

Day 283

Dear Diary,

It's day 283. 283 days since I have been here. 283 days since stepping out and feeling the sun kiss on my skin. 283 days since I felt the evening breeze. 283 days when all the hell broke loose.

It's been 283 days. 283 days since the pandemic broke out. And the seconds are ticking. The minute hand is moving, so is the hour hand on the clock. The days are counting. And it's going to keep counting. Till it ends.

Till it all ends. And I despair on how longer this may go on.

Dear Diary, today I thought would be a day like all other. A day, sitting around this house which I used to call home. This house now which I'd rather call a prison now. And guess what happened?

I got shot. Yes, I actually got shot by a gun. But thankfully, I lived another day to tell the tale. And here goes nothing.

It all began day 1, I suppose. The day it all began. When the hell unleashed its demons upon mankind. Oh, these demons did have a name. Cháros. Cháros is the Greek word for Death. You get the idea. Anyone cháros touches, their imminent fate is death.

That's how I view the world right now. The world, being overridden by cháros. But not the scientific community. They view cháros as some sort of virus. It infects people through touch and air. And pray that you don't have the ill luck to catch it. And if you do, kindly stay away from me.

I started the day as usual. Trying to sleep in and failing miserably. Removing my phone from the charger and having nothing much to do. I turned it on checking if there was any messages I needed to check but nothing comes out of it. Nothing ever does these days. Especially since I lost my internet connection due to me being unable to pay up. How can I? It's been 283 days since I even stepped out of my home. It's been longer since I went to work. And longer since I received my pay-check. And now, even my savings have been exhausted.

And don't get me started on food. In the beginning of lockdown, we devoured down our foods lavishly like monsters who could never get enough. We were full on our stomachs three times a day. More, if we could help it. And now? We are down to one. And it is one that barely even fills up our stomachs. Just enough to sustain our lives. Just enough to survive. To live, and not die. We stopped receiving our rations from the government weeks ago. And now we are rationing our food among ourselves. How pathetic are our conditions!

And that is the sole reason why I got shot today. Our food rations have dwindled to almost nothingness. Actually, come to think of it when writing this, I am lucky to have survived this long.

Dear Diary, do you want to know what happened? I was going to turn my phone off when my doorbell rang. Until then, I was worn out and in dire need of energy. But that bell gave me something. It enlightened a newfound energy within me. I literally jumped out of my bed and went to get to the door. *It must be the rations*, I thought. *They must not have forgotten us after all. They are drawing out the days. They are trying to balance the rations in the warehouses and with the people with the fear of running out*, my heart was speaking. It was vindicating reasons as to why the government took so long.

But then, my mind stopped what my heart was prattling. *Then they should have messaged me. I checked the phone just now and it had no messages.* I stopped in my tracks. My sister, who was the only other person in this house who kept me company and sane until now, peeked his head out of his room. I motioned for him to stay in his room when he nodded to the door. He looked exasperated when I shot him a glare in order to silence him. I trotted over to the front door and laid my ear against the door in hopes of hearing what was going on on the other side of the door.

And that is when I heard the locking of gun. I widened my eyes in realisation and threw myself off the door right when they shot at the door lock. The door opened itself for the intruders. I felt my heart hammering in my chest. I let out gasps fast. I didn't know what was going on. All I knew was that I was on the floor and strangers are barging in into my home.

Dear diary, you should know that I didn't know the first thing about unknown people with guns entering our houses. So, the first thing I said was, "Please spare

me! Please!" Of course, I pleaded without even glancing up at those faces. In that moment, the only thing that went through my head was that my sister was in the room. That my sister had the sense not to get out of the room. *Ally, don't get out*, I pleaded silently.

I only glanced up when I heard a half-hearted chuckle. Before me stood a bearded man chewing gum. Beside him stood a boy, who looked about fifteen or sixteen, about the age of Ally. He looked at me as if he felt sorry for me. I stared at the bearded man, who now I think might be the boy's father. The man was playing with his gun, so carelessly twirling it around his finger. "Boy, you stay quiet, we take whatever you want and then leave. You stay silent until then and we won't hurt you. Deal?"

I was shaking so hard that my nod could barely be decipherable. "Speak up, boy!" He boomed. "Yes," I agreed trembling. I looked at his stony gaze and repeated, "yes." He knelt before me and held up my chin using his gun. "How old are you, boy?"

I stared at his brown eyes hard and said, "twenty-five." He widened his eyes a bit and tilted his head in understanding. "Old enough to earn then." He stated as if that was obvious. Well, that was obvious. I nodded. He stood up and motioned for his son to go along. And that is exactly the moment my sister decided to get out of her room.

