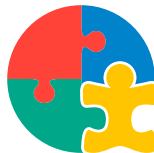


# THE ENCHANTED MASK

Author: Şebnem Congar Illustrator: Melis Coşkun Başay



Avrupa Birliği **sivil düşün**

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## INTRODUCTION

***"Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed."***

***-Gilbert Keith Chesterton***

Covid-19, just like a dragon, entered childrens' lives very unexpectedly, upsetting everything in its way.

Our main goal in preparing the book "Magical Mask" was to help children better understand his disease, internalize protective measures and learn all this through the mouth of fairy-tale characters, while opening the doors of a magical world.

During the preparation stage of the book, we received feedback from 48 children aged 7-9 and 10-12 about how they experienced this period and how they felt about it; through online drama workshops.

The psychologist, author and illustrator took their notes while spectating the workshops.

While Covid-19 is a global issue, our children in this particular geography also had to abstain from going out, giving up meeting their friends and relatives, attend lectures online without going to school for the first time. On the other hand, they had the opportunity to spend such great amounts of time with their families perhaps also for the first time. It was at this particular junction that we wanted to learn about how they felt, handled their problems, protected themselves and the grown-ups around them, faced their fears and worries; and deliver their messages to all children by using a fantastical structure and fairy-tale heroes.

Every child will be given a digital character set so that they can re-write their own, authentic Covid-19 story.

Our purpose is to reach as many children as possible, and accompany them on their journey into their imagination, regarding this time period.

We would like to thank European Union Think Civil Platform for helping create this book, which is about the resistance of our children against the Covid-19 dragon they have encountered for the first time in their lives. We would also like to offer our gratitude to our esteemed artists and instructors for telling their messages through an authentic language and gorgeous illustrations.

We invite all our children to the magical world of our story.

With love,

**Gülsen Çaltıl**

Ekol Foundation for Education and Arts

*President*

-I'm over here Arda! Throw it to me, over here!

A few children were playing ball in the yard and doing their best to be heard from behind their masks while screaming and yelling in glee. All were boys except for one. Maya was wearing the football spikes on her shoes and playing with the boys. They all had bandanas wrapped around their foreheads to soak up the sweat as they weren't allowed to wipe their faces with their hands. Nor their eyes.

### **The year was 2020 - the Covid era.**

In another part of the yard, Arda's sister Derin was socially distance seated around an oval table with a group of her friends. Beads, trinkets and other arts and crafts paraphernalia they had ordered through the Internet were in the center of the table. Shiny stones, sequins, flowers, leaves. All the girls were wearing gloves and holding glue in their hands. They were making their own creations by pasting the items they liked on the cardboard in front of them. No two creations were alike - just like the girls.

Shaking her multi-colored creation like a flag, Derin yelled over to Maya who was playing with the boys:

- Maya, we are making incredible things - you're missing out on it!

Just when Maya was trying to look at Derin and understand what she was saying, a ball landed smack in the middle of her face and she fell over.

Everyone laughed very hard.





Maya's mask was almost stuffed into her mouth, but she got up and continued to play ball. It was a marvelous feeling playing out in the open like this.

Even though Arda was trying to play well with his mask on just like the other children, he was mumbling breathlessly to himself:

-Can't make heads or tails of my birthday or the games I'm playing.

At that moment there was a noise from the corner where all his friends' presents had been placed. He glanced over but saw nothing amiss. A bunch of boxes were just sitting there, so he continued his mumbling.

- You are one heck of a Covid 19! My life is a mess. We've been cooped up inside for months. I thought you would have gone by now, but you haven't.

For the first time, he had actually been happy that his birthday was during the summer months. He had planned on inviting 8 friends to his offline party. He was going to play outdoors with those who came and they were going to have the kind of fun they had missed during the past months, but it was not to be.

A whole bunch of rules he had promised his mother he would faithfully follow - social distancing, not getting too close to one another, no touching, not taking your mask off. Otherwise the party could suddenly end, this was a serious predicament. Even though they were saying the epidemic had slowed down, it was a fact that it was still here!





It was time to cut the cake. Let's see how this is going to go. Everything they were experiencing was new to all of them. He went a small distance away from the other children, lowered his mask:

-Wow! It's really difficult playing with a mask on, I can't breathe!! My face is all sweaty.

