



## The Case of the Broken Eggs

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The year 2020 had a nice ring to it, a fresh start to a new decade. As January 1<sup>st</sup> dawned we were prepared for the tiny challenges any new year brings. Those of us who still used checks had to remember to write out the full year. An election loomed, promising an avalanche of campaign junk, which was a nuisance, but could be handled with more trips to the recycle bin. Although the freshness of a new decade seemed full of promise, less than halfway through we were longing for 2019.

Our heroine, we'll call her Nancy Drew, had seen a lot in her many years. She had survived 1984, Y2K, and 2001. She had solved many mysteries and ripened into a wise and not entirely cynical senior. She read a lot, including dystopian fiction. Why were young people so pessimistic? *Hunger Games*? *Station 11*? At least Holden Caulfield had made just himself miserable. But here came 2020 when the world was miserable and Nancy had to wonder what signals young people picked up that she missed.

Nancy Drew's life had settled into a comfortable routine of late rising, drinking cups of hot tea, and streaming videos of other people solving mysteries. In 2019 we all saw seniors like her meeting their friends for lunch or a brisk walk or an occasional glass of wine and conversation. That was before the pandemic. That was before we sprayed our mail with Lysol, washed our groceries before putting them away, washed our hands over and over like Lady Macbeth. In 2020 lunching with old friends was to risk death. Restaurants were closed anyway. People met Brady-bunch style on Zoom.

We all had to break out of our isolation bubbles from time to time. One morning Nancy Drew rose before dawn to pull off one more caper. From across the canyon, she heard a rooster crow as the dark sky began to pale. Some of her neighbors kept chickens. Nancy silently mocked them, since the corner grocery store sold eggs. Then the pandemic hit and sent egg prices soaring to more than \$6 a dozen. In 2020 the idea of keeping chickens in a city backyard suddenly seemed like a good idea.

This morning Nancy wanted to look old. She dressed in her dowdiest pants suit, one that had been on a hanger since 1982. She put on sturdy shoes and tied a scarf around her head. Nancy remembered when lady detectives wore leather driving gloves, kid perhaps, with fancy stitching. Now she donned not-quite latex gloves. Next was the mask decision. Nancy had some attractive flowery ones but decided instead on a pleated, one-use disposable. She put on her sunglasses although the sun hadn't risen yet, and headed for her car. She could have been a bank robber. She could have been a forensics examiner, but she wasn't. She was a senior shopper.

Nancy was after scarce commodities—toilet paper, paper towels, and hand sanitizer. Also a dozen eggs that cost less than \$6. Nancy had a plan. She had already made several unsuccessful attempts to stock up on paper goods. Most stores were limiting how many one person could buy. We all read about the threat of toilet paper violence and the black market on paper towels. We saw the images on TV of hoarders who filled the beds of their pickup trucks leaving the shelves bare for the shoppers who were lined up at the door waiting their turn and who had to make do with picnic napkins and baby wipes. Nancy had managed to buy one extra package of toilet paper and one extra three roll pack of paper towels. Clearly not enough. She wasn't sure why she should build up a stockpile. She just knew she needed one.

Surveillance was clearly necessary. Store #1 hadn't opened yet, but a line of seniors distanced six feet apart wound through the parking lot. Nancy knew if she made it into the store she might be able to find eggs, but everything else would be gone. It wasn't worth the risk, so she went on to Store #2. It had opened, but little old ladies and gents were pushing carts piled high with toilet paper to their cars, so it was too risky. If she stood in line and the store ran out, she would have wasted the morning. Store #3 was just right ... a line that was no too long, no pickup trucks in the parking lot, and a handwritten sign saying "We have toilet paper" in the window. She grabbed a shopping cart in the parking lot and joined the line. Once inside, she went for the toilet paper first. She loaded up the cart with jumbo packs. She found paper towels and put them on the bottom rack of the shopping cart. There was no hand sanitizer, but the eggs were only \$5.99 for a dozen, so she balanced a carton on top of the paper goods and checked out.

When she got home, she removed her gloves the way she saw them do it on *Law and Order*, turning them inside out to avoid touching the surfaces. She kept her mask on as she made several trips from the car to the house unloading the toilet paper and paper towels. The caper was successful. She was well stocked, though still not sure why.

She intended to reward herself with a three egg omelet, but we know what happened. She had dropped the carton of eggs in the parking lot. They all broke. But what did we expect? It was 2020 after all. The chickens cackled from across the canyon.

