



Abstract

One day, doors stop working. Humanity is divided between those trapped indoors and those who can no longer go home. Somehow, life goes on.

Keywords

Class struggle, doors, dystopia, speculative

THE GREAT OUT-DOORS

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ONE DAY, “OUTSIDE” stopped existing.

It’s not as bizarre as you might think. Simply, the doors leading out of buildings stopped working. Same brands of locks and hinges, same cut and dimension of rectangular slabs put up by the same carpenters refused to budge based on whether they lead to the bathroom or the yard. Sliding doors, double doors, push-pull glass, automated what-have-you’s—every manner of entrances and exits, all jammed shut. World expert scientists, physicists, engineers, architects, and carpenters held scores of e-conferences, but no one could figure out how it happened, or, more importantly, how to reverse it.

At the very least, observations were made. It seems the doors made of artificial material stopped working a few days or even weeks earlier than the ones made of raw material, but the distinction stops there. To this day, it is possible to break through doors but impossible to replace them as the hollow space produced would immediately fill in with bits and pieces of the rest of the house—by logic, presumably, of the same

inexplicable force that broke the simple machines in the first place. Millions worldwide were killed or gravely injured attempting to replace or remove their doors. A year into radical experimentation, many countries deemed it illegal to break doors to replace them, and after a few more years, everyone willingly obeyed. Drilling holes into your walls to put up a new door produced the same results. New houses would let people in and out as normal but irreversibly shut tight once someone has lived in them for about a week. Establishments that cheated by installing doorways without doors found their walls collapsing to fill in the empty space. And shovels and high power tools refused to break through the floors, and the roofs over our heads ignored the blows and bullets we dealt them for a way out.

With the exception of several developing countries, windows all over the world remained functional so long as they 1. measured three by four feet or smaller, 2. do not touch the ground, and 3. are not damaged such as by sawing off grills; otherwise, they behaved exactly like their supposedly more accessible cousins. Noting this, a multinational megacorporation invented the widely bootlegged “Out-Doors”: three feet by four feet vertical window-door hybrids hovering one foot off the porch complete with complementary safety locks and options for screen doors and doorbells, “a novelty from the good old days.” Children, provided they were strong enough to vault over the bit of wall by their knees, made best use of the thing the first few years since it was patented, but by the time they were tall enough to be considered adults in most establishments, their lungs had presumably grown too weak, and the world had more or less adjusted to suit their every need, so the great outdoors became more or less obsolete.

And so we stayed inside.

Everyone else became Outsiders during the Great Lockdown, barred from their homes and offices en route to make deliveries, cure the sick, get the news, and sweep and sell and beg on the streets. Tourists on vacation, to the morbid delight of some, suddenly became homeless, not even able to return to their hotels, like the prematurely campaigning politicians locked out of their estates. Tent cities bloomed in the cracks between skyscrapers (zippers and Velcro, thankfully, do not count as doors by Great Lockdown physics *unless* the tent is bigger than the standard for outdoor camping) as astronomical parking spaces and new subdivisions (for those who could afford to be rid of the great out-doors forever) smothered our

farms. Forests were cut down too, but we have always been cutting them down, anyway. The mobile home returned in full-swing, built outside factory, warehouse and malls with tools and materials we passed through the windows and out-doors, but a month of sleeping within most nights rendered them near inescapable as well.

There had been a long debate on social media on who had it worse—the DOA's that never arrived, versus the old people who miraculously survived death but walk the hospital halls like exercising zombies. The million street cremations and mass burials against the ones who died alone at home, eaten by their animals that eventually rotted in the haze of a sealed house themselves. The homeless who could work, or the housed that couldn't. Those dying of hellish conditions in the cramped streets and the air in each other's breaths, and those dying of the mold in their damp houses, Wi-Fi radiation, and incest. But like most debates on social media, this did nothing except get people to hate each other more.

In an archipelago in the Pacific, several tent city districts and parking lot patriots raided the Palace by breaking through the windows, sealing themselves in with the incompetents. We lauded them as heroes, delivered them food and supplies out of our own pockets until they took the bloodied seats and turned out to be incompetents themselves. But really, can you blame them for the state of the country they were left to govern?

My parents had been waiting indoors as was their duty—*ours*, all of us, save for those who couldn't afford any more—and made us Insiders in what sociologists call the Great Divide. Life is more or less the same, they tell me. My mother's gynecologist instructed my parents how to deliver me on Skype. They fetched for a computer when the first one broke so they could keep working, and set up the one-time payment lifetime internet router themselves when it got enough rave reviews online. It's shit compared to their last provider in the before times, but I don't really know that.