"Richard!" I groaned and looked at her. She looked terrified and was staring at the gun in the man's hand. She whimpered and was muttering, "no, no, no," over and over again. She moved towards me when the man stopped her. "Woah there, young lady. What do you think you're doing?" She struggled to find voice when the man's son spoke, "Allison?"

Do you know what I felt then, diary? I felt anger. This boy knew my sister and he is in leagues with someone threatening her. I was almost sure he would not mind when the man spoke, "You know her, James?"

I looked at my sister for any sign of recognition. She was hanging her mouth wide open. Then, she regained herself and said the first thing that came to her mind, "Please don't hurt us. We'll give you whatever you want."

“Well, now. That’s more like it.” He nodded. Oh god, he was a madman. I got up and rushed to my sister when he looked at his son and stated, “You haven’t answered me yet, James. How do you know her?”

“We are in the same class!” James blurted out while I took cover of my sister. The man’s head whipped angrily at me at my motion and said, “Well, aren’t you a little quick on your feet?”

And before I could comprehend what was happening, he shot at me the same time his son shouted “NO FATHER!”. *I got shot. I got shot. I got shot.* That was all that was going through my head. That I got *shot*. It seemed impossible but who am I to kid? I suddenly fell backwards into the arms of my sister. She was whispering something incoherent. Maybe I just cannot comprehend what she was saying due to my blood loss.

I could hear his son screaming at his father, “What did you do?! You said we won’t hurt anybody!” I shook my head to keep myself sane and looked at the man before me. He had the nerve to nonchalantly shrug off his son’s babble and said, “Chill! I just shot at his legs! It’s not going to kill him or anything. Let’s go get our things and leave.”

That’s right when my sister found audacity to speak up. “Just shot at his legs?” She fumbled. “Just shot at his legs?” She repeated and continued, “Did you know that it could still kill him? He could die if that bullet hit the femoral artery. Do you hear me, he could die!”

Dear diary, I’m not going to pretend to know what femoral artery is but I’m pretty sure that is what my sister said. “Well, you seem to know things. I’m sure you can find a way to clean him up too.”

“Get out!” I pointed at the door. I was angry. Really angry. Who is this man who thinks he can barge in and shoot? He thinks he can threaten my sister? I think not. But all my thoughts dissipated when he pointed the gun at my other leg. I cowered at him.

He nodded as if satisfied and went down to the direction of kitchen and storeroom. His son stayed behind keeping an eye on us. He quickly kneeled beside me and asked Allison what he can do. She directed him to bring ice and first aid kit from her room. He rushed off quickly when a woman entered in carrying a

really young girl who looked about six or seven. She widened her eyes at my legs and muttered loudly, "He shot at you, didn't he?" She left her child in the room and rushed off to find the man. I could only assume that she was his wife. James was back with ice and first aid kit when that woman disappeared.

"I'm really sorry, brother. I didn't know he would shoot." And he went on babbling during helping my sister to clean the wound and getting the bullet out. After he found that he was no longer required, he went to pick up the girl. He sat down on one of the chairs and placed the child on his lap. Everything was happening very quickly for me.

The husband and wife entered our room, wife still arguing while husband was carrying half of our food rations. When he saw the child on James' lap, he shouted at his wife, "You brought the kid? Are you nuts?" This made the woman go even more off the course. "What do then suppose I do? Leave the child on the road off alone?" And that seems to have silenced him. He spared a glance at me and my sister and muttered, "let's get out of here."

He shoved packets of bread onto James' arms and exited along with his wife. James nodded apologetically at my sister and looked at me with sorrow in his eyes. "Our food ran out 3 days ago." He said as if it explained everything. He tried to hold all the bread in his arms with one hand and held his sister's hand and walked out. I didn't notice that he's stopped at the door when my sister was wrapping up my wound.

I looked up only when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I expected James to say another apology but it was the girl. She was holding out a packet of bread. She smiled to encourage us to take it. My sister took the packet from her gladly and patted her head. "What is your name?" My sister asked.

"Hope." She said and rushed off.

Today, my dear diary, I felt as if I lost many things. I lost my food. I lost my money. I lost my ability to walk. I even lost the lock on my front door. But what I didn't note was that there was hope among us. Hope that thing may all come to pass. Hope to this all would soon be over. Hope that the sun would shine on us again.

Hope is a strong word.

Sd/-

Richard Millers