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Slow Release

by Marion Umney

'Another day another dollar'.

"Well, that's not a very good omen."

It was the first time they'd been out since it all began, and she was surprised how disappointed she felt with the message. She realised she had desperately wanted the fortune cookie to give her something a bit more positive: some hope. Not that she really felt hopeless, things were going the right way after all. She'd been double jabbed and should feel safe; it was OK not to wear masks anymore (although she still did); they could eat indoors, and she'd noticed the Chinese restaurant was not really respecting the two-metre rule. It wasn't a rule now of course, just guidance, but she still felt just a teeny bit anxious and had spent the evening hoping no-one would be seated at the table next to them – too close for comfort. She found herself wondering how much longer this would go on and, more importantly how much longer could she cope like this.

In the beginning it had been OK. She quite liked having time. She felt she'd discovered her inner hermit and, apart from the mandatory walk every day was content that she didn't see another soul; except him of course. He was around all the time but, in the beginning, she'd been OK with that too. They had been like Hansel and Gretel, wandering through the relatively new world of online shopping, supermarket deliveries, facetime and zoom. Scared, but quite childlike in their new discoveries. When she'd asked Liz "How's it going?" and Liz had said "Well, we're still together. Just!" she'd somewhat smugly thought they were doing rather well. That was only three months in though. Now she felt completely worn out. Sometimes she wanted to scream when they had the same conversations over and over again.

She knew exactly what he was going to say – it was always the same. They were poles apart in some ways and too close to make a decent conversation in others. She knew he felt the same way, but that didn't help.

They left the restaurant and turned towards home. Watch the news and go to bed, she thought, and her heart sank. Same old, same old. Then she heard the screech of brakes. She turned. The car had veered onto the pavement and had knocked him off his feet. Her heart was in her mouth as she saw him unconscious on the pavement.

Later, at the hospital, when she knew he'd be OK, she had a guilty thought. She should be devastated and angry about the accident, but she wasn't. She felt fully alive for the first time in months, and she remembered something he'd said a few days ago. Someone was getting an award for "bravery" for doing something he thought was just what any normal person would do, and he'd said "Any idiot can face a crisis. It's day to day living that wears you out."

How right he was!