He put his mask back on and went back to join his friends. He was after all, the birthday boy. The girls were in full conversation at the table. Derin:

- I have never been so spic and span clean and tidy in my life! Everything in my room is in its place and clean. I also got rid of all the things I wasn't using.

One of the girls chimed in:

-Yes, I put everything that was too small for me in the clothing recycling bin so people who fit into them can wear them.

And another said:

-And I got rid of all the paper, stationary, pens and pencils I didn't use. My room looks so nice now and we also got rid of the carpet. Mom says that it's easier to clean this way.

Derin:

-You are not going believe what I'm about to tell you!

There was total silence at the table, and Derin continued:





I sent my doll collection to the hospital's children ward.

They all screamed at the same time.

-You can't do that. I don't believe you.

-I already did! Even though Covid-19 doesn't make the children very sick, there are still children who are ill. Let them play with the dolls now, we enjoyed them enough in the past.

One of the girls pointed to the children playing ball and said:

-My older brother donated his electronic toys to a nursery school.

-Hey guys, I'm really ashamed. I can donate my colored pens and pencils collection. My father said they dry out when not used. I have a lot, so I should let some others color too.

One of the moms who overheard this conversation said "bravo".

-I'm proud of you.

She then climbed on a chair. Her dress had a design symbolizing spring and the folds of the skirt were flitting in the breeze. This was a time when she preferred not to shop and had picked out a pretty dress from the ones she already possessed. She looked pretty. She was trying to get everyone's attention by tapping the glass in her left hand with the fork in her right. The children finally became quiet and she started to speak in a loud voice from behind her mask:





-Children, it's time to cut the cake but I'm going to ask something of you. I promised your families that I would look after you all. We are going to continue following the rules until the end. Try to have fun and enjoy yourself within this context. Now: *THINK OF YOURSELF AS A HANDFUL OF BEADS. WHEN THROWN INTO THE GARDEN, HOW WOULD YOU SCATTER? USE YOUR IMAGINATION. THAT'S EXACTLY HOW YOU WILL BE STANDING - DISTANT FROM ONE ANOTHER LIKE THE SCATTERED BEADS OF A BROKEN NECKLACE.*

*It's a funny but good analogy.*

There was a small rectangular table in the garden with a tablecloth design of green treeleaves. It was held down by ladybug clothespins in each corner so it wouldn't fly off in the wind. Next to it there was a tower of paper plates and plastic forks. The mother continued:

-Only Arda will stand next to the table, but there won't be any candles to blow out. Then I will cut and put the slices of cake on the plates. You will approach the table one by one to get your cake and then you will all disperse into the garden. You will lower your masks and you can eat with your hands. You can also yell in order to be heard when talking with each other. Just do not go near one another.

Many of you have elderly relatives or parents with chronic illnesses at home. So be careful.





It's good she told us this. No one wanted to put their grandfather or grandmother in danger. They were precious. The garden took on the appearance of a military barracks. But despite all the rules we needed to follow, these offline parties were so much better than those online ones. We had really missed shutting their internet and experiencing the smell of green grass.

Arda went inside and washed his hands and face. He put on a new mask and went back to the cake. For the first time in months, he had put some thought into what he wore that day. He was wearing sky blue shorts that had been too big for him last year and were still in his closet with all the labels on. They fit perfectly now. His mother had cut his lengthy hair and he looked quite handsome. If it weren't for these masks, all would be perfect.

Usually a person's social environment is composed of their peers. He had never felt that way with his parents and sibling. His mother was a bit harried at the moment, she was like a warrior princess who found herself battling with Covid 19. He wasn't unhappy at having experienced lockdown with them – it was the first time he had been able to enjoy quality time with them all. But on the other hand, he dearly missed his friends – they were something else. Now they were all there and looking at him. They all started clapping and singing the birthday song. Notwithstanding everything, it was a happy day.





- Happy Birthday Arda.

Only his father was taking photos and videos. This was an offline party. There was no connecting to the internet, nor any electronic games. None of the children even looked at, let alone took out their telephones. They didn't even think of it. They had really missed each other. They didn't even care about the masks. They started clapping.

Then Arda went and found himself an appropriate spot in the garden. His mother went to the table and started to cut the cake. The children were overjoyed. They clapped like crazy and Arda's mother did a curtsy and continued to cut cake slices. She put each slice she cut at the other end of the table and a child came up to collect it.

