

The Day After Yesterday
#1 – 890 words
By Grace Gonzales

Ms. Gonzales began her writing career in college publishing her first article in the UTD Mercury. She later went on to study Journalism and wrote for South Texas Entertainment Magazine in the late 90's. She taught English and Writing briefly including working as an Environmental Educator and grant writer for over 20 years. Ms. Gonzales published her first book a few years ago as a co author for Cornell University, Measuring Environmental Assessment in Education. She wanted to be part of this unique opportunity in order to learn from others and polish her skills in writing.

It had been a hot, scratchy evening in the Rio Grande Valley. Standing on the curb, waiting for traffic to pass, Mary's mind began to race in an attempt to divert her mind from the daily drudgery of work. Mary was looking forward to leaving this desolate place after working in such a whirlwind manner all year long. She had a boss who constantly worked around the clock, which ultimately meant no one at the office stopped to breathe in between tasks.

She had left one hour before her shift was to end, with an intense desire to leave this pit of a town. Even if it meant traveling a few hours to a nearby city, that would be her moment to venture outside her circle of trust. Drawing in her breath, she ran across the street to avoid oncoming traffic, usually heavy this time of day. Everyone was rushing to get home only to turn around and repeat the same routine again. She approached her car, parked under a Big Leaf Maple tree shading the entire south end of the parking lot.

"Call Sylvia," she muttered into her phone.

"Calling Sylvia now," answered her phone's voice response system.

Mary began to speak before her friend had a chance to say hello.

"I made a reservation at the Golden Sassy Hotel right by the Riverwalk," said Mary with eagerness in her voice. Sylvia was quiet for a minute, then muffled her voice through the phone.

"Where are we going and what are we going to do? Never mind. Don't worry about where we are going! We are going to get the heck out of Dodge," exclaimed Sylvia and proceeded to hang up the phone.

Sylvia regularly chatted with Mary, usually about moments of self-discovery or how to have a better relationship with your mate. Now Mary packed her bags for her long-awaited trip as though she would not get another chance. She envisioned sitting in a handmade, straw cabana by the pool, finally getting the anticipated sunshine of San Antonio. This was a much-needed vacation she was excited to embark upon. Fancy hotels always made her feel she was in another part of the world, especially if there was a balcony overlooking the pool. Work this year had been long and strenuous. Mary thought of work again; it was always fresh in her mind. She knew her boss was a perfectionist, which meant she hardly ever got a chance for serenity. Though Mary's trip was not for another week, she still had to make time to put things in order in preparation for her getaway.

Mary never stopped to rest, not even for a moment. She was a force to be reckoned with, her wheels in constant motion, exercising her mind and body to her wit's end. She was excited to smell the roses for a few days during her spring break vacation and possibly listen to her favorite PodCast about The Inner Workings of Aliens during her upcoming road trip. Her brain was built to look for patterns at work, at home, and even in her own personal love life. This trip would

force her to rest her mind even for just a few days. Her goal was to lose track of time while away from home.

For the past few months, she'd heard the news about a rapidly spreading virus named COVID-19 which seemed to be ravaging China. From the reports she had seen on TV the country was being taken over by a slow-moving zombie which suddenly became mobile and ended up on one's doorstep. After spreading death, it moved on to the next household until the whole country was under quarantine.

Listening to the news didn't make Mary too concerned about her trip to San Antonio since China was on the other side of the globe. As she flickered through her phone she started to see more reports about random cases of people getting infected with the virus in various parts of the United States. No sign of her inner angst showed as she continued listening to the latest reports on a virus she knew nothing about. In the back of her mind, however, she thought it might be best to cancel the hotel reservation. She could save the cost of the trip and use it for a fancy appliance she had spied during the spring sales. She did not fret for a second about the virus and seemed more concerned about putting money away for a rainy day or for something really special instead.

The next day she awoke checking her cell phone as usual with one eye shut, pushing aside Gidget and Zues, her 2 rat terriers who only cuddled in mornings.

"Move over Gidget," she said as the dog slowly leaned in to bury her head into the pillow behind Mary's back. She came across a new email alert announcement from the president of her college.

"We will be shut down immediately until further notice. Someone in the Valley has tested positive for the virus, the COVID19 virus, so plan to stay home," the email said.

"What now?" Mary thought. *"What has just happened?"*

She clicked her phone until she found the contacts and pushed the button to call Sylvia. She knew what to do.