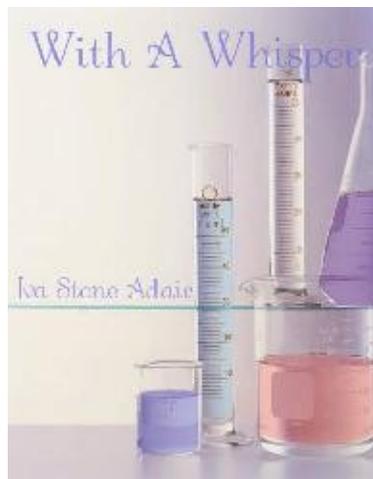


With A Whisper (for Aphrodite88's Writing Challenge)

By : Iva Stone Adair

T.S. Elliot once said "This is how the world ends; not with a bang but with a whisper." He could not have been more correct. After a drug trial for a new pill that cures the common cold goes wrong, the drug and it's idea is thrown out. Not a year later a young man studying to be a chemist finds the notes for the pill and begins making it in his house. He comes out to the government and says he's made something amazing. Too bad the last page of the notes was lost to the world.

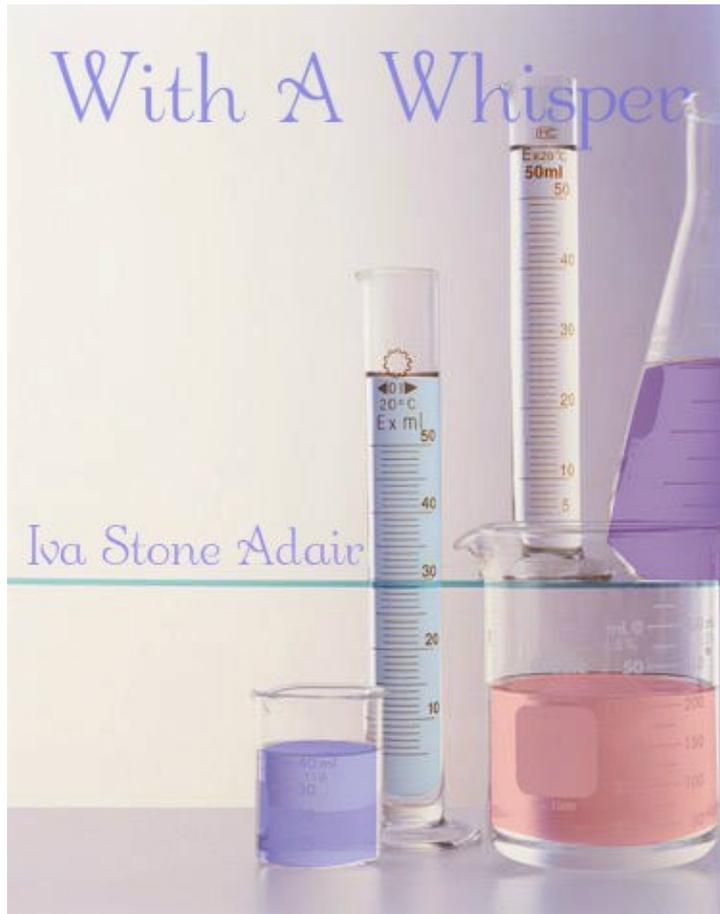


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"This is how the world ends; not with a bang but with a whisper."

--T.S. Elliot--

Almost seventy years have past since Jacob Delacy made the mistake of not testing the long term effects of his cure for the common cold and the population of the human race is paying for it. We are dwindling. Ever year the old die but the new don't come into play. Everyone from the insanely smart to the unbelievably dumb have been trying to find a cure to Delacy's drug.

We first found out about the defects of the drug twenty-five years to late to stop anyone from taking it. It was the perfect accidental crime. Everyone gets a cold eventually and almost everyone takes a pill or two. Mainly the young and when the young take it, it kills all their eggs or sperm before the poor kids even know what sex is. When more developed people take it, it makes their offspring sterile. Sadly, I am a victim of said drug. Here is my story:

I was twenty-five and married. We were both financially secure, had a bigger house than most people our age, complete with a big yard and a Chocolate Lab. We felt we were ready for kids. We tried for two years to get pregnant. Finally, we went to a doctor and he told us that neither of us were able to reproduce. We were crushed. Eventually we thought of adoption. We called every agency we could find but none had any children available. We thought it weird so I did some research on the lack of people of having babies in the last few

With A Whisper (for Aphrodite88's Writing Challenge)

years. I didn't find anything so I asked some of my friends if they had heard of anyone having kids recently. At first they said no like it never really crossed their minds.

I pointed out that it was strange then they thought about it. Some even told me *they* were trying to get pregnant but couldn't. The sixth person I called was a chemist and when I asked her about the phenomenon she seemed like she didn't care. Luckily, she had been my best friend for ten years and I could tell, without even looking at her, that she wasn't telling me everything she knew. After a few minutes of coaxing I got her to open up. "Listen," she said, "You cannot tell anyone what I'm about to tell you. If my boss finds out I told anyone I will be suspended or worse, fired."

I agreed to keep my mouth shut and said that Finn, my husband, would be the only person I would tell. She sighed then began telling me that the cure for the common cold was under going some new tests. "It turns out that it wasn't tested for the long term effects. People that were in the original drug test called back about twenty years later and mentioned that their kids couldn't have kids. Both men and women. The company that sold the drug told them to come in and they did a million tests on them and their offspring trying to figure out what could have made them infertile other than the cure for the common cold. So far, they have nothing. It *was* the so called cure." She paused again. "I'm sorry, sweetie. Both of us and our husbands are unable to have children."

