

Love In The Time

Of Corona



a short story by

L.A.
Corona

Prelude

Corona - like the ring around the sun. A crown that brings waves to elevation beyond that of the seas. A crown that turns pebbles of sand crimson. Corona - also a name of firsts and lasts. An honor to some, a curse to others. What is in a name, but a thought, but a lineage of past sufferings and triumphs. What is in a name, Corona, mine, my last, but the pronunciation of each letter with mistrusting delay, when once upon a time, it was said loudly, carrying the glorious weight of ego. Humbled ego, as it is the only one it's ever known. What is in a name, but a promise, a surrender, an understanding. Like the ring around the sun, it shields, it protects, it creates. Corona - like the ring around the sun.

[Day 10]

It was inevitable - the clouds of gloom always reminded her of a faraway love. It was day 17 since he'd left and day 10 of the now mandated quarantine. Irrevocably, the world had been falling apart just as fast as their longing for each other had grown into worry. No one had put serious thought towards the severity of the virus that would go on to becoming a pandemic reaching all corners of the world. Leaders had failed them, racial crimes had reached new peaks, and shelves that had never been empty were now collecting dust. Change had come; and no one body was prepared.

Time had stopped towards the beginning of a new decade, yet all she could think about was the last time protection cradled the dark of her mind. The sentiment had come from him only once before: *The month of December suits you.* An artistic flow of written words that reminded her of a time when the weight of blankets created the warmest illusion of security. It was fulfillment through faces of tigers, horses, and superfluous designs only Mexican fabric could wear. It was also the thought of the grey bottoms he used on cold winter nights, never failing to pull her attention towards her favorite delicacy. However, the craving for physical touch had surpassed the sexual, for what was once deemed normal was suddenly and quickly becoming taboo. As a self-proclaimed writer, pen to paper was what she called on the most. Love letters were prepared every other day only to recognize that the trip from West to East could contaminate. Coming to terms with the distance while combating both the virus and the copious amount of human ignorance was something that never quite came to be.

The spread of the disease resembled that of thunder and lightning; an unavoidable sound with a delayed visual that devised a deeper delay in response. Only those in the midst of it could hear the tormenting cries of the sky and move with reason. The U.S. had its warning behind protected screens, but it was too late. The reaction was none as the clamoring thunder inched close enough to soil the ears of the heedless blind with blood. The moment came and went in which movement was still allowed, and as devastated as she was, she had to accept that throughout this historical time, they would be apart.

While the world's condition was fragile, so were the minds of the people inviting panic into their homes. Devious were the thoughts controlled by fear, immersing themselves into weakened beliefs in faith. But it was the lack of the physical that controlled the weakest parts of her. Those who could make statements of tangible love were lucky: the warmth of a chest, the safe haven in the bent of an elbow, a good morning kiss, and a squeeze to a clammy hand just in time for bed. Present time allotted them to see one another's world through small screens. Opposite coasts came with different time zones and weather conditions that seemed miserable to live in unless on vacation. They would mimic each other in dance and grin as they played pretend in the presence of his snow. He would call her with a view of falling specs of white amongst a tree filled canvas while Christmas songs lingered in the background. It was a temporary happiness as distance was never part of the plan.

- Night and Day -

Her four wall confinement was on the second floor of a two story house consisting of two windows which almost always remained open to the street below, never stopping her from undressing without caution. Her concern for private indecency was none, for

she preferred to be an unhinged shadow moving at her own accord. Certainly, her body wasn't something she sought to put on display; although the romanticized veil of lights against her skin would transform her into something she liked. The view from her window was exquisite, especially at night. She would light up a pair of tea lights that outlined the frame, highlighting the brims of rooftops across the way, simulating the curves of the earth-made hills behind them. It was their silhouette in sight that seemed to cure the world of all its illnesses, even if only for the night.

During the light of day she would, without expression, catch a glimpse of herself through her bedroom mirror, taking notice of the shifting light to her lingering facades of youth. The lighting gave truth to her most dominant features: the thick of her brows were untamed, the pale of her skin shed light on her sprinkles of brown, and the strands of her black hair seemed to bloom alongside the flowers birthed by spring. Each feature was simultaneously dark and soft, paralleling the often dreadfully weary nights. One would tire from counting the endless tosses and turns that came more often than not. But on the nights where the patter of rain would soothe and the cricket-like frog hymns would surprise, those were the nights that would pacify her to dream dreamless dreams.

Half of the world spoke in solidarity while the other half wrestled in arrogance. 20,000 souls was today's number mean while the assumed leader of the U.S. aimed to lead his people down a catastrophic road: to resume with business as usual so that the health of the economy would override that of the public's. Those in power had never been interested in progress, only the promise of more power. It was difficult to imagine the

light at the end of the tunnel, the shooting star of hope, the silver lining that somehow made life tolerable. She couldn't help but begin her days in fear, undressing in defeat, removing the silver lining from her skin, shedding flakes of distress onto the ambiguity of her future.

