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GETTING SICK OF STAYING WELL

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There's a hole in my heart—a vacancy awaiting the arrival of family whose voices, electronic messages, and virtual meetings shout: "We miss you too."

Someday, one day, we'll share one physical space again. Then emoji-blown hugs and kisses will go the way of umbrellas on a sunny day. Arms entwined, our senses will signal, "We're home."

Then I'll welcome the infant granddaughter I've loved since before her arrival. Oh, the long-awaited pleasure—to hold her, coo to her, feel her sweet softness. To embrace again the grandchildren I welcomed as newborns—one in college and two in high school now. The eldest, fair, vivacious, and intellectually curious, explores historic places with me. Her brunette, warm-eyed, whip-smart sister sprawls across the sofa, head on my chest when we hang out. Then my Hollywood-handsome hazel-eyed grandson dazzles me with self-taught, practiced-to-perfection trampoline feats. These three, how special they are to me. When will I begin nurturing that closeness with their newborn cousin?

Promising, "See you soon," as we hugged goodbye in Los Angeles after my son's wedding. We couldn't foresee that a shroud of fear would drop over people everywhere, freezing us in place, as if Mother Nature whimsically engaged the whole world in Red Light, Green Light, the game we played as children. This time a hasty step could be deadly. Terrified, we stayed put. For me, a widow living alone, that meant solitary confinement.

When asked, "How are you doing?" I answer, "Fine." I'm healthy. That's what counts. I savor quick exchanges with

neighbors and occasional porch visits with friends. Add FaceTime calls, Zoom meetings, extra-long phone calls with conversation-starved friends—that’s the sum of my social interaction. My days fill with writing, reading, ingesting a measure of unpalatable news, letting the dog in and out all day long, and watching for the UPS truck—almost as exciting as the ice cream truck used to be.

By today’s definition, I’m fine. But the sameness of it all, the silence broken only by the music, video, or podcasts du jour—words emitted by on-screen images or disembodied voices pinged to my phone—how is that “fine?”

Someday the deadly cloud will lift. Then I’ll break bread with friends, kibitz across the bridge table, and our family will fly the once-again friendly skies to embrace, rejoicing in, savoring each other’s presence, touching and hugging—yes, touching and hugging!

Back in LA, I’ll feel my son’s scruffy beard against my face, his baby’s tiny hand in mine, and promise her, as I’ve promised her cousins, that “Grandma will always say ‘Yes.’” I’ll admire the Craftsman home her parents restored and exchange “good mornings” and “good nights” with them—what a treat!

My daughters and grandchildren will arrive and the wound in my heart will close, complete with contentment. How will I be? Fine.