

# Tuesday Evening

It was a normal Tuesday evening; five hundred at the club and then, unusually, dinner out. A nice restaurant, Italian, ambient, checked tablecloths and my mate was on his phone, as usual. "We've got to be home by midnight."

I had started my dinner, his was untouched. When we left the restaurant I popped them, in their paper bag, down behind the driver's seat. He left before me. He's been living in two houses for years and only needs to grab his computer, meds and current paperwork. I fuss around and make sure the dishwasher has rinsed, clean benches, water plants, and pack the fresh food and the empty bottles to take up and fill with rainwater. My book and a few clothes. After all, I'm a girl and have a bit of a fuss about what I wear. I don't just get up and put on the closest cleanest thing, I'm in the mood for a skirt, jeans, a dress. Yes, that dress.

This time I was really fast and basic; not even anything in case we went out. All in the car with my computer and bits that plug into it and gardening shoes. Off to the Coromandel where the dogs and chickens are, and we spend most of the week.



Probably middle class, middle aged just like us, or workers getting home to their families. The ute had turned off at the golf course, I think he was sad to see me go, and the van behind turned off too but I wanted to go through town, stick to the highway, not get stuck on country road bends with oncoming headlights. I regretted it but too late.

It was a good chance to observe the speed signs and obey them, get a feel for the pace with no traffic behind me. I've been in a bit of trouble lately as people drive faster in Europe and even Australia, so a few more demerit points and I'm off the road. That annoying person at the front of the queue doing thirty through a few cones and no workers, is probably me.

There were a few denizens of Waihi nipping out for milk and a squeeze down the road before lockdown. But I wanted to catch up with someone before the gorge. The streams from Auckland started again, like worms, snakes through Karangahake Gorge, quite long spaces between them and not as many cars as before. I wondered what the Motorway had been like for them.

Through Thames it was very quiet and there were only a few cars up along the Firth. But I still kept the pace, good practice, don't want to lose my license and just in case a shark was lurking ... . A couple of times utes came up behind and sat in my mirror, so I used the slow lane and let them go. By this stage in the journey, usually the views across the sea are stunning but the night was dank, clouds lying on the water.



The girls in the petrol station had been busy. "Constant," was the way they put it, "like late afternoon." And the traffic was normal. For a Friday at 4pm when everyone wants to get out of town. But this was Tuesday 8.30pm. Out on the road, up hill and down dale, there was a moving chain of cars in both directions all up the bay. Katikati flowed. No one was doing anything except driving through and all on the speed limit, just eating road, getting there. Not much coming against us then, but up the coast people dropped off right and left and streams against us increased.

I'd hitched up with some guy in a ute who was driving well and kept behind him far enough back so my lights didn't show in his mirror. We were alone going north through the Athenree Gorge, and I almost lost him because I hate driving at night so had to force myself to keep up. Even had to turn on the headlights couple of times. Straight through Paeroa, but more South bound traffic coming on.

"Aucklanders!" whinge the locals, "they come in here and buy up all our stuff. Block up the roads with their b... boats." No boats on Tuesday the 17th of August, just Kiwis travelling.

When I got to our gate the drivers who had hassled me to go faster were stopped. Obviously the bridge was blocked so I turned up the driveway and got home. The locals had decided to keep out foreigners, and there had been a bit of oncoming traffic on the coast road so they were succeeding.

There's a lot of vulnerable people here, there and everywhere and we are lucky in our tribal survival instincts. but we are the most fortunate. Among the most fortunate in the world in our isolated fertile paradise with our hono ki te whenua and mutual respect.

We're used to getting stats on the media, of death, now. It hasn't the numbing effect it had last year. The horror of family members dying alone and mass graves in Europe, Africa and South America; we're used to it. People still die in hospital corridors, and we saw them fighting, in India, on the streets for oxygen. Millions are dying and hundreds of millions are sick, many of whom will never really completely recover.

We are among the chosen few. This is a poem I wrote about it last year in the shock of the first lockdown.

## Somehow

*Somehow my coffee has crept into two  
that decadent cuppa, hot milk in the brew  
To laze in the morning on the couch, watch the news  
Take photos of sunrise, catch the tones and the hues  
unload the dishwasher, feed the quails, as you do  
Make the bed, feed the dogs, put slippers on too  
and brush my hair slowly, wash the face, visit loo  
Take note of the death stats, lonely souls passing through  
Yes, now, morning coffee has morphed into two.*



Fiona Sullivan

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