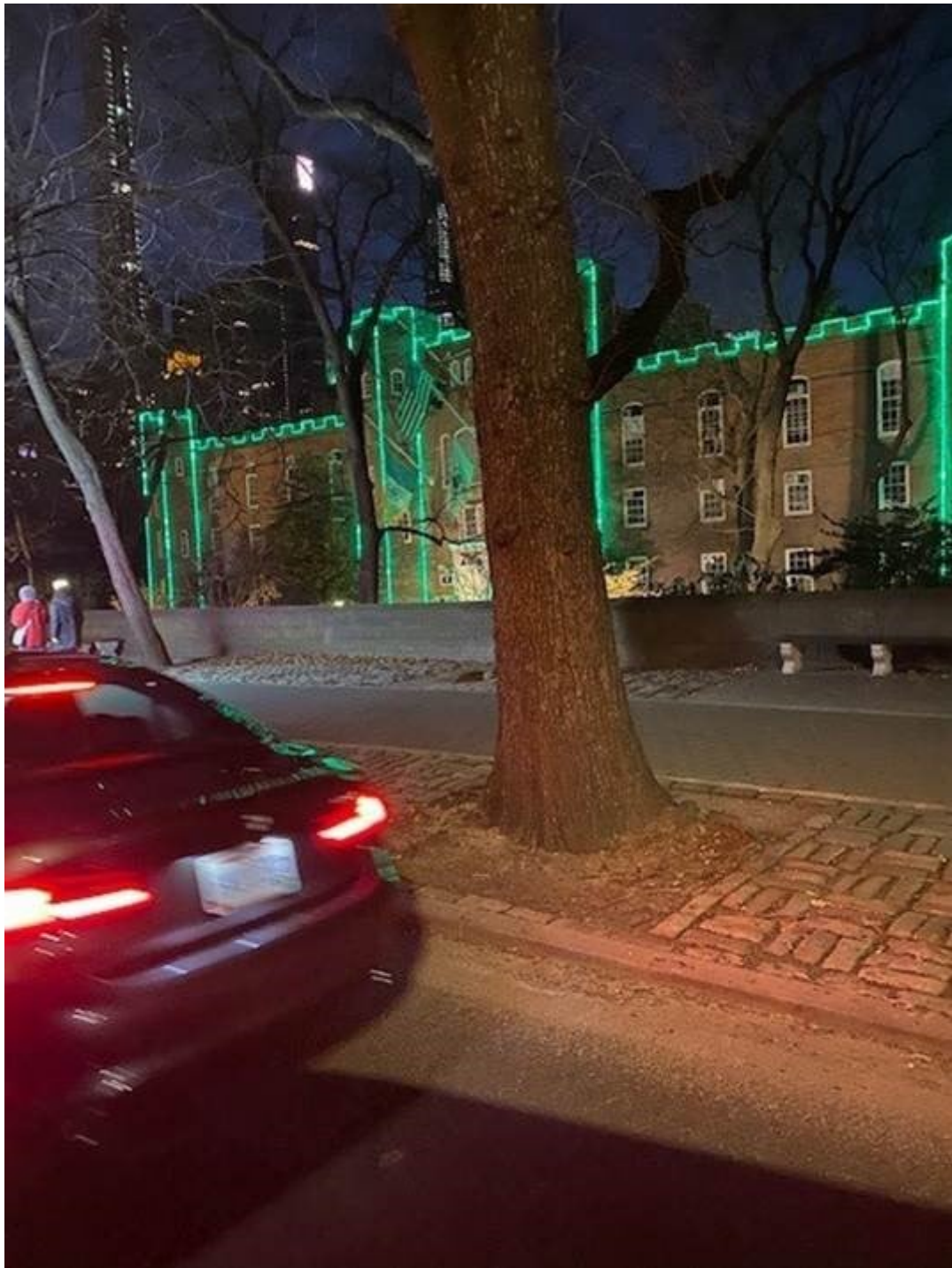


Manhattan Nights

by Phyllis Chesler



Last night I took a tour by car around the fabled city of Manhattan. Despite the surge, the lockdown, and the cold weather, festive lights were everywhere; the Central Park zoo became a magical castle outlined in neon green; the buildings near Central Park South were shining in orange. A long line

of cars were waiting to see the Christmas Tree in Rockefeller Center.

And yet—every beloved movie theater, Broadway, the Opera House, all remain shuttered and dark. Many favorite restaurants have gone out of business, have a limited take-out only menu, or are closed for the duration, maybe forever. The American-style cafe on my corner no longer seems to have heaters. Other restaurants do. Young people huddle together along Central Park South, dealing drugs, listening to what I call “noise” as if it were music. Some are masked, some are not.



This will be a long, dark winter, one that will test our well being, even our sanity. We are like prisoners, mistrustful of neighbors and strangers. Yesterday a woman in my building nearly freaked out when she thought I would dare to join her in the elevator. Those who are traveling for family holidays are risking their lives to do so, as well as the lives of others. New York City children have lost their regular lives—no classroom structure, peer groups, friendships, or regular learning. What will this mean for them in the long

run?

A redemptive perspective: Imagine if we'd all been alive during the Spanish Influenza. No internet, no television, no telephone, probably very few telegrams. We would not know who had lived or died, we'd have absolutely no contact with friends and loved ones, and we'd have only our own company in silence and solitude and that of those who already lived with us.

We are lucky in history. We can Zoom friends and families. But oh, how weary I am of two-dimensional intimacy, no touching, no hugging, no kissing of adult children or of grandchildren...May we all stay safe, stay strong, and stay sane.