

Jacob

i s o l a t i o n

by

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DAY ZERO
The Day

So close, yet so far, what a difference a day makes.

From traveling all last year, throughout the States,
It took just one flight,
One strain, one New Year.

Whisked to hospital, stigma on show,
Condition perceived as a criminal in tow.

The induction and the cubicle, the room and the roommate,
A sobering sign of the journey ahead.

14, 20, 28 40? What days are left?
Politic, paranoia, and patience will decide.

What difference a day makes...



DAY ONE
Contemplation

Only time will tell what happens from here,
But with no sleep, no information, and no other,
One can only wonder.

The unknown is such a powerful force,
Consuming and directing every thought.
All the while, Big Brother looks on -
Do they know?

What will the tests indicate,
How will it develop?

So many uncertainties and no language the same.
Asking for information, or just basic supplies,
Answers seem distant, and no-one provides.

How will I develop?

Only time will tell...



DAY TWO
Climate of Fear

What today brings.

Blood clot marker high,
Throws uncertainty and anxiety into deeper levels.

Fear of health, the unknown,
The future of my family and my home.

Speaking to different doctors,
Trying to gauge really and truly
What my tests mean.
Risks and prognosis, is all I want to know.

I again go to bed tonight with the knowledge that,
I know no more.

My wife, a rock, helpless in situ.
To say I miss her wouldn't even come close.

Oh, what today brings...



DAY THREE

Movement

Just a number, just a wristband,
A Pariah in the making.

Word spreads, fear is insidious.
People outside with opinions, escape all empathy,
(The insightfulness and effort required to be empathetic
lives only in true good).

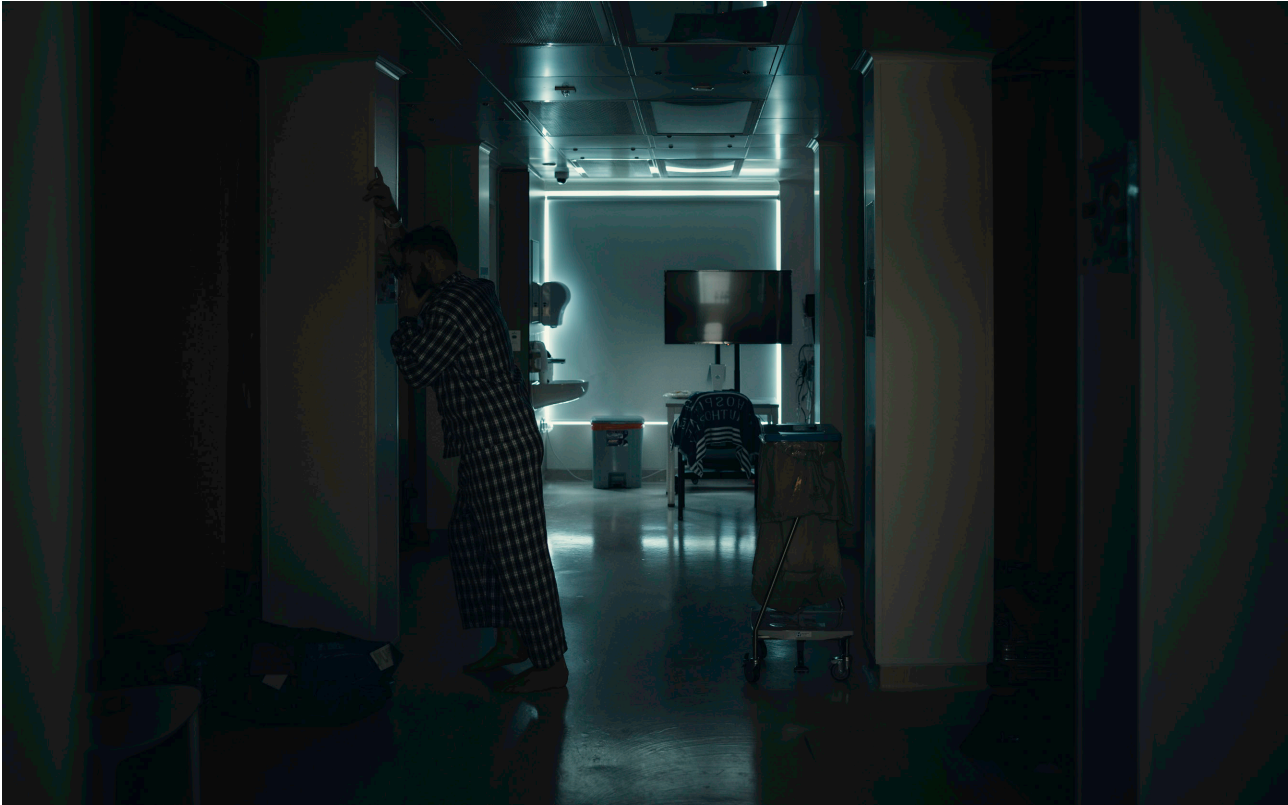
"Stay strong", "you will get through this",
"Do a project", "take vitamin C"..
The platitudes are vacuous,
And of utility for only contribution pretence,
A hole in society, far too many show.

