



IT WAS FUNNY

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It was funny and then it wasn't. It was funny when it was in some huge city in China we never heard of and they called it the Corona and we laughed about the Mexican beer and said why don't they call it the Tsingtsao Virus. It was funny when the pundits said that the virus came from bats. It was funny when we saw people on TV wearing masks and wondered which of them might actually be bank robbers. It was funny when we wondered for an instant whether it was okay to hug our friends hello and goodbye and then knew instinctively that it was fine because, after all, they were our friends. It was funny to contemplate fat cats being confined to their rooms on luxury cruise ships, unable to impress the other fat cats on board with their jewels or their status or indulge in the trivia games and Broadway entertainment and wine tastings for which they had paid a goddamn fortune.

It stopped being so funny when it came in droves to places we knew, like Venice, where CNN showed us the deserted Piazza San Marco and sweaty doctors and nurses trying to assess priorities and save lives. But at least it wasn't here, not in the US of A where we had the smartest doctors and the best scientists and the Centers for Disease Control. We were sure it would turn out that our country prepared for something just like this, not like Italy or Spain whose systems clearly hadn't been ready.

And then it hit New York and we were incredibly unprepared and generally fucked. And I never did put on a mask but I tried to be careful and turn away from coughers and sneezers and limit my time in restaurants to an hour or less. I washed my hands at least four times a day and tried not to touch my face. It didn't work. On Saint Patty's Day, as I was downing my second pint of green beer at Gallagher's Steakhouse on 52nd Street, my fevers began. The bar was warm and crowded and I was shivering and incredibly alone. I saw spirits and goblins without names. I embraced my beer but it refused to make its way to my mouth and crashed to the floor. I looked down for an instant and crashed to that same floor, a shard of that broken tankard impaled in my cheek. I heard "Somebody call 911." I touched my face and saw on my hand the flowing blood which seemed to have amoeba imbedded inside. I passed out.

I awoke to again confront the spirits and goblins, but this time they wore masks. I knew I needed to be calm. I remembered the yoga breathing exercises my ex had tried to teach me. Inhale five seconds, hold five seconds, exhale five seconds. That would calm me. But it didn't do shit. Because a foreign object, not quite a robot but clearly a machine, had taken over my lungs.

Where are my loved ones, my head wondered, but the question passed quickly without resolution like a bad joke from a late-night comedian. I was helpless and drugged and alone and hot and cold and afraid. I whimpered like a puppy wanting to come up on the bed. Nothing made sense anymore.

I was one of the lucky ones. I survived. It wasn't funny.