There was an uneasiness that passed through her every three days or so, causing her to question the existence of truth. Fact and opinion had begun to merge, creating streams of doubt she wished to sanitize with the help of the only outlet keeping her afloat. Art in all its forms had become her only surrounding ailment that was both tangible and obscure. Art was the lie that lived in the justness of the truth she sought. She searched, not for understanding, but for discovery.

- Perspective -

Perspective was an ally all on its own; a shift in perspective had become a necessity and possibly a cure to the noise inducing anxiety. She had been inspired by a probing question: 'What if this virus was an ally in our evolution?' As of late, the normal percentage of pollution had ceased, while rain, usually absent, had blessed her withered lands. The virus had ironically gifted her home with the capacity to breathe again, to take a break and bask in sweet stillness. It would have been ignorant to say that the spread of a deadly virus was the answer to the curbing of climate change, but the notable differences were worth admiring, despite their temporary lifespan. She realized that her outlook needed to say, 'We will rise again, but towards a different goal.'

Until now, the world had moved at a speed that had interfered in noticing, let alone appreciating, detail in the mundane. This time had been a gift of reflection on not only the self, but on the machine generations had served and complied with their entire lives. This machine had strategically created

obstacles in order to trap diversity in the nosebleed section. It was a system that was not broken, rather exceeding in what it was invented to do: suppress the 'other' until the end of time by embedding injustices in contrived rules and laws. It was time to think about reshaping the way of life they had been forcefully fed. She wanted to re-imagine a normal that gave the world the health it was deprived of. To be normal was to continue the struggle of those already struggling. To be normal was to continue the assimilation of those absorbed in wealth and self-appointed privilege. She wanted nothing more than to be a part of creating a diversion in the existing order - to be different, because different had always surpassed the norm.

- Home -

[Day 16]

The day was generous in its temporary detachment of the misery that would come from the grinding of her teeth. She had stood in silence, inhaling the calm engraved in each yellow petal that swayed in the early morning's breeze, basking in the blessings of prayer from the night before. It was nature and baskets of gratitude that carried her back to a house that she had never lived in prior to the outbreak. After 21 years of being 15 minutes away from her beloved Downtown Los Angeles, she was now in a much more appeasing house, filled with space and neighbors who kept to themselves; 75 minutes without crowds was what now stood in between her and home. The streets were absent of clutter and speed bumps, while memories of a man mending shoes and another selling *esquites* were blurred into seclusion. The old house housed a family of four in a one bedroom duplex that had been deteriorating at a dangerous speed. Nevertheless, it was home. It was also a forced acceptance that opened her eyes to her

present; as she watched bits of pollen dance around her in mesmerizing patterns on a mission to diversify the white that now surrounded her, she realized that the luxury of certainty was no more.

Strange was to hear frogs outside her windows when all she could hear in the city were either love stricken cats or airplanes on their descent into the airport. The distance between cities believed pollen essential, migrating like she did, planting unexpected beauty into uncharted territory. Greed and all its companions had been destroying the works of mother nature before the pandemic: the decimation of the ozone layer, the seeping toxins in the pores of all things breathing, the weeping of mother nature in forms of fires, floods, and droughts, and the madness of corruption in the unbalanced division of time. Wonderful was to witness the destroyers of the world squeezed into stillness, while the natural world began taking steps towards healing itself.

Common was to have a variety of visitors ranging from rabbits to lizards, to the one permanently placed on her back. Hummingbirds were the antidotes against melancholy - each with their own purpose would roam among needle covered cacti and over and under the greens of her fruit trees; they would press themselves against the calming scent of lavender buds while respecting the magic of the Aloe Vera plants; it was an appreciation for the mint they frequently sampled and the rosemary they seldom nibbled, never failing to relish in the sweetness of both the fig and guayaba trees. Their presence brought excitement and reassurance during times of distress.

Although unfinished, with bricks that did not match and weeds that would not stop, her new backyard had surpassed expectations of what it would be like to live with nature at her fingertips. But even with the blessing of unaltered beauty, she

could not escape the precision of the debilitating fear bringing havoc on her attempts towards happiness. Memories were her anchors for remembrance - but it was the unaccounted for subtleties that were slipping away. She could not remember what he smelled like. The clothes belonging to him had been washed several times, stripping the fabrics from their purpose. Her body craved hands of lust and love, but could not remember what it felt like to be touched. Her mind ached for stimulation and passion, but could not remember the last time he had searched her soul. Forgetting was her biggest fear.

