

**Jane was like a fine china teacup; dainty, delicate, elegant, yet full-bodied and strong inside. Drinking tea with friends was a weekly ritual. Jane, Jessie, Mable and Annie have been meeting at the same café, at the same time and day each week for the last 20 years.**

It's a Friday morning and Jane gets ready for her café date as she always does. A little dusting of powder to the cheeks, a splash of rouge to the lips and a good coating of lacquer to the hair. Jane often wears her smart coat for the occasion and doesn't leave the house without a splash of Channel Number 5. Jane leaves the house in plenty of time and makes her way to a nearby bus stop to catch the number 27 to town. The bus arrives on time, Jane flashes her bus pass at the driver and takes a seat. Finding a seat is surprisingly easy today as the entire bus is empty. 'Quiet today' Jane mutters to the bus driver. Jane is slightly perplexed by the lack of people on the bus but concludes that it must be a bank holiday or something like that. Jane gets off the bus at her usual stop and thanks the driver who rather oddly says 'you stay safe now'; that's very caring indeed, Jane thought to herself. The 5-minute walk from the bus stop to the café is noticeably quiet too, there are very few people around. In some ways Jane finds the lack of crowds quite nice, not having to dodge in and out of people. Jane being dainty means

that she can feel quite vulnerable in big crowds. Whilst walking to the café, Jane is starting to get excited about seeing her friends and thinks of what they might talk about. Mostly, they talk about the 'good old days' and all the fun times they've had together as friends. Talking about old memories with her friends is one of Jane's favourite things to do and she can participate, instead of trying to remember what she did since last week; that doesn't always come so easy. Jane arrives at the café and wonders why it looks so dark inside, maybe they've had a power cut, she wonders. She goes to open the door to find it locked. Jane rattles the handle to no avail. Peering through the glass door she can see no-one inside and then notices a sign on the door that reads:

"To all our loyal customers, it is with heavy heart that we are closing our business until further notice due to Covid-19. We hope to reopen in the future and thank you for your support over the years - stay safe"

Covid-19, what on earth is that, thinks Jane? It sounds vaguely familiar. Jane wonders if her friends have already been and gone, or maybe they knew it was closed already, they could have told me. Jane takes a moment to recover from her feeling of deep discontent, mostly because she won't get to see her friends and chat over tea and a scone; her favourite time of the week. Jane begins the lonely journey back; she has a long wait at the bus stop but eventually makes it home. Usually Jane returns on a Friday feeling happy and content, but not today. Today Jane feels sad, lonely and really miffed, especially by this Covid business. Never mind she thinks, we'll try again next week.

Jane has made that same journey every single Friday since the start of lockdown, each week is the same, she finds an empty café and no sign of her dear friends.

