

Freedom

Kila lifted her hand up to the door again. Nothing.

She shook her head perplexed. Why wasn't the door opening? This had never happened before.

When the Ministry of Security and Home Affairs had first mooted the idea of integrated keys there had been an outcry.

What next will they want to embed in our skin, people had asked. But, as with the notion of vaccine passports, back in 2021, everyone had soon got used to the idea. And who nowadays used an old fashioned key?

Kila rubbed her hand and tried the door again.

What was she going to do? Without her palm key she wouldn't be able to activate anything. How was she going to make phone calls, write, bank, show her health record, her ID? This was the stuff of nightmares.

She looked around in case anyone she knew was passing.

"Kila!" It was Alik reaching out a friendly elbow in greeting.

"Alik! Am I pleased to see you!" She smiled happily at her neighbour and elbowed him back.

Alik wasn't smiling.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

"My key's no longer working," he said.

"That's odd," she responded, "neither is mine. What do you think is going on?"

"So you haven't heard the news?"

Kila shook her head. "What are you talking about?"

"There's been some kind of security lapse. None of the palm keys are working. Not just yours and mine. But everyone's."

Kila's eyes widened in amazement.

"But that's crazy. How are we going to do anything? The whole system will breakdown! It's like they had back in the old days with the internet. What are we going to do?"

"We're marching" announced Alik. "We're marching on the Ministry. Listen!"

Kila listened and for the first time could hear the shouts of an angry mob.

She could just about make out the words, "freedom from the key" being repeated over and over again.

"But I don't want freedom from the key. I like my palm key. It gives me freedom to do everything I want to do."

“But it gives them control over us,” answered Alik. “We want freedom from control.”

Now Kila could hear the mob chanting, “Freedom from control. Freedom from control!”

Alik elbowed her again.

“Come with us Kila. Join the protest.”

Kila stepped back.

“I can’t Alik. Keys give us freedom. You must see that.”

Alik scowled. “Keys belong to our colonial past.”

Kila shook her head and elbowed him away.

“NO!”

“Kila – wake up! Happy birthday my darling! 21 today!

Her mother was leaning over her. She was laughing and dangling something in her face. A large silvery beribboned cardboard key.

“Happy 21st birthday! Today you get the key of the door! That’s what we used to say when I was young. But it’s all change now. The Prime Minister was on TV just before announcing a new idea. They’re going to impregnate keys into your hand. Can you imagine! Whatever will they think of next?”