



The Year of the Chicken

Robert Arends

If anyone told me I'd be an urban farmer and raising two ridiculously cute fluffy silkie chickens named The Chicken Lady [*Kids in the Hall*] and Silky Nutmeg Ganache [*RuPaul's Drag Race*], I'd say they were crazy and don't know me very well.

I don't have the time for such frivolity and responsibility. I work 40 hours a week, come home exhausted after a full day of publicist duties, pick up fast food for dinner, watch Netflix, and fall fast asleep around midnight to start the whole process again the next day.

I have my routine, my ritual, and I love it! Change is not my groove, and I like things just the way they are.

Then 2020 happened.

January 1, 2020

Happy New Year! This is the year, I can feel it! Everything's going so well. All our friends attend a big New Year's bash in our new home. You can feel absolute joy emanating from every corner of the house, from every hug from every friend. The night shimmers and glows and pulses with music, twinkling lights, gold and silver streamers by the hundreds taped to the ceiling and a Christmas tree topped with a disco-like kaleidoscope. It's all so intimate and gleefully intoxicating. Such are most New Year's parties.

March 2020

I've been furloughed from my tourism job. My career job! The COVID-19 lockdown is in full affect and nobody's traveling. Nobody! Heck, we're not even allowed to commute to the office. My whole job is now a laptop on the kitchen table and a banker's box filled with some notes, files, a few office supplies, and other hastily-grabbed items I think I'll need to do my job for the next couple weeks from home. Furlough=layoffs to most people and our whole staff is feeling the ache of uncertainty and dread. I could lose everything. This job defines me—a much TOO big part of me. It's how I can pay the mortgage every month. It doesn't look good. But maybe it won't get worse.

May 11, 2020

Furlough also=sleeping in every day. I love sleeping in! {yawn} It's 10 a.m., and my cell phone rings. Who's calling in the morning? Usually no one. My VP and communications

director are on the line delivering bad news: I've been laid off. I get a severance. Cool. I have to clean out my office tomorrow. Not so cool. Nine years of my career fit into three banker's boxes. I'm tearful and literally shaking driving to the office that one last time. I see my good friend Jacqueline also cleaning out her cubicle. We can't tell if the other is smiling or frowning through our masks. But our eyes meet across the empty office and say everything that needs to be said.

June 23, 2020

Born date. Every chick hatched at this Lakeside farm gets a born date. Today is and will always be our two silkie chicks' birthday. Their names are The Chicken Lady (Lady, for short) and Silky Nutmeg Ganache (aka Nutmeg). Lady is a blue silkie with grayish/white feathers, and Nutmeg is a golden brown-colored buff. I know nothing about raising chickens. My partner Milo had chickens in the Philippines. Tells me they follow you around like a dog and are actually pretty smart. We'll see. When he asked me last week "Hey, what do you think about getting a couple of chickens?" I said, "Sure, why not?" I didn't even think twice. Yes, emphatically yes! Lady and Nutmeg peep sweetly, nervously the whole way home. I think—I know—they miss their mama. They fit in the palm of our hand. So small and defenseless. We set up a box in the living room with a heat lamp and wood shavings to keep them warm and safe for the next 12 weeks.

July 11, 2020

We're watching TV after dinner. It's not too late, maybe 9-ish. Lady and Nutmeg are bigger, fluffier now, nestled in a corner of their box, trilling. Trilling! Softly, pleasantly trilling like those Star Trek tribbles or a cat happily purring on a window sill. We laugh together at this strange beautiful sound coming from the box. They're actually singing each other to sleep. It's one of the strangest, most comforting sounds I've ever heard. I keep applying, but still haven't landed a new job . . . Is this why people have comfort pets?

August 4, 2020

They're calling it a second wave. I didn't know we were done with the first. We still wear masks—everywhere. Our lives are like a dystopian episode of *Black Mirror*. I'm over it, fatigued, miss my friends, but finally receiving unemployment benefits after months of bureaucratic nonsense. Our home is a refuge; for Lady and Nutmeg too. They're still in the house, but in a big spacious cage. I'm sweet on Nutmeg. She talked to me when I held her this morning, saying "Bup, bup, bup, baaahhh!" The first three sounds are low and the last one is just a smidge octave higher. I learn it's chicken-speak for "I know you and like you. You're part of my flock." We're family now. Love these chickens!

September 7, 2020

The coop arrived today from Amazon. It's Lady and Nutmeg's graduation day to the backyard. They excitedly flap their wings like they can fly, running to and fro pecking at the dirt. We hang netting over the yard to protect them from hawks and the big bad world. The virus is virulent; the death toll nears 200,000.

Watched the final presidential debate tonight. Definitely more civil, even watchable. Biden warns we're going into a "dark winter." {sigh} Didn't think it would get worse.

{sigh} I'm worried about the chickens, as the night temperature dips. I heard silkies are actually pretty hardy in the cold. But I lay towels over the coop anyway, as Lady and Nutmeg snuggle in the wood chips.

