

*Hi folks,*

It's my penultimate week as Writer in Lockdown. I can hardly believe nineteen weeks have flown past so quickly. In some ways a lot has changed since I first began writing to you. Back in March it was cold and drizzly outside my window, (it's still drizzly, but at least now it's warm), and we were all hoping this situation would be rectified quickly and we'd all be back to normal in a couple of months.

It's been a long old haul. The many, many weeks of Lockdown. The sad news from around the world. The gradual, slow transition back to engaging with the world outside our front doors. The realisation that life isn't going to look the same post Covid-19 and we've all been changed by the experience.

There have been some definite highs, and I'm looking forward to recapping these next week in my final blog. There have also been a fair few lows too and I keep having to remind myself how well I've done, managing to get this far. I definitely believe the writing has helped.

Art and creativity have given me such a positive outlet and a means of processing the last few months. Writing's been a lifesaver, but I cannot wait to return to enjoying the arts outside my own house. Last night I attended my first cinema screening since the lockdown and it was the highlight of my entire month.

This week's feature story, (with art by my wee pal, Isla), is in praise of arts venues. It makes a few assumptions about what's been going on in our theatres and galleries while the human's weren't in attendance. I hope it gives you a bit of a laugh.



I've included two other funny stories in this week's round up because I'm in a pretty upbeat mood.

Bearing in mind my social life's been non-existent since February, this last week's felt totally jam-packed. Getting out to the cinema last night, finally climbing Slemish mountain and a meal with my family in an actual restaurant; I might have overdone the fun, folks.

I hope you're all having a similarly positive week. If nothing else, Lockdown has taught me to appreciate even the smallest joys. I'm looking forward to rounding up our time together next week. Until then, enjoy the stories.

*Love from Lockdown, Jan*

## "MONKEY"

Melanie didn't know how to tell her students she was turning into a monkey. She still wasn't able to admit to herself. But all those days stuck inside, alone, nibbling on nuts and bananas had taken their toll. Melanie was slowly but surely becoming a monkey.

At first, she'd been able to ignore her little problem. When her feet turned into paws she simply stuffed them into slippers and tried to pretend they were the same as before. It was harder when the tail sprouted from her backside and impossible to ignore when she woke one morning to find her legs covered in fine, brown fur. Still, Melanie was teaching all her lessons online these days and, if she angled the camera just right, there was no way her students would be able to see what was going on beneath the desk. However, now the fur has spread all across Melanie's body and her hands have shrunk to form small, monkey hands, it is much more difficult to keep her predicament a secret. There is only so much which can be hidden beneath scarves and gloves.

This afternoon, Melanie will tell her students that she is turning into a monkey. She sits down at her laptop, turns the camera and microphone on and begins to speak. "I have something to tell you all," she says, but all that comes out is a crazy, monkey laugh.

## "GHOSTS"

Now that the theatres are empty and the cinemas are closed and all the churches are silent, the ghosts are able to come down from the rafters and go romping around the buildings freely.

No longer forced to keep their hauntings to the dark hours, the cinema ghosts crack open the popcorn machine, put their feet up on the seats and catch up on all their favourite movies.

The theatre ghosts float from one side of the stage to the other uninterrupted as they perform their best Lady Macbeths and Eliza Doolittles in front of an all but empty house.

The church ghosts go buck mad on the pipe organ. They hammer out sea shanties and drinking songs and ABBA covers – all sorts of bold songs you'd never normally hear in a sanctuary.

The ghosts who live in the hairdressers at the top of the street trim each other's fringes and tidy up each other's split ends, thankful to be operating their scissors and clippers safely, in broad daylight for a change.

Meanwhile, the Tesco ghosts and Asda ghosts and hardy Lidl ghosts curse themselves for having had the misfortune to drop down dead in a supermarket aisle. This is no holiday for them. These days they hardly get a minute of peace.



### Questions:

- What changes have the ghosts noticed over the last few months?
- Would you rather be a theatre ghost, with a whole building to yourself, or a supermarket ghost, with people to haunt?
- If you had a choice of which building to haunt, where would you go for?

## "CROCODILE"

When the zoo shut its gates last spring, they put out an advertisement asking for volunteers to mind their animals until they reopened.

I did my bit. I said I could take something small and low maintenance. My house was tiny. I was getting on a bit. I couldn't be doing with a giraffe or anything too active.

I was expecting a chicken. They gave me a baby crocodile. He was very small. I could hold the length of him in my cupped hands. "Will he grow much bigger?" I asked. They assured me that he was a miniature variety and even as an adult would grow no bigger than a house cat. **THEY LIED!**

Clive - as I came to call him - soon outgrew the margarine tub I placed him in, then the mop bucket and the sink and, by Easter, could barely fit in the paddling pool I kept for the grandkids. Now, it is summer and I have not had a bath for two months. Clive lies curled up in the bottom of the tub, snip snapping every time I go in to brush my teeth. Don't get me wrong, I love my crocodile. Mostly he is great company. He'll listen to me for hours when I am lonely and rarely ever snaps back. Still, I can't wait for the zoo to re-open. It's so long since I last felt properly clean.