The children were like rare flowers which had bloomed in the grass. There was silence. All the kids were busy with the cake on their plates.

Now it was time to open the presents. The cake service at the small rectangular table had finished and table was cleaned up. Arda went to stand next to the table again, and the children went one by one to pick up their present from where they had put it when they had first arrived and brought it over to the table where Arda was standing, and placed it at the other end of the table. Arda opened everyone's present. Each had their name on it. He lifted each present in the air and twirled with it so everyone could see it. This was very important for them all.





There was a lot of cheering because all the presents were toys and games they would all be playing with. Since they wouldn't be able to get together very often this year, most of the presents could be played online. The life they knew had changed without any warning. But they were on the verge of refusing any and everything online. They were even quite angry at their parents for their dependency on the smartphones.

After the last present was opened, someone threw a ball in the air and they all ran off to play. But there was a package near the place where all the other presents had been. No one had claimed it and it was still there.

When the party ended, Arda put on his gloves. When he was bringing all the opened presents to his room, he also took the unclaimed package.

He saw the unopened package. He looked it all over but couldn't find any clue as to who it was from. He was curious. Yes he was curious about it, it was a mystery package. He decided to open it. It was like a silly joke because a Covid-19 mask was in the package.

-What????? Someone gave me a mask for a birthday present? Ok, but who???

It was impossible to know because everyone had given their presents to him and no one was missing. He put the mask in its cellophane wrapping aside.





He took off his gloves and threw them in the waste basket then lay down on his bed and started staring at the ceiling:

-What a day this was! Just like a movie. But it was so nice. Even if it wasn't like before, we were still able to play. I had loads of fun and I think the others did too. It's just difficult with the mask on because we are still not used to it. I realize that my dentist always greets me with a mask on. I had never put myself in his place. It's quite difficult. One needs to have empathy sometimes.

He was tired, but it was a nice kind of being tired. He bunched his pillow with his hands and turned onto his side. He was probably going to sleep. At the moment, he saw a piece of paper on the floor and there was something written on it. He read:

-This is an enchanted mask. A Covid-19 mask.

What did this mean? He ran to show his mother. She laughed:

-My eyes can see close up but I see nothing written there.

-Mom I'm serious. Read this!

-Arda what is this? Some kind of Alzheimer test?

I'm not that old you know.

Arda answered all frustrated:





-Mom!!!!

- Ok Arda ok. You read it to me then. What does it say?

-Mom can't you see the writing that says "this mask is enchanted"?

His mother really laughed:

-I know you don't like masks, but I don't understand what you're trying to do here. There is nothing written on this piece of paper.

His sister Derin was running in the corridor at that moment and Arda stopped her:

-Derin would you read what is written on this piece of paper?

Derin looked all surprised:

-It's been ages since I learned to read and write. Is this some sort of test?

His mother started to laugh again but Derin's words mixed in with her laughter:

- This mask is enchanted.

Without letting go of the tomato or knife she had in her hands, their mother went next to them and still could not see anything on the paper. Derin continued:

-Covid-19 mask.





Their mother became angry.

-You two imps have banded together to make fun of me.

Their father who was hungry, came into the kitchen at that moment, right in the middle of the affair. When he too couldn't see anything written on the piece of paper, he opened the oven door while mumbling. He turned towards her:

-They weren't kidding. It must be a new generation game.

Having heard this remark, Arda and Derin glanced at one another and immediately left the kitchen. Derin slinked away afraid of being interrogated and they met up upstairs.

-Arda what is this?

-I don't know. They don't see what we see.

-What's this mask it's talking about?

Arda went to his room with Derin following him there. He took gloves from the box and put them on. He tore open the cellophane bag from the present, emptied it on his bed, then threw out the cellophane bag and gloves. There were 2 masks staring up at them on his bed. They looked just like normal masks, but that message had really confused them. Arda took one of the masks and put it on. Derin was watching him. Then all of a sudden, Arda disappeared. He was just here and now he was gone. She couldn't figure out a logical explanation. The only thing that came to her mind was that Arda became invisible as soon as he put the mask on.





-Hey! Arda! Are you there?? I can't see you. Where are you? Say something.

Not a peep from Arda. Their father came up to tell them dinner was ready. When he saw Derin all alone he was surprised:

-Derin, where's Arda?

- Oh he's around. He'll be here soon.

-Are you talking to yourself? Come on, dinner is ready.