Our neighbor who has long since pitched a tent in her family's yard is on our daily payroll, passing all our groceries and take out through our out-door. When she delivered my cake on my seventh birthday, I asked her why her house didn't have one, and she said the two foot by two foot crawlspace by their door was enough (her husband had died trying to make it bigger). When I asked if she didn't want to hug her kids when they become teenagers, she said they need to keep getting medicine to

live that long. She stopped being a home-call surgeon operating through people's windows once a hundred patients have died in her care and used her savings to buy a motorcycle. Her two boys are men now, and hold hands with her through the hole for an hour every Sunday.

My grandmother died recently and unlocked her house with her final breath. The Lockdown hit her so bad, she learned how to operate a smartphone on her own at the age of 93. At the same time, she would insist the Outsiders went extinct a year into lockdown because the air finished them off, and that it's angels working for Food Panda ringing her doorbell and handing her food every day since. A week ago, we paid an Outsider to pick her up, put her in the coffin we chose on Shopee, and bury her. Halfway to the cemetery, they lost the FaceTime stream, but later sent us a picture of our grandmother's freshly dug grave. I hope they didn't do anything meant to be hidden, but they have high ratings on the Errand Boy so I'm not as worried as my parents. People who remember the before times tend to be more paranoid, anyway.

We're alive, more or less. In any case, I don't remember living otherwise. Biologists say my generation, the first Insiders, hasn't evolved to adapt outside yet, but they're all indoors examining our lung tissue samples in petri dishes instead observing the children roaming the streets. Some brave researchers left their labs to hunt down real data, but they all eventually lost connection to the WHO Discord server and were never accounted for again.

Early into Lockdown, there was a big social media campaign on unity in diversity and diversity in unity (there has always been, more or less, but never so pronounced like this). Institutions ran celebrity-backed campaigns on the glamorous, symbiotic beauty of Outsiders feeding Insiders and Insiders providing Outsiders opportunities and money. While popular in the first months, the comments sections were eventually overrun with the debates I've mentioned earlier, and why-should-we's. It is said incensed Outsiders eventually made a ritual of hunting down entitled Facebook users and sending bricks through their windows to trap them inside forever, but those are just rumors Insiders made to vilify our hardier brethren.

Talk shows have recently begun discussing the probability of another raid on the Palace. The economist they invited to talk on behalf of the street-dwellers was a no-show due to a gang war over the open-air sweatshops in the capitol, so his replacement in an air-conditioned

home office assumed bullshit in his stead: He says that the streets are so unlawful despite our good government's best efforts, the Outsiders would soon start cannibalizing and raping indoors and, worse, breathing deep into Insider lungs with their immune ones unless we moved first, harvest their organs, and recode our DNAs with their spilled blood.

A milder guest says a radical power shift is bound to happen across the Great Divide with everyone's general dissatisfaction with the longstanding situation sooner than later, but I don't really see that happening either. Maybe in the cities, but things are better here in the suburbs. We're good friends with Mrs. Espanola and her two asthmatic BPO boys next door; we tip them enough all year round to take care of a whole month's groceries. Every year for Christmas, we have e-dinner together where my father quietly offers to get them an out-door. They refuse out of pride. Sell it and give us the money instead, they would request, and we'd obliged. It's not their fault Mrs. Espanola had to be locked out of her own home to raise her family, and neither is it ours. We help in any way we can.

She's been gone for two days now. No signal, probably no battery. We've been trying to get another rider in the area to shop for us but the apps say they're all unavailable. Her sons, my first and longest friends, do not answer any of our decades-old private messaging channels, although the lights in their house turn on at night as usual. My mother keeps muttering that this wouldn't have happened if only at *least* the windows in this god-forsaken country didn't decide to self-destruct too, if only a local Insider had monopolized the nation's out-door trade and made it affordable for everyone, if only they switched continents before having me. No use griping unless it's the end of the world, though. With strict rationing, we could get through for two weeks, and that should be enough time for someone to reply at last.

It's quiet outside. I finish weekly Wi-Fi maintenance and sit by my bedroom window to sleep through my classes. I miss waving to the little kids running around outside already. I know all their social media accounts but they aren't online either. I hope there's work wherever they are so they could eat. I send their parents e-coupons and bitcoin. I wonder where they all went.

I wonder what they're up to.