

## *The nightdress*

---

by Elisabeth Grigoriadou

Wake up, have breakfast, study, video conference calls, shopping, cooking, eating, some TV, a walk, more studying, dinner, reading, more TV, sleep. In between, messaging, phone calls, browsing on social media and watching foreign series on the internet.

The students, rays of sunshine when they weren't busy with pranks. On the school's video conference calls various irrelevant names would appear amongst the names they were expecting, waiting to be let into the lesson.

This had been her routine for months. How many months? She could hardly remember. Sometimes time flew by so fast that she got the days mixed up and other times it went by so slowly that she felt like she was in a hospital waiting room, waiting in line for medical tests.

In order for her to leave the house she had to send an SMS and wait for its approval. The neighbourhood was quiet. Even quieter than in August. Everything closed apart from the chemists, the supermarkets, the bakeries, the cafes and the grillhouses, the latter two only for take-aways. Going anywhere outside the boundaries of the local borough was strictly prohibited. There was even a fine for doing so.

After the referendum of 1974 and the final expulsion of the crown from the country, the crown returned through other means. The virus looked like a crown and inflicted a deadly pneumonia on people.

It had started in China and soon Italy was the first country with serious problems. The spreading of the virus took on pandemic proportions and all of a sudden it had totally changed our lives. We were told we had to stay at home in isolation and every evening we awaited the official update from the Department of Health. Fear was everywhere and so was ambiguity. Masks protected us and they became compulsory indoors. In the beginning they were not necessary in open spaces but later they became so. The older generation

were more at risk and so had to stay strictly isolated. At first young children were regarded as dangerous carriers of the virus and then not so much it would seem as they were thinking of opening up nursery schools and primary schools. The schools opened and closed based on the numbers of cases showing how fast the virus was spreading. Citizens learnt to wash their hands over and over again to destroy the virus with water and as the virus was invisible it was even more dangerous.

“I am not scared,” said her mother over the phone. “I have been through war, what should I be afraid of?”

Christmas and New Year came and went surrounded by four walls. The same was true for Mardi Gras. Family far away. Friends around but far away. Books close by with those unread waiting their turn.

The apartment high, with views of the whole city. Full of light. That’s how she saw the hole in the nightdress. And not only one. It had become just rags but it was her favourite. Cotton, soft, the colour of almonds when they are still green. It was high time she threw it away. To buy a new one but from where? Not on the internet. No more internet! The local market had reopened after a long while. She would definitely find something there.

And she did. Not what she wanted. Cotton with little mauve flowers on a white background. Her size but dowdy like a sack of potatoes.

“These are all I have left,” said the seller.

She tried it on at home and ran to the mirror. In it she saw a stranger looking at her. Not her mother, that she looked so like but her grandmother. She had been wearing something similar the last time she had seen her, just before she died. She got the fright of her life. She threw off the mauve little flowers and put her old nightdress back on. The one with the holes. She stood in front of the mirror and sighed with relief. She knew that woman well.

Athens 31/7/2021