-Ok dad, I'm coming.

Derin started looking for Arda in the room by feeling her way around. She examined the curtains, inside the closet, under the bed. He wasn't there. What was she going to do? The other mask on the bed caught her eye. She put it on her face and placed the loops around her ears.

-Come along now Derin!

It was as if the sound was coming from a tunnel. When she could finally see clearly, she realized she was talking to a rhinoceros. He was like a king because he was literally sitting on a throne. He had a magnificent horn on top of his nose. That made him seem quite regal but at the same time he seemed to be quite a sweet and down to earth rhinoceros. Like those nice school principles in kids' films.





This must be heaven. He was sitting in the middle of a blue lake with a gold crown on his head. Derin shouted to the rhino without thinking:

- What is this place called?

**-AN-KI-C-A. Animal Kingdom Corona Academy.**

-Fancy name AN-KI-C-A. And you must be the head of this academy.

At that moment she felt someone kick her collarbone. There was only one person who would do that. He must be here.

-Arda!

-Derin, why are you here?

-I don't know. When I couldn't find you in the room, I just put the other mask on and found myself here. Just like you.

At that moment they heard the Rhino King say while gesturing with his hands:

-Don't speak so privately, let us hear too.

Derin answered quite nonchalantly. She must be crazy. She was having a conversation with a golden colored rhino who had a magnificent horn on his nose and an incredible crown on his head.





It was as if there was no salt at home, and she had gone over to the neighbours to borrow some.

-My father is calling us for dinner. Why are we here?

During all this, Derin was taking in everything around her. This was such a beautiful place. Why wasn't the world like this? Maybe this was a dream, maybe this too, was the world but how marvelous it was. She was thinking out loud:

-Maybe where we are living was like this once upon a time, but we ruined it. It's changed now. Nature has recuperated a little since the Covid-19 epidemic. Air pollution is down 30%. The world is renewing itself since we're not there. Flowers have sprouted on the sidewalks. What am I saying?

The King started to laugh:

-Hahaha Arda needs some help since he has many complaints about his life these days. You came to find him but you don't seem too happy yourself.

Arda looked around and saw there were many children. They were all dressed very colorfully. It was a wonderful mixed group of children with hair, eyes and skin of many different colors and shades and all wore masks like him. He was very pleased. It had been a long time since he had been together with his peers. Today was such a lucky day for him. An important day. The King saw him looking around and continued to speak:





-As you can see, you are not alone. All these children are Covid 19 collateral damage. After having been cooped up at home for so long, you are having trouble adjusting to the normalization stage. You aren't wrong. Come now, let's not make your father wait any longer.

Arda was stunned:

-How do we return home?

The King laughed while answering.

The other children started to laugh also.

-That's the first question everyone asks. You are here because you had been complaining about Covid 19. Returning is quite easy. When you take off and put your mask on again, you will be back home. This procedure is to prevent you from taking your masks off while here. If you decide to sneak a few minutes with your mask off, when you put it back on, you will have returned home.

While both of them were rushing to take off their masks and put them back on, the Rhino King said:

-Don't forget to come back to the Animal Kingdom.

-Why?

-Because you need this. **ANKICA** will help you while transitioning back into normalcy.





But by then, Arda and Derin were long in their room. They hid their masks and ran downstairs and sat down to dinner.

Their parents looked at each other. Their mother:

-What are they cooking up?

-I think they were dismayed and put off balance by finally being able to play face to face with their friends.

Arda managed to say a few words.:

-Mom, dad and Derin. I want to thank all three of you for today. It was quite tiring but well worth it. It was very nice.

Then they both dug into their food. They didn't speak at all. Then they went upstairs. The parents didn't see anything strange in this behaviour because since the lockdown, both kids were living in their rooms. Their school studies, friends, shopping - everything was through the internet.

Soon both were in Arda's room with the masks in their hands.

They were scrutinizing them. Derin:

-I'm just wondering whether what we saw was just a figment of our imagination?

-Is it possible? Maybe it happened because we haven't eaten very much today. We only had cake you know. Did we maybe faint?





Derin's eyes were sparkling:

-There's only one way to find out.

Arda finished the thought:

-To put the masks back on.

Arda:

-If they worry about us...

-I think there's a time warp. The time hadn't changed when we went and came back.

Arda's eyes popped:

-Really?? I hadn't paid attention. Then are we all dreaming together?