For, anyone who knows me, or
Most semi-intelligent/motivated adults,
Would see past such wasteful asininity.

No movement of people, no in-person care,
Head games with symptoms and hyper-aware.
Is my body telling me something or is it just my head?
With no information one is careful how to tread.

Movement in my blood, and in my value.
An improvement in the test marker for COVID.

Everything here is just a number..



DAY FOUR
Processing

Mornings are better.
Mornings give hope.

Today is brightened with rumour of changing requirements;
The groups' faces lift, relationships grow,
And discussions of perceptions and conjecture deepen.

Tests are processed, routines emerge,
Doctors rounds seem more remote,
Even if seen on the same screen.

Outside life feels further away;
So much distance at play.
Six strangers share that distance,
Share stories, share perceptions,
Share hope.

New updates may lead to false hope,

Mornings are better.



DAY FIVE
Difference

Everyone is different.

As personalities and habits emerge,
It becomes easier to identify emotional states.
In such echoed environments when placed under stress,
Getting out of people's way is important to address.

Everyone is different.

We now live for each others 'CT Value',
A tangible dictate of our progress path.
Half the ward get tested each day,
Usually something to discuss come end of play.

But everyone is different.

Together but alone,
A paradox that I live with often.
Here it is only magnified.

Strangers on a train,
One destination, and many stops.
There are people on the train,
But in different carriages.

It's lonely.

Will lasting friendships be made?
Who will get off,
And will they remember us when they're gone?
Should they?
Should I?

Everyone is different.



DAY SIX
Chaos and Order

Ever wondered,
How tenuous is the seam that runs between chaos and order?

Here the illustration of such a finely balanced paradox
Is in full swing,
Institutionally, social and personally.

The hysteria of new cases
Bursts open new wards and new beds,
But limits of operation - staffing -
Mean all provisions and information
Are slow and confusing.

The irritant of deteriorating daily constraints
Rub coarsely against our skins.
The truths play promiscuously within a chasm of unknowns,
Torturing the mind on tenterhooks,
Awaiting every find.

Today, just results;
Only results,
Give focus, give hope.

But when did known data become such doubted metric,
A sign of the times,
A reflection of our society?
Is this our fate?

Ever wondered?



DAY SEVEN

Background

Different backgrounds coalesce,
Boys in striped pyjamas.

As the mental landscape changes,
While new rules and new data come into view,
The six strangers who share a room without air,
Gain things in common;
Frustrations, loneliness,
Hope.

Is this penance?

Outside, people send messages,
And impart advice
- they think they know me -

They want to serve their own interest
And satisfy their need to feel better
By pretending to show compassion.
A box ticked, another 'thoughtful' message sent.
About as far from thoughtful
To whom it is meant.

Think. Educate. Care.
Actually care.
No pretence.

Leave me alone.
Your self-serving attempts gives me nausea.
Your arrogant notes of "you should"s
Remind me of your small mindedness, ignorance and lip.

My friends - my real friends - offer no advice.
They know that's the last thing one should do.
Why, they know my times before,
Locked behind a door.

Empathy, love, support,
That's what's on offer.
'Cos that's what's in need,
For the boy in the striped pyjamas.

Is this penance?



DAY EIGHT
Circle of Isolation

A microcosm of how my life is;
From one isolation to another.
Hotel room to hotel room,
Suitcase to suitcase,
Alone to lonely.

Challenges of 'COVID Jail' are reflective,
And not alien.
The task is not to find tasks
- they are plenty -
It is to battle the further isolation
And time away from home and loved ones.

Loved ones...

A partnership of synergy and transference,
Where pain is absorbed by one's half
As much as it is alleviated.

Time heals and blinds.
Mental paths show growth and production.
Unknown futures and outcomes
Make room for acceptance of the settled construct
And the inhibited reality.

Just the new microcosm of my life.



DAY NINE
Landscapes

A change in mental landscape.
Where there were six,
There are likely to be five, or four?

No landscape can be seen,
No other, no air.

Mental games, mental strategies.
Double figure days,
Single figure progress.

Stories are told to ourselves daily,
Narratives align.
Human need for resolution
Made worse by contradiction,
Attrition and puniton.

But unknowing is the worst,
The only constant in an ever-changing mental landscape.



DAY TEN
Stories

Stories,

That we tell ourselves.
That we own.
That are charged by narratives.
That are historic.

Observance of others,
Six strangers placed in a room,
With one thing in common

- a fascinating experiment -

A basis of history,
Moments in life lead up to this point,
Leads each one of us to perceive our experience
And the information we receive
In an entirely different way.