She was silent for a little while as I thought about it. When it finally sunk in, I freaked. "So than, the last two years... I've wasted my whole life wanting kids! How could you not tell me!? Is... is there a reverse or something to this 'cure'?" I began to hyperventilate and ramble about how my life was ruined and there was no point anymore. She asked if I was going to be okay. I choked out a yes then hung up and fell onto the floor.

It was hours before my husband came home and found me still on the floor clutching the phone. I was all cried out and could barely tell him what was wrong. When I finally choked out the words he fell next to me and held me tight. Eventually we climbed the stairs to our bedroom and fell into bed. The next morning when I woke I felt that the night before had been a nightmare but after looking at my husband with his hand in his hair sitting at our table, a steaming cup of coffee in front of him, I knew it wasn't. If I hadn't cried so much the night before I would have again than. I sat down across from him and stared at the top of his head until he glanced up at me. "What are we going to do?" I sighed.

He sat back in his chair and took a sip of his coffee. He doesn't even like coffee, just drinks it when he's upset. "Well," he sighed, "I guess we have no choice but to forget about having a baby." A slight smile touched his face. "Want to get another puppy?"

I looked at him in mild shock. "You still want to be with me even though I can't have kids?"

He laughed half heartedly. "Why would not being able to have kids affect my love for you? I married you for you, not for the kids you may have given me one day. Plus, I called my parents last night because I couldn't fall asleep and they told me that I had taken the cold medicine when I was a kid, too. Honey, it's neither of our faults." I was amazed at his understanding in all this. I mean, I knew it wasn't my fault but I still felt guilty and his puppy idea and reassuring me that he still loved me made me feel that much better.

"But," I questioned, "You're drinking coffee. You only drink that when you're upset about something."

"You forgot when I'm think about something. I was wondering what type of puppy we should get."

"But you had your head in your hands! That screams distress!"

With A Whisper (for Aphrodite88's Writing Challenge)

He smiled and calmly said, "I'm tired, baby. With the office making me work over time than last night's bad news, I am beyond exhausted." He smiled again and I couldn't help but get excited over the new puppy. As soon as the nearest pet shelter opened, we got to looking.

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A few months after we found out so did the rest of the world and basically all of them weren't as nonchalant about it as we were. Since the drug was easy to make and had relatively simple ingredients, it was mass produced and sent to just about everyone and even donated to the poorer parts of the world. They said, "People in these poor areas get sick and die so often, we just liked the idea of knowing they can stop dying from small illnesses taking over them when they have the common cold." What they didn't know was that it also cured bigger problems, like over population.

There were the "a little to far left" extremists who planned riots and sit ins and put bombs in the buildings and under the cars of the people who worked for Delacy, including Delacy's. Then there were the people like me and my husband, the ones that were living life to the fullest and taking a few more fun risks now that we knew we were either the last or second to last generation that were going to live in this planet. The "a little to far right" extremists.

As the years went on the police tried to keep people calm and from doing stupid things but there were so many more people than cops the police force eventually faded out. The health care systems began to go, one hospital at a time. People started to think that since they were the last and most couldn't have children anyway there was no point in taking care of themselves. When the last few high school students graduated, the school system crumbled as well. No one went to college because... well, what was the point? They were no longer trying to make a better place for the future since there were going to be no future children. No one was trying to save Earth because they knew that the planet would repair itself. Most of the laws went out of order too.

Government has died within recent years, leaving the people to run the planet. Most are elderly like myself but some are still in their early forties. There have been many wars trying to decide who owns what land. The infamous cure changed everyone when they found out what had happened. Some people killed others. Others killed themselves. Some, like me, have learned to keep myself and my belongings protected with dogs, with guns. I found my bad streak about thirty years ago when my husband and I woke to someone stealing our things. Our beloved dog had just died so we had no warning except the man rattling the coins we kept in a baggie. Instinct told me to bolt for the bathroom and lock myself in but something in me made me grab a shotgun that we had found earlier that week. I pointed it at the robber and told him that if he didn't put everything back in its place I'd shoot him where he stood. I must have had some crazy look in my eyes because he did as told. The poor bugger didn't even know the thing wasn't loaded.

After that we got another dog, a Rottie that time. Trained him to only be nice to us. My husband died twenty years after that and I had to become tougher. So I did. I made it a rule that if anyone were to come ten feet from my house I would let the dogs out first, as a warning. If they didn't leave within five seconds I'd call the pups back and start shooting. People began leaving me alone. Only an idiot wouldn't. I have shot some people in my day. I'm not proud of it but in a failing world what else could I do?

Other people didn't fare as well as I did. Most were killed. I saw more dead bodies daily than I did living people. Yeah, it made me sad but what could I do? It's not like I could save everyone. I barely had enough food to keep myself alive. Sad to say, it did get easier and at the same time harder when my husband passed. I had more food and that made it easy. But the hard part was I was on my own and that made other people see me as a target. I also missed having company that I could talk to and get answers in return. You can only talk to a dog so much before you start to go crazy. Another hard part after my husband passed was having only one pair of hands working on the garden and only one set of eyes looking for animals when out hunting.

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And this is where you came in. Me sitting on my porch with my husband's ashes in an urn that a little tree grows from. Three tough looking dogs lounging beside me. You know almost my whole history except for the fact of my name. When I was a little girl, my mother and I moved from my father because he decided his job was more important than us. My mother changed her last name back to her maiden name. I began going by my mother's last name when I was nine. Her marriage name was Delacy. I am Demmi Delacy and I, along with everyone else, am paying for my father's mistake.

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