Reflections
A Covid-19 Ghost Story
by Leo Levy
Content Warning:
Suicide
Ach! 118 years later and here I am, back on the shores of Cayuga Lake again.

History seems to be repeating itself... I hope I'm in time to stop it.

But first, where did I put it?

Ja, there we go.

Perhaps, if I can just save them from making the same mistakes...

I may finally find peace.
Ithaca, NY, home of Cornell University.

Oh, give my regards to Davy! *Cough*

"Cough" "Cough" And we'll all get drinks at Theodore Zinzik's. When I get back next fall! Go Big Red!

* Give My Regards to Davy, the Cornell University fight song

Pardon me, students. May I tell you a grisly tale?

I think you may find it... Educational...

GASP! "Cough"
It was the winter of 1903, and death was in the air. Or actually, it was in the water. Typhoid had come to town.

Disgusting. Pestilential rabble!

According to our data, the rate of infection is increasing alarmingly. If we don’t take precautions soon, we may be too late!

Wrong! Fake news!

Don’t let this hack shut down our economy! The only germs in this town are those damn dirty immigrants.

I couldn’t agree more with your comments, Herr Morris. I fear that these restrictions will put my alehouse out of business!

I’d have to turn my patrons away, and buy all my water in bottles! What’s next? Those silly masks that the surgeons wear?

Herr Morris, are you unwell?

Never better, Zinck. Just a touch of indigestion, I’m sure. And don’t worry, I didn’t mean your sort of immigrants.

Guggle!
The sickness spread fast. In a town of 13,000 people, at least 1400 fell ill. Your chance of recovery depended on your age...

Typhoid preys on the young.

As patients flooded into the hospital, the town's few nurses grew overwhelmed and exausted.

Bring him this way, boys. I think a bed just opened up in the hall.

And don't ask how...

And then one night...

I'm so terribly sorry, Mr. Zinck.

There just isn't any room for her.

Don't cry, papa...

I'll be alright.

Just... please don't cry.
The epidemic raged out of control, becoming a national scandal. With its reputation at stake, the state sent in Dr. George Soper, the infectious disease expert who would identify Typhoid Mary a few years later. Soper was horrified by what he found.

Guided by science, Soper rallied the town's beleaguered healthcare workers, and together they set to work.

Week after week, the townspeople made painful sacrifices. More than 500 homes had to be quarantined, and over 400 wells were abandoned.

By springtime their efforts paid off. New cases ebbed, and patients headed back to their homes—this time, not in coffins.

Exhausted and scared, the townsfolk united behind them.

But not all of them were that lucky...

All told, at least 82 Ithacans succumbed to the disease.
But for some of us, normality was irrevocable. The newspapers disagreed about who was at fault, but all agreed that things could have played out differently, and all the grief and suffering could have been avoided.
Somewhere in the darkness, though, I realized my mistake.

It had been wrong to end my life.

Punishing myself was no solution to my suffering.

And it certainly wasn’t what my daughter would have wanted.

I saw that my death didn’t help anyone.

It only brought more pain...

And left more people grieving.

That wasn’t fair.

My heartbreak had taught me so much...

Instead of giving up, I could have shared those lessons.

I should have survived.

I should have LIVED!

But it was too late for that.

Still, I was determined to do what I could to make things right...

And spare anyone else my fate.
"sniffle*

So?

UH...
*Cough*

Now go and share what you have learned, Kinder.

But keep your germs to yourself!

Oops. Can't lose that!

I think... uh I have to.

Yeah... me too...

Maybe we can zoom later?

The End
A Note on Suicide:

While Covid-19 is a new and dangerous disease, suicide has been plaguing humanity for far too long.

The vast majority of suicide attempts are related to ongoing mental health issues, but grief can increase the risk for those already struggling.

If you or a loved one feel vulnerable to suicidal thoughts, free help is available from the following sources:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline
1-800-273-8255 (24/7)

Crisis Text Line
Text HOME to 741741 (24/7)

IMAlive, an online crisis center
www.imalive.org (24/7)