



How do you spend your time in the quarantine?

By Marilia Kaisar



I received a message from a boy in my cohort yesterday. He asked, "what are your new routines in the quarantine?" I thought I just walk more. I try to find reasons to get out of the house, be in the fresh air, walk alone through nature in solitude.

Yesterday, I took a walk in the forest. I contemplated between the Redwood trees. I noticed their long roots, penetrating the earth, and getting entangled with one other. I thought about my own roots, a different land so far away from here. Where is home for me? I have moved so many times, trapped inside a language that is not my own, using foreign sounds to frame familiar thoughts. I am so far away from home, completely alone, wholly displaced. As the days pass, the monotonous acts of everyday life start making this place seem more and more familiar. Sometimes I have to look carefully around, pinch myself, to realize that I am not at home, I am inside the TV series and the movies in suburbia, in Santa Cruz, in California, in America. I have consumed so much that now my fantasies have consumed me.

The woods and nature are so much wilder here. I looked at a sign letting me know I might encounter wild lions. Don't run and don't crouch. How did I manage to end up so far away from motherland, my steps leading me through those woods? I stopped and

stared at the Poison Ivy, spreading like a virus, through the land and the trees, not differentiating between dead and alive, rocks and trees. Between the ivy leaves, some flowers are starting to bloom, alone but beautiful, still managing to flourish despite the ivy, right next to it or between its leaves. As I walked, I saw two dead rats. I almost didn't notice them and stepped on them. Did the poison ivy kill them? Or was it maybe the wild lions. Their corpses were starting to deform and degrade, becoming one with the earth. I stood in silence for a second. I could hear the birds, the sounds of the forest, and faraway the cars on the highway, sound nearing and moving away. The sounds are human but also natural.

I hear voices; there are some more people on the path. I have to walk faster; make sure they don't reach me. They speak in English, and somehow my train of thought gets derailed. In the forest, in nature, I forget where I am, I forget who I am, I become young again lost in an enchanted path, only one goal follow the path until you reach the end. The trail becomes narrower and harder; I climb on a hill. Upon the top, I arrive in a meadow. I realize it is a golf course, luscious green grass, sunny skies. I want to rest there, but instead, I decide to return home.

The other day, I took a walk at the beach. This land is so blessed, so beautiful, it is uncanny. One day I can get lost in the forest the next I can admire the waves of the Pacific. They say the ocean is the same everywhere, but back home, we have no ocean. We just have a sea. Sea smells salty and clean. The ocean smells infected, almost like a port; it makes me want to gag. I hear people say, "oh, how I love the smell of the

ocean," but I despise it, I can't even bear to go near it. I dig my toes deep in the warm sand but stay as far away from the water as possible to avoid the smell.

Before I came here, I had never seen a sea lion before. The few encounters I had with them warmed my heart. I admire their in-betweenness, living between land and water. I think of my thoughts, existing between languages and borders. The sea lions lay one on the side of the other, drying their skins under the sun, resting on the pier's wooden frame. Their society knows no self-isolation. They can be together. I dream of the same togetherness soon to reach our human communities. We are now distancing, everyone detained in the little prison of their liking and making, crouching over our screens. "Isn't it wonderful how we can all be connected through the Internet?". But it is not the faces and voices on screens that I miss. I miss smells and bodies, hugging, sweating, laying embodied next to each other.

When I bike by the river, I meet the homeless. There is a woman I used to see at Trader Joe's; she carries with her three plastic babies; she treats them as real, holding them all between her arms at once. Today I saw a man with a cart outside of our house.

Yesterday it was a woman with a car packed with her belongings. I am so lucky to be able to stay at home, to have a home, a shelter for sheltering in place. But still, I can't help myself; I can't stop desiring to be with others, to touch someone else, to feel someone's embrace. I want to be like the sea lions, resting my body between other bodies, an infinite somatic orgy of togetherness.

<https://vimeo.com/402578065>

