

Vintage Whine



Achy Breaky Heart

By Kate Gilderdale
Stouffville Free Press

Recently I watched *The Killing* - a relentlessly gloomy, hopelessly addictive Danish-TV series - on my all-region DVD player (the series is not available in Canada, so I got it from Amazon UK).

Afterwards, seeking some light relief, I hopped on the GO bus with one of my friends and went to see *Amour* at the Varsity. *Amour*, which has been nominated for best picture and best foreign film in the Oscars, is about an elderly couple who are doing fine until the wife gets sick. After that, it's more doses of relentless gloom, brilliantly served up by Emanuelle Riva and Jean-Louis Trintignant. I'm not giving anything away when I say it doesn't have an upbeat ending, a bit like life really.

Despite all that, I was feeling quite chipper until I got home and opened an email from the Heart and Stroke Foundation, which read, "Dear Kate," (like everyone in our brave new world, my correspondent seems to think we should be on first-name terms from the get-go even though we haven't been introduced), "If you're like most of us, you've got dreams for your later years - dreams that may include travel, time with your family, and doing the things you love to do."

It didn't take Einstein to figure out they were about to burst my bubble big time, and they didn't disappoint. "But your dreams may be at risk," continued the missive, darkly. "The reality is that the average Canadian will spend their last 10 years living with sickness and disability. Every Canadian needs to hear this important message."

As it happens, the important message inbox in my brain is already overflowing with health warnings, nutrition caveats and an avalanche of expert advice on appropriate lifestyle choices that proliferate and contradict themselves with the frequency of writs being served on Rob Ford.

Cue *Make Health Last*. What will your last 10 years look like? an incredibly depressing commercial with a split screen showing Mr. Healthy on one side cavorting with his grandchildren, and his sickly counterpart on the other, festooned with tubes and struggling to sit up in a hospital bed. It's not that I don't understand the message they're trying to convey about healthy living, it's more that as I get older, I don't want to be constantly reminded of my impending mortality.

Health messages are getting increasingly strident these days as wellness advocates struggle to make themselves heard above the white noise of modern life. Over-sized soft drinks have been banned in New York, warnings are being stuck on restaurant menus and the grim reaper seems to be lurking on every website and newspaper front page, and in every inbox.

Apparently I shouldn't give up hope of redemption if my would-be saviour's final words are anything to go by. "The good news is that you have the power to change your future. The Heart and Stroke Foundation wants to help you make healthy choices so you can spend every moment not just living, but truly alive."

Of course there's still no guarantee I won't die prematurely of some condition or other, but at least I'll do so secure in the knowledge that no one can say it was my fault.

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