

AN UNUSUAL SPRING



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It's a rainy and cold day in early spring. There is a virus going around so I think I'll stay in. I pick up a good book and put some bird food out on the deck. I hope a bird comes by before the squirrels. Soon, a blue jay makes a visit. The sun *will* shine again.



The virus is called Corona. And we are told to stay in because it's nasty and very contagious. I look outside and, as nature is waking up, it seems to be mocking me. But why do I have to stay inside the house? There are 288 cases in my state and two deaths. Why is this different than the flu? Yet the news sounds pretty scary and I now have to teach online. This is crazy!



Staying in the house all the time now. The cases are on the rise, and so are the deaths. I have a hard time adjusting. I need to stay active, but being cooped up is not easy. I start to walk a lot. And, as I do, I begin to notice things I never would have before. Today I found this little egg. A note of hope?



Wearing a mask in public is mandatory, and everything is closed. I need a haircut. I am frustrated. So, I grab my scissors and start cutting. Then I take a closer look in the mirror. I will have to wear a hat from now on.



It's Easter again. I don't want to think of last year's fun - waking up late after yesterday's midnight mass, lamb chops on the grill, spinach pies and cheese pies, everyone dancing and cracking red eggs one against the other. But I am well, the air is clean, the sunlight bright and crisp, and the azaleas in the garden are smiling. That is enough.



I've been confined to my apartment for weeks now. And even on my infrequent trips to the supermarket, I am in sweats and snickers. Today I decided to put order to the photos from a trip I took early last winter. In one of the photos, my friends and I smile back at me, and I find myself perplexed: "what boots am I wearing?" I wonder. I take a closer look but still don't recognize them. I search for them in my closet, holding the photo. And there they are; my everyday boots. When this is over, it will be like going shopping in my closet.



Cleaning up some old stuff in the studio, I come across a palm tree branch that I had picked up walking through a New Orleans park. This was back when travel was easy. I snap and shape the palm a bit until the spikes resemble wings. Then, I attach a broken earring to make the head. I hung the piece on top of my desk, call it “my angel,” and daydream about the time when I can travel and wander around again.



He left his clothes in a pile on the floor. I move to pick them up but sit down again. He's gone for his annual test, the one that can turn our lives upside down once more this spring. Probed and checked out wearing a mask. I sit and wait, staring at my phone, paralyzed. My hands are full of new wrinkles from washing too much and forgetting to moisturize. Maybe I should pray. But all I can do is sit and wait. After what seems like an eternity, the phone rings. And before he even speaks, I know. We have another year.



I sit around again looking outside the window. I seem to be doing that a lot these days. There are close to 10,000 cases in our state now, and everyone is required to wear a mask at the supermarket. Yet, since finding the tiny blue egg, I have been wondering how much of what really goes on around me I don't notice - busy, running around me. And just then, a deer comes in the garden. A deer? Here? Have there been deer here before? Apparently, there is a lot I don't notice in my hectic daily routine. And just then, as the deer passes through, I turn inside me to examine my life.



People stand on orange circles spaced six feet apart in front of the supermarket, waiting for their turn to step inside. I come a bit closer and get a dirty look from the woman in the black mask and blue gloves in front of me. When I get inside, shoppers seem to forget all about the orange circles, or social distance, or this crazy Corona thing. They brush against each other, reach in front of someone else to get what they want. I stuff my basket with more things than I need. At home, I disinfect a few items, pile the rest up in a corner. They say this pesky virus survives on cardboard for 24 hours and on plastic for three days, so I must not touch them for now. I clean my hands, throw my mask away. In this “new normal,” I have to shower and wash my hair next.



When I was a little girl and listened to this or that war story recounted at dinnertime, I, one day, asked my father if anyone from our Southern European family had ever gone through life without experiencing war. My father raised his shoulders and said, “No.” I was terrified. I had nightmares. Of war and of the fact that I too would have to endure it. Now, confined to my house, I put on my mask and gloves and think of the modern-time war I am going through. But my grandparents were forcefully evicted from their hometown, lost everything they had, became refugees, starved, and started from scratch. I can withstand this.



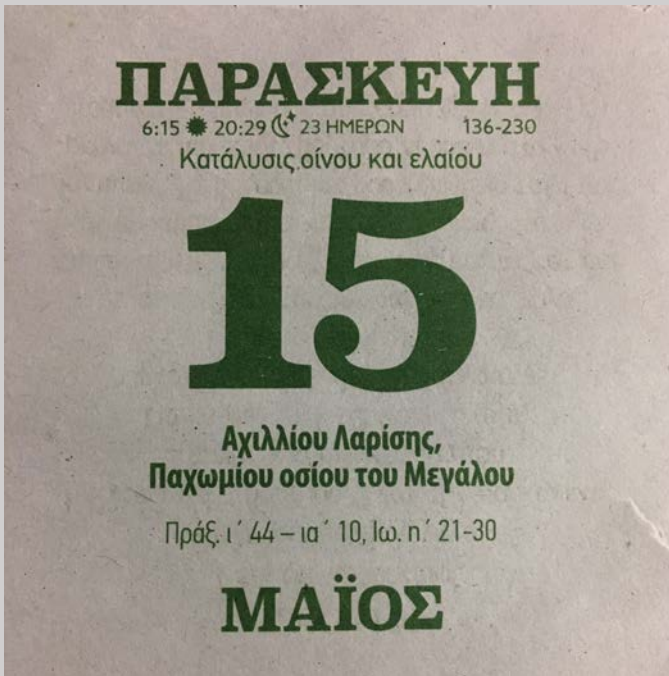
I walk around the yard, enjoying a bit of sunshine when I come up to a sight that revolts me. Bird wings, feathers, down. But no carcass. What kind of an animal does this? A cat? Another bird? Life and death go on out there while I sleep preoccupied, wrapped in my world, and its problems.



Cases now in our state, over 15,000. Cabin fever increased; walks decreased. Trips to the frig increased; zoom talks with friends decreased. Lying around increased; cleaning the house decreased. Swing moods increased; productivity decreased. My life is a yo-yo.



On the first of May, back home, we used to pick flowers from our gardens or from the countryside. We then gathered around with our friends and made wreaths that each family hung on their home's front door to welcome springtime. We left the wreaths there to dry out until June 23, when, on Saint John's day, as was the custom, we took them down and used them to build fires. The brave ones jumped over the fires while the rest clapped or took their turn. Those days are long gone. Now, I am quarantined at home, and as I recall my childhood days, I take out a little sweetgrass wreath I once made in South Carolina. In this life, now, this is my May 1 spring wreath.



I peel off each page of my calendar, anticipating the recipe they usually have on the back. Sometimes it's a funny joke instead, sometimes a love poem. When it's a recipe I go to my cupboard, see what I have, and improvise. Stuffed cabbage leaves with rice, onions, garlic, and spices. Chicken and potatoes in the oven dressed in lemon pepper and olive oil. One day, I eat something without checking the expiration day and I stay in bed sick. At first, I worry. My only thought is *let this not be the virus*. Eventually, I get better and go back to peeling off the dates from my calendar hoping that tomorrow will bring us all closer to a resolution.



Our state is slowly reopening. But the cases today are close to 50,000. What has changed? Maybe it's the feeling of spring in the air that brings with it a sense of optimism. It's hard to ignore the beauty and stay cooped up inside. I am going out!



**THE END
(NOT)**