-Ok then let's try. We'll find out if we're dreaming or if the masks really work.

They donned their masks at the same time.

The Rhino King was sitting in the middle of the blue lake. He was wearing the crown again. When he saw Arda and Derin he motioned for them to come nearer. There were a lot of children so Arda and Derin went over to them. One of the children said:  
-I feel so lonely. I have no friends nearby. And when the schools closed down, I was left totally alone.





There was a lot of mumbling and grumbling around the lake. King:  
-I see you all have a common problem. Before your parents would become angry when you spent too much on the internet. Now you can be on the internet for a long time and they don't get angry. Have fun while you can.

*CHILDHOOD DOESN'T LAST FOREVER. ITS A VERY SHORT PERIOD SO ENJOY WHILE YOU CAN.*

Go online with your friends, especially peers, and play offline games with them. As if you were sitting across from each other at the table. Use actual paper, pencils and toys. I mean *USE THE INTERNET AS YOUR EYES*. Laugh, smile and enjoy the time with friends during video calls. And don't forget to laugh hard.

It was another child's turn. Everyone was allowed to ask one question:

-I don't use a mask and I really don't understand what good it does and what it's for.

The King's eyes searched out Arda. When he found him, he pointed:

-Go and form a team with Arda and Derin. You are going to have a skunk session.

CHILDHOOD  
IS A PERIOD THAT  
IS OVER BEFORE  
YOU KNOW IT.  
DON'T  
MISS  $\leq$   
OUT!





Derin and Arda looked at each other then, together with the other child, they were introduced to the Skunk teacher. This lesson was about keeping enough distance for the smell not to be able to penetrate the mask. It wasn't enough just putting a mask on. They understood everything right at that moment. It was impossible living with this smell inside the mask. So if they replaced Covid-19 with the skunk, they could have full protection. If they stood at a distance where the smell could not penetrate their masks, then Covid-19 couldn't reach them either. It was a very nice and informative lesson.

They returned and the King continued to listen to the questions and problems:

-In order to be able to play with my friends, I have to learn to keep up social distancing, but I just can't do it. My mother and friends are worried. I enjoyed myself at home. I found out that my father can bake delicious bread, and that my mother is a pretty good plumber. Since nobody at home goes outside, we didn't practice social distancing. That's why I don't know how to do it.

The Rhino King started to laugh:

-You're right, my boy. In normal life, you were able to approach people at will and hug those you loved. Now you are being told to do the opposite. You need to learn it though. You need a porcupine session.





He turned back to the crowd:

-You all need to learn this. This is one of the most important lesson at the Academy.

He made a strange sound and all of a sudden a porcupine army waiting for their orders appeared right in front of them. The Rhino King laughed and yelled:

-Ok now – play time!

They all went with the porcupine army to the play area. Derin:

-Arda just look how cute they are. I had never seen so many porcupines together before.

-They seem that way from afar. Don't you remember Haminne? How she was able to become all prickly whenever she wanted?  
-Yes. We named her Haminne because she walked like a "nana", a grannie. We're following a troop of grannies.

They finally came to an open area. One of the porcupines was the game setter. Everything was really funny – so enjoyable and so much fun. They were all having such a good time playing together that the children started to forget about keeping their distance. And at that point, you started to hear screams because as they touched the porcupines, the spikes really hurt them pretty bad.





In the end, they had to learn to keep their social distancing, even at the most exciting moment. After a while, the distancing became automatic. The Rhino King seemed truly content. They had succeeded.

When they returned, the Rhino King was talking to a small child:

-And?

The child pointed up with his thumb:

-And in the end the mask became used to me.

The Rhino King started guffawing with loud laughter. When he saw Arda and Derin, he again motioned them to come nearer.

-And you? Derin and Arda?

Arda:

-Yes, I believe my mask has gotten used to me.

-Hahaha. Good. That's really good. You can at least start the normalization process. You can leave your home to mingle with others.

The small child:

-Yes, schools can finally open. I can go to school.  
I can play with my friends just like I do here.  
I really miss them.





The Rhino King smiled:

I'm sure they miss you too. When you return home call them online visually. Appreciate internet during these times, it connects you to each other. The trick is knowing how to use it correctly. If the adults are as understanding and complying as you are, this epidemic will be under control all that sooner and then in little time, schools will be able to open. *ASSIST THE ADULTS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES DURING THE PANDEMIC. SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT WITH THEM. HELP THEM REMEMBER.*

A pandemic that has been controlled,  
is a pandemic that is nearly over.

