

## **THE VIRUS**

**Ruth Daniloff**

I stare mesmerized at the television screen. It shows a congested New York emergency room with mounds of bodies stacked on makeshift beds. The bodies are so close together I can't see if the patients are lying on their backs or their sides, let alone if they are male or female. Ghostly figures, swathed in white and blue protective gear, hover over the beds plugging and un-plugging tubes. The patients need ventilators, but they have run out. They can't breathe. They are drowning. They are choking.

Panic invades me. The pictures on the screen are unreal. Maybe I imagined it. This is not supposed to happen. People are dying like flies; the numbers tripling by the minute. Elders are at risk, a newscaster says. That's me. That is my husband and all my elderly friends at my assisted living residence where some cases of the virus had been identified.

I know I shouldn't be watching television, but my eyes are glued to the horror. As a journalist I have written about the terrible suffering from wars and conflict, but I have never experienced the horror myself.

I am glued to the television because I want to prepare for the worst. I wonder if I am part of the next mass extinction. There have been five already. The latest being 65 million years ago when a meteorite zapped

the dinosaurs. Now there is even talk of triage. If ventilators run out, doctors will advise you to go home to die.

Choosing who lives or dies seems a bit uncivilized but what can you do? Despite my age I have unfinished business. I want to know which girl my grandson will marry. I want to read my son's unfinished book. I want to see the colors change next fall over the mountains in Vermont, not to mention finishing the many conversations I started and then I would like another cat.

Unfortunately, we can't even blame anyone for this virus, not even God, not even our feckless President who deserves a firing squad for his neglect and indifference for the fate of this country. It is hard to imagine the chaos which awaits us in the wake of this epidemic.

Despite this ghastly debacle, I am naïve enough to see a glimmer of hope, not so much for myself but for humanity's extraordinary people, doing extraordinary things. Nurses, doctors, ambulance drivers, train conductors, bus drivers are risking their own lives to save ours. A restaurant owner who was forced to fire his 40,000 employees creates food for his neighbors now. I have to believe that people want to help others. Many of these Good Samaritans are immigrants and need help themselves.

Maybe this ghastly epidemic, if it ever ends, will herald a period when we can create a more decent society. Maybe the virus will shake

up humanity like the snowflakes in a Christmas ball which flutter down to earth in different shapes.

I need to believe in some goodness in the human heart. I turn off the TV and switch on the voice of Patrick Stewart , the famous Shakespearian actor who recites a sonnet each morning to make us forget the world we inhabit.

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