

A Bad Dream

Category: Contagion

written by Deborah Levin | March 23, 2020

Last night I dreamt that New York City was gone—that it had disappeared into a billowy horizon. I was walking on some unknown highway and looked over my shoulder and saw nothing but grey-white layers of clouds. No blue sky. No brown earth. No Big Apple. A real nightmare.

I woke to huge snowflakes dropping from the sky. My family is safe. But I am sad and scared. I can taste the fear, and I don't like it.

I can see the fear in the overflowing supermarket carts, the Purell dispensers popping up everywhere, the empty roads, the lonely streets.

I can feel the fear on my hands made rough from all the washing, on the cardboard boxes that I must handle with care in case they are contaminated, in the weight of one last banana in my palm as I wonder when I'll be willing to go out to a store to buy more.

I can smell the fear in the big batch of meatballs I'm cooking to fill up my freezer, in the cookies I'm baking to pass the isolated hours, in the air outside that should be bursting with the sweet scent of spring but instead is carrying particles of a deadly virus.

I can hear it in the voices of the experts exhorting the public to pay attention to their warnings and reprimanding those who are blatantly ignoring them, in the desperate pleas of medical professionals reporting that they are running low on critical supplies, in the silent text messages flying back and forth between worried families and friends.

It's impossible to make sense of all this. No school, no work, no play. A world turned upside down and inside out. In times of crisis, one is often advised to take one step at a time. Suddenly, we have to take those steps six feet apart from the next person. I cannot get close to those I love. FaceTime, Zoom, YouTube ... we can connect. But we cannot touch or hold tight.

And so a new national vocabulary has developed: social distancing, shelter in place, self-quarantine, pandemic. In the year 2020, this seems unthinkable—or so I assumed. But obviously not.

There's no precedent, no story we can read for an idea of how this will end—and when.

Perhaps I am still dreaming. Someone please wake me when this is all over.

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