- Memory -

Leaned against the wall directly in front of her bed was a medium sized scrap of wood; a hand drawn portrait of her and him on the eve of their five month anniversary. The story was that this work of art was that of a man of the streets impacted by homelessness; the talent that burned inside of him could never be erased, regardless of where he slept. He had approached them, as they settled over the wooden bar top stools, with politeness in his voice and kindness in his eyes. Upon agreeing to be captured in moments of fluidity, they looked around at the dream located in a crevice of Downtown Los Angeles. There were scattered vases along the walls, each with the shadow of a single flower, illuminated by the melting wax beside them. French tongue had tickled their ears while foreign wine teased their lips - if those dark blue walls could speak, they would whisper in accents of seduction. They were one of three couples at the French bistro, so petite that the six of them were deemed a crowd. Across the way, on the other side of the bar, sat the talented man consumed in his focus for detail, never to know the joy this would bring him for years to come. Strokes of black bled onto the imperfect

wood, perfectly capturing the faces of two people in love. He caught the alluring slant in his eyes, along with the most underrated lips she had ever kissed. Proof of the dancing that followed lived only in her memory. as the lack of distraction was evident enough of the moment itself.

[Day 20]

One could make the bold statement that masochism ran in her blood. It had been a surprise to her that it did not happen sooner - the ugliness that it is to be consumed by envy. She would watch both strangers and acquaintances in their own definitions of love and hated them for it. And although today was the first of this imposing gloom, it certainly was far from the last. It was a struggle to frequent the reminder to take each day as it came, with the only steadiness existing in the cracking of her flickering flames. The heat would trigger memories of him and her and nothing more.

There had been a time when slow dances had moved empty houses into fruition with passion alone. On such occasions, before making love, he would use his hands to slowly caress the bare of her legs from the bottom up to the thick of her thighs. Her legs were long and open to a pair of hands adorned with scars of snakes and past mistakes. The fact that he was now missing from her created an unappeasable hunger. The quiet that would come from a darkened sky would at times cure the ugly enveloped in her thoughts, making space for memory after memory. Some were sweet but most were salacious. It was this recollection of memories that helped preserve the intimacy of what once was.

[Day 27]

The day had come where she had arrived at a solemn intermission from her regularly scheduled specks of optimism. She had inevitably lost count as to the day and could not seem to reach the section of the mind that cared. Extensions were coming in herds and there was nothing to be done but accept. Useless was to reach for love in a time where longing of the past weighed heavy on the minds of most. There was no denying the necessity of these extensions, but neither was the grand necessity of reacquainted love. Although the day was bleak and gray, and for no particular reason, the mysteries of the coming night seemed promising. She continued to sit and ponder, stand and ponder, and lay and ponder. Her 27th day in quarantine had her wishing for more candles, as her current collection had been dwindling in daily sparks of madness. She looked forward to today as it was scheduled to consistently rain into tomorrow. As she cuddled alongside a book of love, a notification of dire disaster distracted her bubble of peace; more deaths.

The pandemic had now infected over 1.5 million bodies worldwide and killed over 90,000 of them. She closed her eyes and took three deep breaths before walking over to the therapy that was her window. She opened her eyes to what was perceived to be a collection of pearls attached to branches of trees - nature's peace offering for an uninterrupted downpour. She felt as if the nightfall was leading her mind down pathways no longer available to her, serving only the purpose of fleeing nostalgia, when it had brought peace just the week before. Before she could fall deeper, she made her way to her celibate sheets, closed her eyes to rest, and counted the days as if they were sheep.

[Day 31]

As the reach for sanity became increasingly difficult, she did her best to mute news outlets who drowned its viewers into quicksand's of contradictions. Yet, not all days were days of strength. She gave in to temptation and immediately faced regret. She witnessed dozens of coffins, pristine and dark brown, waiting in line for cremation in a section of Spain. Although it was common knowledge, the realization that those who died of this illness would do so alone sunk in as deep as her soul could bear it. Families of the dead would be cheated of their 'goodbyes' and 'I love you's', blindsided by rage that would rise due to mourning without the physical. Inconsolable was the despairing solitude of such loss. The principal factor operating against her was suddenly made clear; love in the time of Corona was all she had.

