

## **Prologue:**

### **In the year of the virus everything changed.**

We had been a world at peace so long, chasing the capitalist dream, and we had no idea what the world could look like, should things actually go bad. Or worse, rather, as things are always bad for a big slice of the population that we try not to think about, and that we rarely see on the news or in our media except to provide some local colour, or a sad human interest story with a surprise happy ending.

We don't like to think about how rare those happy endings are for most people, including ourselves. So many people were just one payday away from a looming disaster. Of course, now that all seems so far away, and nearly no one can remember what a payday was.

I remember the first shut down; the "social distancing" was jarring. Basically the world went from a bunch of people racing around trying to make money, "free" to go wherever they wanted, spending, socializing, even just trying to enjoy the outdoors, to a world of shut-ins, with little human contact. Discouraged from being close enough to breathe on each other, it wasn't long before paranoia set in, and anyone whose mouth you could see was not to be trusted.

Of course, we had the internet back then, and cable T.V., and movies on demand, in house delivery and a million other ways to avoid people or ever breathing fresh air. It seemed like we were in a new stage of evolution, with tonnes of people already nearly completely content to be alone most of the time, locked in to their own little worlds. A good chunk of people, like introverted me in those days, were already living in a self-imposed isolation and were less bothered, or even barely noticed the new standard where we were not supposed to touch, to talk, to feel.

In those times the virus was a deadly little fucker, foisted on the world by someone eating a bat some said, or released by an industrial accident from one of those government sponsored genetics labs according to others. It didn't matter really, how it came. It came, and it was new, and no one had immunity back then.

It could cut you down in days.

So, the governments of the world promoted the lock down, "the emergency" they called it then, and as a society we left our jobs, closed for business and went home and locked ourselves in.

We bought into it, mostly, except for those that couldn't, and some that wouldn't, the ones whose distrust of the government ran too deep. They were wrong, of course, and died in droves.

After a month or so of devastation, most people got on board. I mean we could all smell the bodies piling up in the hockey rinks, and the occasional brownout would let the smell of death and rot pour over the city. Most people could see the sense in the isolation.

It only took a few months though for some people to start going crazy. You'd hear about big parties in public like those old flash mob things people used to do? Like five hundred people would just show up on the beach and talk, and pass beers and joints around, and try to remember what it was like to be human. Naturally, they'd all get sick, or most of 'em anyway, and you'd start hearing about the deaths a few days later. They'd keep the events out of the news, for fear of the idea spreading around. No one wanted that, really.

Me, and a bunch of people I knew from my club years, when I was trying to be a musician, would have these weekly get-togethers for a while. You know, we'd turn on some chat app on the computer and all sit at home bullshitting each other over beers, playing old records and going over the same old arguments about this band or that. Just trying to recapture the feeling of that community we were all once part of. It was like a secret club being a musician in those days. We all we chasing the same shitty buck, but while playing and having fun, hanging out. It was an easy thing to miss.

Anyway, after a while people would start talking about how cool it would be just to sneak into one late at night, you know? Like, we could keep it really small and slip in a back door and fire up the sound system, but keep it low and the lights off. Who would know? Who would it hurt? We were all gonna die anyway. They were still working on the vaccine then, that's what we'd constantly hear. But, as the months rolled on, less and less people actually believed it. It just seemed like the whole thing was gonna crash down around us anytime.

Now, at first this was just more bullshitting really. No one wanted to risk death just to hang out together. I mean, we were all adults, right? We knew the lock down was a necessary thing. The whole world was at stake, after all.

But, somehow, an idea like that can just get in your brain and take hold. We'd mention it every now and then at the all on-screen listening parties, and reminisce about the good old days, and what it would be like to actually see each other again. Someone might say "you know that secret club thing? we should do that, I could show you this new song I'm working on". Or another would go "remember how good beer tastes in the company of friends? As good as this screen thing is being there would be better." Just little mentions...

After a while we started hearing about it for real. Or, as real as rumours get, anyway. You'd hear about an illicit house party, or adults drinking together in the woods like back when we were in high school. It never seemed true, but you kind of wished you were there all the same...

And how many times can you play guitar for someone on a chat app? I mean, that's not what music is, not really. Music is, you get on a stage with some friends, and try to be entertaining for some friends on the floor, and if they like it they feel better, and onstage you feel better, and you all share in that feeling, and then the real old day-to-day world falls away.

Shared joy, that's what music is. That is it on a good night, at least.

People in the listening group would keep dropping these little anecdotes, these rumours of secret to-dos, and more and more they seemed like a good thing to me. I had even heard of one in an old club somewhere; the Double Deuce was the word, where they were having these semi-regular get-togethers. They were calling it the Touch-Easy, for that old timey feel, and even had a password at the door like in those old roaring twenties movies.

The twenty twenties sure weren't roaring at all, and the whole thing seemed totally romantic to me.