strung out journalist characters.

Could I really believe in all this media hype? Of course there was a virus, I believed that. But what was the driving force behind all of this? Why did the UK government delay a lockdown for 2 weeks when it was estimated 1.7 million could die? Surely elderly people dying in care homes alone without loved ones was morally bankrupt and wrong, an unsavoury insulting snack to add to what was becoming a sickly gluttonous banquet of hypocrisy. Party-gate only went on to prove to me the same burning question: if those in authority had access to the scientific data that this virus could be fatal, why did they themselves not be socially distanced?

And a new law was brought into force to legalise putting Covid on the death certificate without a biopsy. It was like the real contagious virus was whether or not people conformed to lockdown or whether people opposed it. Society was split in glaring polarity: those who wore masks and those who didn’t. It became the new trendy never-ending debate instead of abortion or fox hunting or the death penalty.

As I greedily glugged down another glass of wine, having a new penchant for drinking alcohol to remain sober and composed, my 2-year-old walked into the room. “Look at me mummy!” I was horrified to see he had put on a face mask as though it was a game of charades. I hid my bottle of wine whilst licking the salt and vinegar lingering odour from my fingertips to give him a cuddle, and to remove the hideous factory made mask from his innocent face.

As my little one lay in my arms for a nap, I watched him dream a dream near a pot of gold at the rainbow. Why did I feel like the odd one out in all of this? Why did my brain yearn to find the truth about all of this yet remain the conforming, gun shy person I was? I even had a Twitter account. Important people and self-appointed important people traded comebacks for each other in less than 140 characters. Surely that meant something real and solid in what was becoming a cloud of uncertainty to these conflicting versions of reality?

I dared not to step out of the boundaries of convention. I posted the odd thing here and there on social media about Bill Gates' dodgy past, and about 5G towers having capabilities to fry our brains, but I sanitised my shopping trolley and avoided other people with my germs like everyone else. I stood in line far apart from others as though I had farted extremely loud and was now embarrassed to admit it was me.

I also marvelled in awe at the sheer cheek of a local neighbour who worked in a care home, yet who was brazen enough to throw family birthday parties of 10 people in her front garden like it was a window display of B&M. Her 'Keep Smiling' window poster blatantly mocking us all from behind the next beer or fizzy drinks can spluttering open in the summer sun.

I heard the obnoxious mess of the drunk neighbours at the back garden's side who applauded each other for drinking another vicious Sambuca shot to burn their Covid-free throats. I could sense how they were oblivious to the conformist mugs all around them who abided by the rules / slash / restrictions / slash / what are we calling this new society. An army of boozers having the time of their lives in a back garden arrayed by B&Q bollard lights which were now out of stock for click and collect. As I peered out of my bedroom window overlooking the mayhem, my nosey face rested on my hand - who was I to judge? I sipped more European wine before diving into my Brexit bed (one now only for me alone), promising myself I was going to develop a bubble butt in the morning through extreme exercising. Hangover allowing, of course.

I did go out once a day for exercise. I was fully aware there were people who did not have the luxury of a garden, and unlike me lived in a small flat with small children. Or there were those who lived in damp, confined spaces with tiny windows and who were told to stay in to save lives as their own lives got more claustrophobic. I didn't need the news to show me the class warfare in Tory Britain. I felt it already in my bones. I heaved the pain of muscle ache on my yoga mat with my sweat of self awareness dripping off me never to be seen or heard of again. I, like many others, would soon have my flowers to feed in my garden, a haven for butterflies, bees and birds, along with for myself who was not confined by small spaces, but instead by my invading thoughts of conspiracy theories, and a broken down relationship with a man I saw 24/7, yet who didn't really know me.

In amongst the spitefulness and resentment of seeing so much of each other, I looked away from my partner's aggressive face and tuned into Nicola Sturgeon's daily updates, trying to feed myself with the so-called normality of what being a Scottish person entailed. F**k those in Westminster, we have our Nic! I connected and synced the realities of this never-ending pandemic. The one

where I got to laze about in my f*****g humongous garden with a hangover and fancy myself as the next Sarah Kane who didn't kill herself, but wallow in Co-op's own brand of Chianti. I could finally chill out after having 3 back-to-back pregnancies and give their dad a taste of what my life had been like. One of roller coaster moments of joy amongst moments of sheer isolation and loneliness without a village of support to raise them.

Yet something deep within me couldn't quite buy into the story told about the pandemic. It was like being consumed by the blatant light of obvious sun rays, only to be captivated by oblong peculiar shadows when I took an awkward side glance at them. It felt like a set-up. The more booze the furloughed masses drank the more lockdown became a way of life. A new religion to believe in, to not question your faith in, and above all, to preach to others about. Here was a dogma fully equipped with scientific papers, death tolls and the next pharmaceutical breakthrough. Only those waiting in long lines in at the supermarket to buy tinfoil to make hats with were the ones who were insane. Covidoids the new witches to burn at the stake or the new scapegoat to laugh at.

As Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said: "To be sane in a world of madmen, is in itself madness." On the one hand, this felt like a spiritual deep dive for humanity to look at itself and find out what really made a community with commune for one another, and on the other hand, it felt like a way to kill people off easily.

For me, as I threw my last wine bottle into the recycling bin, hearing it smash against a barrel of bottles, I was determined to quit drinking and leave this hazed membrane feeling behind and to finally wake up and start a new life afresh as a single mum. (One, ironically, who would go on to live in a small flat with my 3 children and without a garden). I knew I actually had benefited somewhat from lockdown, glad to have time to get my act together in myself, and as a way to write another act of my play.

However, for the most vulnerable people to be cast aside like disregarded extras in an unpredictable plot, as the mainstream protagonists took centre stage, here was the UK establishment with its hegemony and cronies and sycophants of society eating its cake too. I was glad there wasn't a bag of flour to bake with left for me when I eventually got let in to the supermarket, settling instead for a long hard look at who I had become and who I wanted to be after this lockdown. I started only to do that, after I tore down the collage of tissue paper on the window, and began to create my own rainbow of dreams instead. This may have been a lockdown, but by no means, was it locking me and my freedom of thought away.