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# Alone, Together

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(ALONE, TOGETHER)

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# Corona Chicken (Part One)

By  
CHERYL L. WEST

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(CORONA CHICKEN [PART ONE])

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CAST:

PENELOPE.....Jenna Scanlon

### AUTHOR’S NOTE

Pandemics inspire great fear, often followed by a type of hysteria that leads to unmitigated chaos. In such a climate, we are all capable of inflicting great harm on ourselves and on each other. We are not ourselves. Sadly, our best self has transformed into the stranger that seeks only to tease us.

—Cheryl L. West

# Corona Chicken (Part One)

## CHARACTER

PENELOPE

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*(PENELOPE struggles in with a rolling cart teeming with groceries, notably a multi-roll toilet paper pack and, toward the bottom, a whole chicken wrapped in a plastic meat bag. She's well dressed in suburban chic—tasteful jewelry, the hair just so. But she's a bit off-kilter—the labored breath, the arm-length rubber gloves, the face mask askew and tangled in her string of pearls. Or perhaps it's her profuse sweating that signals she's a woman in jeopardy. Once safely inside, Penelope quickly flips the lock, positions her back as a human barricade. She wills her breath to slow. Deep breaths. Finally, in control, she and her rolling cart move in. She looks around, then suddenly stands at attention and recites the Girl Scout three-finger motto.)*

PENELOPE. “On my honor, I will try: To serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by ...”

*(She smiles solicitously at us.)*

“Penelope, darling, you're such a Girl Scout.” That's what they'd say. “So unwavering ...” That's me. A good girl.

I ask you, what are we without the exchange of goodness and kindness? Forgiveness and hope? I tell my kids that all the time. I have two ... wonderful, well-behaved, exceptional children.

Right now they're supposed to be at the park with the nanny. Actually, she's really just a babysitter. I call her the nanny so I can keep step with the other mannequin wives around here. I keep telling my husband that I'm the best person to care for our children. I'm their greatest example ... I set the standard.

*(She starts to take out groceries from her cart, wiping them down as she goes.)*

So happy to see name-brand toilet paper again ... With the virus, everything is in such short supply. Still no wipes, but I'm bleaching like a fiend. Oh my ... I almost forgot.

*(She removes her gloves, squirts hand sanitizer, cleans her hands thoroughly.)*

I have sanitizer in every room, no excuses. Robust hygiene, that's the key to protecting your family.

*(An alarm goes off somewhere.)*

I set alarms for everything now.

*(Her watch beeps. She looks at her watch. Shows us her Fitbit or Apple watch.)*

The alarms help. They insert order, something I can count on. See, almost to my step goal ...

*(Smiles, then anxiously looks around.)*

The nanny should be returning with the kids soon. The husband, he's an auto mechanic ... owns his own failing business. Not quite an "essential" worker but what the hell, I'm a supportive wife who allows him his lies like I suppose he allows me mine. I love Dan, but ... well ... I shouldn't say this but OK, I just wish his hands were cleaner ... There I said it. His hands, both of 'em, always have some speck of dirt somewhere, a little grime under the nails or a little dirt burrowed in the knuckles. But for some reason, he doesn't seem to care. So I remind him. A lot.

"Did you wash your hands, honey? Please, wash your hands, sweetie."

I'm not trying to annoy him, but I have to look out for our kids. Hello! There's a deadly virus killing people. And let's face it, dirty hands could've been the beginning and now the reason.

*(Beat.)*

Whenever there's a crisis in this country, everyone chases after hero stories, anything that generates hope. But what if you don't feel particularly heroic or productive or even charitable? I told Dan, I'm sorry but this virus has not made me a better person. His response ...

"The virus is not happening to just you, Penelope. We're all suffering but leave it to you to make everything worse."

What an idiot. Sometimes I feel like taking one of his precious hunting rifles and blowing his damn head off.

*(Beat. She takes out a bottle of wine from the cart, then picks up the "chicken" bag. Smiles sheepishly at us.)*

But I keep trying. I even planned to make us a good healthy dinner. Dan loves chicken. He must have been one in another life. And after the phone fight we had this morning, I'm thinking this beautiful, organic chicken might keep us out of divorce court.

It was just sitting on top of her basket. She, the mother, was distracted, three of her little delinquents were crawling in and out of her van like they'd been shot up with sugar, and she's screaming at them to watch out for cars since everyone backs out of the parking lot without looking. Plus, these days, with the virus and all, we're all so much more distracted. At the same time she's