



Unraveled and Awake

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The flowers have come to taunt me—all bustling and free in these sweet winds of spring. I'm a jealous fool. Head pressed against the window, I open my mouth and breathe heavy on the glass then write my name in the fog. All at once the letters fade and my eyes appear.

Don't bad things happen in threes? I count my recent misfortunes, offer patterns for sense, but it's hard to make shapes in this darkness.

We're fine, I tell my mother, I tell my friends, I tell myself. I prove it by littering my Instagram with photos of our smiling faces, the kids swimming, memes about sanity and banana bread, more swimming.

Are we fine?

Trauma takes years to manifest in a soul—it has to sink way down into the bones then spreads like a virus by way of veins, heart, brain. My past traumas have come out to play in this new stillness—the silence of it all, a breeding ground for remember when's I've tried to forget. The throned villain herself, anxiety, has taken this opportune moment to rise up and light a match— all my uncertainties like kindling wood. I go up in flames.

My dreams become a highlight reel of everything I've ever boxed away and shoved into the attic space of my mind for later sorting—now a gut-wrenching motion picture with vibrant colors. Each morning I jolt upright, gasping for air. *Is this my unraveling or am I finally awake?*

The kids look up at me with their big, too-young-to-really-understand eyes— *Why can't we see our friends? I want to go to school.* Normally, “Pandemic” is a word they'd probably learn in later years while studying world history and the Spanish flu, Black Death, Plague of Justinian, lots of other stories about bad things that happened to earlier people, but not us. Not in an alternate version of the future. But here, in this reality, I look down at them and simplify the definition of the Coronavirus.

Co-ro-na-vi-rus? They test it on their lips—it's fun for them to say. I watch them wearily—this word will define their generation. And if we're not careful, somewhere in a future stillness, these memories might jump out of an old attic box from the corners of their own minds, leave them with an internal fire, gasping for air.

We need distractions—I open my Pinterest app, write down “fun chores lists for kids,” write down “gourmet recipes I'll never cook,” write down “craft ideas to do with a four and six-year old.”

Did you hear? My phone dings with texts from friends and news alerts. It's getting worse. There's no end in sight. What happens next?

We set up Zoom calls with family—*Are you there?*—stare at the pixelated versions of familiar faces, rack our brains for words. We make hopeful plans—*Maybe next month we'll drive out. Maybe by the end of summer you'll be able to fly here.*

I mistakenly open my 2019/2020 calendar planner and flip through the pages and pages of past plans, future engagements, and so much *life*. How drastically we've pivoted off-course. *Look how many should-have-been-memories we've lost.* I'm angry.

The months tick by and family units choose paths, form pods. We have difficult conversations with those not on our path. Too many turned down invitations, so many friendships put on ice. Mere acquaintances now know the details of my medical chart. *Yes, autoimmune. Fresh out of surgery. Blood tests will be back soon, hopefully then...*

My husband hugs me close at night. He says, *I just want to keep you safe.*

I trace my fingers across my scars, close my eyes tight and will my body to heal faster, be better. *What's wrong with you?*

I put my phone on silent, under a stack of papers, stuffed in a drawer, upstairs, furthest away from my brain. Nothing good comes from notifications anymore. I peer over my internal edge. *How long can I balance it all here?*

But somehow my feet hit the ground with determination each morning. I brush my teeth in vigorous circles and study the sticky note I've placed on my mirror that reads: *Be Stronger.* I play the Van Morrison Pandora station in the kitchen, cook scrambled eggs and bake cinnamon rolls, try and set the right tones for the day. We're making it all up as we go and many days are pure and simple brutality, but slowly, very slowly, we create rhythms here.

One day my daughter comes running in from outside, *Mommy! Look! I saved a ladybug from the pool!* I'm beaming. I tell her, *If a ladybug lands on you it's good luck, but if you save one from the pool? Then she might just make you the luckiest girl in the world.* She smiles. She believes me. I allow myself to believe me, too. The kids are so tuned-in to the present moment, they've noticed a ladybug wading in the pool—the minuscule movements, the silent struggle. A hope flickers inside me—*they're paying attention now.*

Over time, I watch my children's sobs of boredom morph into a super bloom of imagination—the forts, the storylines, the art, the performances, the skinned knees, this fostered sibling bond. *Within this void, might we be gaining something, too?*

With each new month, I've broken down just a little bit more—my past life split open at every seam. In this new place of vulnerability and truth, healing is the only step forward. Physically, mentally, spiritually I move towards rebuilding, restitching these pieces of our lives in a more thoughtful and intentional design.

I still don't know how it will end, there's still a lack of comfort and ease in our day-to-day movements. But now I do know this for certain—it's both: This *is* my unraveling and I'm *finally* awake.

