

# LOCKED DOWN

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*Come in 560079, this is 48143, over. Go ahead 48143, over.*

*Corona virus aka Covid 19 on the loose.*

*Docs say it's highly infectious, communicable. Things look bad. Over.*

*Will you make it back home? Over.*

*Come in 48143, I repeat, will you make it back home? Over.*

*Negative. Over.*

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## **Lockdown 1.0**

Half asleep, his hand automatically reached out to the button on the side of his phone. White light from the rectangular frame rudely poked at the eyeballs cozily tucked within his eyelids. 12:00 pm. Kicking off his blanket, fingers still intimately tangled in the wire of his earphones, he heard plates from the morning's breakfast being washed out and laid down for lunch in the apartment upstairs. A silhouette by the door caught his attention.

*Amma?*

Her fingers are a dull orange. Mangoes. He smiled. She had the craziest ways of eating them. Lower incisors to pull out the peels, then tending to each peel with great patience, slurping the juice that flowed down her arms as she did so.

He looked over to the table by his window.

She would cut the pulp off the jacket free mango into perfect cubes and place them onto a plate for him, while she happily slurped on the seed.

There was no plate on the table. Looking towards the door, he saw the shadow of his mother had taken the shape of a tree, its yellowed leaves dancing.

No flights back home. Barely the sound of an automobile on the street. Not a single soul had walked by the window he had been staring out of now for the past 40 minutes.

21 days and counting...

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*Come in 5679, this is 4843, over. Go ahead 48143, over.*

*Cases now at twenty thousand. Nine thousand deaths and rising. Safety gears and weapons declining at a drastic pace. How is the situation there? Over.*

*Not far behind. Have you stocked up? Looks like we'll be stuck indoors for a while. Over.*

*Not enough. I'm heading out now, over and out.*

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Stepping outside, something felt different, strange after a point.

He was all geared up. Face mask, hand gloves, sanitizer neatly seated in his back pocket, wet wipes in his bag. Looking around, he saw that the trees had extended their branches, like arms ready to embrace, their leaves and flowers crisp and fresh, dancing joyfully in the wind. But the sun pierced through those arms that refused to embrace him, as he breathlessly puffed within his mask.

It was as though he was not allowed to be part of their happiness. As though he was wandering off onto a restricted zone. *Danger, Beware!*

His mind was constantly alert, looking around, making sure he didn't touch any surface, maintaining two feet social distance. He bolted into the nearest Rewe that he spotted. Eyes scanning the perimeter, searching through the half empty shelves, locking on things that would last him a while. Rice, some packets of noodles, potatoes. He felt like he was in a video game. Turn Left, avoid lane 4, dodge the two men standing by the deep freezers in 50 meters. Collect as many goodies from the shelves on your way to the billing counter, super speed activated. Bill items, collect items, hand weapon sanitizer activated.

*You are now back home. Your game is over.*

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He stared into his laptop screen. A camaraderie of tabs. Clicked on Zoom, everyone he knew had been reduced to a tiny box on the screen, trapped. Clicked on news, "US, leading with more than a lakh cases", "thousands of deaths worldwide", "migrant laborers in India trapped in lockdown"...

The tab labelled Gmail was suddenly blinking. *1 new message in your inbox. "Shakespeare wrote his magnum opus King Lear during the plague."*

Hovered over WordPress, a blog post titled "Quarantine haircuts are apparently a thing now" popped up, "Continue watching" on Netflix.

Suddenly, he heard a commotion outside his apartment. An ambulance was parked. A bunch of nurses and doctors wearing what he saw as some sort of space suits had gathered around.

The next morning, he heard no plates being laid down for lunch upstairs.

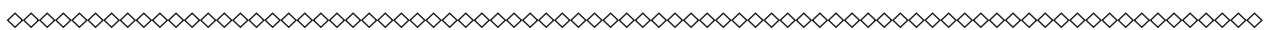
An eerie silence.

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*Come in 5679, this is 4843, over. Go ahead 48143, over.*

*Things are not looking good. I hope the vaccines are out soon. Over*

*What do you mean, is everything okay? Are you safe? Over.*

*It has reached my apartment. Over and out.*



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