To sub-consciously filter, edit and delete,
To choose what we think about, what to pay attention to,
How to process the situation,
We make up a story,

That we tell ourselves.



DAY ELEVEN

Impotence

The lack of control is consuming,
No power to change outcomes,
So dehumanising.
Erosion of rights and respect,
Demeaning.

We are impotent,
It's overwhelming.

A bed number, a thing.
An inconvenience, a fling.
Worthless or less, the treatment suggests.
A bot, an object, a problem,
An outcast?

The stigma is visceral,
Not quite yet hit.
Judgement in the mind,
Yet will it benefit?

We are impotent.

Disbelief runs through daily occurrences,
To overall situations.
The management (lack of),
The care (lack of),
The humanity (lack of).

Tensions run high and anger sets in.
Emotions fluctuate as results come in.
The brevity required to look forward not back,
And strength of character digs deep,
When a ward-mate improves.

We are together, angry or sad.
Six strangers in a room,
Living as if mad.
Illusions of control haunt at night,
But morning is a reminder;

We are still impotent.



DAY TWELVE

Punishment

A new day and the group's first leaver.
Days of seeing other wards' success stories
Now bears fruit within our own jail cell.
One down, five to go...

A stark reminder presents itself today
- a pivotal day -
For why we are here,
And the populative sentiments against our 'actions'
Of contracting COVID - Omicron to be exact.

Not a patient, never a victim;
A criminal, a hoodlum,
A careless and selfish offender.

Rarity of the virus in Hong Kong
Pulls into focus those that have it,
And local consensus of their COVID-lens
Becomes magnified even further.

Perspective and relativity creates environments.
And in this box, the climate is varied and volatile,
But each day brings a reset and new hope.

What will tomorrow bring?

A new day and the group's second leaver...?



DAY THIRTEEN
A day in the life of

Groundhog purgatory,
A day without touch of the outside;
One that starts with hope and ends on a tightrope.

Morning bells, morning lights,
Decrees for vital signs.
Routines for physical health,
Routine for the mental self.

Dreams of coffee, hugs, and the outside world.
The little things amiss,
I miss the most.

Restrictions a plenty,
So many things banned.
First world guilt shows no face here.

So is this punishment?
Is this existence?
Humanity gone missing,
An inconvenience without sense.

If that...

Such feelings of non-existence proven without care.
So many, so few, how can they bear?

Jaded, faded, disenfranchised,
Are you still there?

One negative test,
This purgatory may dare...



DAY FOURTEEN

Visions

Remembering day one,
My life through the glass.
Tears of sadness, fear of the indefinite,
Fear of the unsure.

How amazing she's been, the anchor of my soul,
Tested and stretched, and stronger we become.

The impact of this journey,
And all who endure it,
Goes further than those alone.
Families and friends through unnecessary strife,
Positive, recovering,
Close contacts alike.

Will today bring solace or a reset of the switch?
In search of that second negative,
Hope for no glitch.

Negative...



DAY FIFTEEN

Exit

Today or tomorrow?
We don't know.
Paperwork ready, pestering ongoing.
The story framework developing
And reflections taking shape.

Solace with the onset of what's coming,
Deep sympathy for those staying behind.
Their journey more volatile than mine
But their support and companionship unwavering.

Visions of home tonight,
The touch of my wife,
The aroma of wine!

Further isolation, more quarantine,
The journey not over, but a chapter complete,
And the end in sight.

What has been made of my mind,
This stay?
Surely time will tell;
Mindfulness and awareness will accommodate my growth.

But what of the process?
The rules, the treatment,
The principle of such mandatory confinement.

Few freedoms,
Akin to tighter-than-jail like conditions.
Draconian, cruel, pointless,
Punitive.

Who is the arbiter of equity? Of justice? Of truth?
Will the truth ever materialise?
Today or tomorrow?



DAY SEVENTEEN
Reflections

Overwhelming emotions,
Going home.

Fourteen days more of freedom atrophy.
In happiness, I'm still mindful of those left behind,
And with relief to be home,
I am reflective of the path.

The journey, the experience,
Never forget.
But not just my time, the wider picture yet.
How are we here?

The country I once loved,
Eroded and shamed.

The world in division,
No further along.
Two years in tow,
Still science versus opinion.

Humanity with devolution,
Seems scariest of all.

For my time stood still,
And feels now just a blip.
What did I learn,
If anything at all.

Will I forget?

Overwhelming feelings,
But now I am home.





KEN, first leaver



JERRY, second batch of leavers



ANTHONY, second batch of leavers



EMIL, fifth leaver



KENNITH, the last to leave



Where privacy meets publicity.



People often kept to themselves but didn't want to be rude.



People often kept to themselves but didn't want to be rude.



Food deliveries, at random times every day.



Sleep was often the best,



and only option.



My home for two weeks.



My temporary family (from left to right): Ken, Anthony, Me, Emil, Kenneth, Jerry.