[Day 33]

The sun had made its comeback today, bringing with it a salty breeze that had traveled through massive terrain and grapevine covered valleys. The corner palm tree creaked like a door from a horror film, a noise more apparent the slower it moved. Some had said that the end of the world was already here, for they were floating upon a corpse whose bones rotted in waste, greed, cruelty and abuse. Slow, like the creaking tree, basking in the sun like the rest of them, revealed only in uncertainty; slow, like that of decay. Sleep's inconsistency was stress's repercussion. It could have been the mourning of normalcy that produced restless nights and anxious days. A simple journey for food had her coming home feeling as if she had traveled by foot for days under the sweltering sun. The stress seemed to linger and multiply in the overthinking while in public. She had to constantly remind herself to peel her shoulders away from her ears while also releasing the tension causing the wrinkle in between her brows. 'Relax' was becoming more and more of a foreigner in her body as

the days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months. Where was the light that never went out? When could she bask in the energy of music, people, youth and life?

[Day 40-something]

It was not easy to sit by and watch as her divided country made a mockery of itself. Most followed the orders put in place that were meant to protect; yet there were others who claimed to be stripped of their rights. Those of whom she did not know personally had spent their days rotting in their own impoverished ways of thinking - a mentality assigned to the privileged. A rise in protests for the return to normalcy consisted of the most feeble minded. A rise in temperature had also begun to affect the public's obedience, for miles of beaches had turned into hot zones. It was only a matter of time before even the most cautious took their chances towards the possibility of death.

- Love -

[Day 60-something]

The surplus of time, distance, and predicted neglect had led her to fill her deprivations with complementing vowels from a tempting soul. The innocent intent had brought color to her cheeks and aroused her mind in new ways, admitting the creation of contradictory guilt of pleasure. And although lines had never crossed and skin had never touched, she had begun to feel an affliction from the shadows of love both old and new.

Memories of him had begun to blur as he repeatedly overlooked the needs of her heart. The neglect and differences of thought was enough to famish the profoundness of her soul.

Looking ahead was what tired her the most - the uncertainty was taunting. Looking to the past used to be nothing but soothing memories and lessons learned. Today, the past flickered from exhaustion from trying not to slouch. She now looked for a deeper understanding that she hoped would soften her heartache rather than cause it.

What else could this have been but voyages of love? Stages of love tackling the slowness of honey, smuggling the driest of tears, tepid and mosey. It was day 60-something and she was sick of it all. Her patience was growing thin. Her longing was a form of suffering that no one around her knew how to mend. There was no silver lining, no light at the end of the tunnel, no set date for when they'd be able to hold each other once more. She watched as time slipped away, questioning not when, but if, their love would survive Corona. Torture was to sleep with everything but him: night's suffocated by day's lingering heat, distant voices echoing from the street below, a set of white pillows drenched in anxiety, and a hand on her inner thigh she wished belonged to him. Morning's blue skies and radiant sun had been overshadowed by restlessness as marks of love remained absent. Again, she envied lovers in quarantine together, knowing all too well that many of them would never appreciate the luck they were given.

She wanted to be carried into remembrance, taken by scents of lavender and eucalyptus. She wanted to be carried into his embrace, protecting her from forgetting the unity of body and soul. Remembering to never forget the purpose she carried in her heart, hoping to find the path that transgressed love into hope. But like her love, the world had been staying stagnant or getting worse. Also like her love, she had found a hint of hope into believing that the world could change for the better; a belief often deemed foolish. She was, after all, a hopeless romantic with more than just people, but towards everything that outlined the curves of her heart.

Business and plans that had been a past nuisance put in place as a diversion to matters of meaning were scheduled to return. The world was due to begin again, and that was enough to terrify her. Her trust in humanity had begun to collapse as violation of racial contracts had been documented, all while the inconvenience on white America was making headlines. There was a certain kind of people of self-entitled descent who could only move one way: the imbecilic way. Corona, just like the election of the current President, had unleashed truths hidden in plain sight. And Corona, just like America's biggest embarrassment, was running alongside a killer that has never shied in seeping through the soil of stolen land, watered and nourished by tears and bloodshed of the oppressed.

In between the world's demise and her own personal strive to stay afloat, she would fantasize and revel in happiness from life before rampant diseases and racist degenerates. Fantasies were close cousins of memories - the only difference was that one had already occurred while the other was merely intention. It was her last one before bed, before the end of a long weekend spent at home instead of out dancing somewhere. There was a wealth to her imagination, and it showed. She imagined wearing a light sundress, sitting on a serape dressed in colors of its own, during a sweltering summer day as the light breeze carried boleros into her open heart. It was late afternoon and the hummingbirds were tickling the yellow of the sunflower. The heat, wrapping her in an embrace, bringing reflection to the glow of her skin. It was almost as if she were sunbathing underwater. He was there, of course, for love would be hollow without him. He was admiring the rays that held their breath just to kiss her skin. Her glass of sangria perspired in her hand while traces of berries of blue and red floated to the top - it was a day uncalculated by time, present

to the offerings of love. It was a day where the red of her lips were exposed, smiling at the closeness of his breath. It was a day where love was tangible and Corona was just a name.