

A woman in a flowing white dress is captured in mid-dance, her body angled away from the viewer. She wears a delicate red rose in her dark hair. Her right arm is bent, hand near her face, while her left arm extends downwards. The background is a soft-focus blend of warm colors, creating a dreamlike atmosphere.

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Turmoil and Recovery

There Will Be An After
Linda Murphy Marshall

When cabin fever sets in after nearly a year of the coronavirus-induced shutdown, I take a walk around the small man-made lake in my neighborhood to clear my head, escape from the steady drumbeat of gruesome news. I dodge and swerve away from fellow passersby to keep the requisite six feet between us, our moves resembling a strange square-dance choreography.

Patches of decorated blacktop greet me along the way, multi-colored chalk doodles and writing I can't quite decipher, probably a child's handwriting, some of it partially rubbed away by other walkers' footsteps. The flowers and hearts wend their way across the black surface willy-nilly, each letter a different color and size, their message one of optimism. I've seen stories on TV where children are writing such messages on sidewalks, driveways, and pathways; attempts to lift our spirits, the wisest among us often the youngest. But then I see another short message ahead of me on the path, different, this one in plain white chalk, its stark, uniform block letters neatly stretching across the width of the walkway, devoid of colorful flowers or doodles or happy faces. "There Will Be An After," it reads, and I stop in my tracks to absorb

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the simple, yet profound words. “Thank you,” I whisper to myself and to the universe. “Thank you.”

Growing up, my mother had the annoying habit of exhorting me to “Count your blessings!” Her chant pierced the singsongy sound of my whining about this, that, or the other thing, yet only made me feel worse. Now, though, largely confined to my home—along with much of the world—I know what she meant and, more and more, I am discovering there are silver linings to be found, if one will only look; blessings to be counted.

I have a (long) list at the ready of all the ways the coronavirus has impacted me: the long-awaited cruise with my husband to celebrate 30 years of marriage, a trip to New York to see a play with him, another trip there to see a musical with my daughter...on and on my pity party goes. But the serendipitous chalk sign is a reminder that, eventually, this will end and that, along the way, there have been unexpected blessings to come out of the pandemic. And not one of them would have happened were it not for the coronavirus.

I miss going to the library. I miss my volunteer work at the Library of Congress. I miss playing tennis, seeing friends, going to restaurants, the mall, the gym, etc. Some days I feel like this nightmare will never end, my thoughts echoing Buzz Lightyear’s words in Toy Story when he calls out: “To infinity and beyond!” Some days it feels like this pandemic will last to infinity and beyond. But from now on I’m going to try and remember the simple chalk message written on my neighborhood pathway. I’m going to count the blessings that have unexpectedly arisen despite the pandemic, and have faith that “There Will Be An After.”