Derin:

-When the pandemic is over, I won't even access the internet.

You could hear the other children echoing "me too, me too" in the background. They had all realized so many things during the pandemic. Probably the most important was people being able to come in close contact with each other and interact face to face. It was up to them to be able to return to the old ways.

A CONTROLLED PANDEMIC  
IS A PANDEMIC THAT IS  
ALMOST OVER!





They were really tired. Before the Rhino King sent them all back home, he allowed a robust child to speak:  
-Children I would like you to listen to this boy. I believe his complaint is not about the pandemic but rather about the people involved:  
-I realized something: we need to love and protect nature. During this pandemic I realized that plants and animals can very well live without people around, they thrive even more, but that, in turn, humans can not live without animals and plants. We need them. Then why are we harming nature so much and so thoughtlessly?

Everyone clapped. Then there was total silence for a while. The Rhino King clicked his hooves and they all came to. And when they all took off their masks and put them on again, they were all back home.

They both found themselves in Arda's room. They were tired in a nice way and promptly fell asleep. Of course they had strange dreams. They really didn't understand what they had experienced but it was nice. Everything and everyone was nice. Just as they were wondering whether they had imagined everything, they fell asleep and continued in their dreams.

Derin was the first one up in the morning and she ran to Arda's room. She woke him up.

-Was it real?





Arda was rubbing his eyes.

-I don't know but both of us remember it. That's good and frightening at the same time.

Derin continued:

-Yes because everything is surreal. Come on let's go down to breakfast.

Arda looked at Derin totally amazed.

- Hey!!!!

-Yes, yes!!! We need to finish what we started. No changing our minds half way through.

-Hey let's fully wake up first!!

-You'll wake up downstairs. Come on, wash your hands and face.

And you want to know something else?

-Tell me Derin, tell me.

-I haven't felt this fantastic since the pandemic began.

-Me too. It's a good feeling. I feel like I'm about to bust at the seams. As if the pandemic is all gone and done with.

Derin:

-Right. What did the Rhino King say? A pandemic that has been controlled, is a pandemic that is nearly over.





They had a lovely breakfast. Even though their parents didn't understand what had been taking place lately, at least there had been no more ughs and yucks during the past two days.

They went upstairs without any rush. They were trying to behave normally. They donned their masks and they were there again.

The Rhino King was talking. The young child was there again and while listening to the King, he became sad and bent his head down.

The Rhino King noticed this and asked:  
-Now what happened?

Small child:  
-I miss being able to hug my grannie.

Just when the king was about answer, the small child continued:  
-Would my grannie die if I hugged her?

The other kids had started mumbling and grumbling.





The small child continued:

-I can't ask my mother because she'll be sad. Do you know why?  
My grannie is my mother's mother. She can't hug her either. That's why.

The Rhino King clicked his hooves together as if clapping.  
-You are a very thoughtful child. Here's what I'll tell you:  
Fear is useful when it is for something that is actual and real. But when you fear things that have not yet happened but MAY happen, then you become sad for nothing.

For example:

*Covid-19 is a contagious illness. If we don't take preventive measures, then you should be scared.*

But if you live with a bunch of "what ifs", and then live in fear of those possibilities, that would be silly and wrong. What is our slogan at **ANKICA?**

They all shouted together:

**-TAKE YOUR PRECAUTIONS AND LIVE YOUR LIFE!**

The Rhino King turned back to the small child:





Be careful and take preventive measures. Don't go near the elderly for the moment. You can love them from afar.

*IF YOU TRULY WANT TO PROTECT THE ELDERLY, OPEN YOUR HEART TO THEM, NOT YOUR ARMS. THEY HAVE LIVED LONG ENOUGH AND ARE WISE ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND THIS. AND YOU HAVE A BIG ENOUGH HEART TO RECEIVE LOVE FROM THEM TOO.*

-Yes children. Take your precautions and live your life as if nothing has happened. What do you think these precautions are?

The children start listing them:

*WEAR YOUR MASK. MASKS ARE NOT ONLY FOR THE ILL, BUT ALSO FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO REMAIN HEALTHY.*

*DO NOT TOUCH YOUR MASK OR FACE.*

*KEEP YOUR SOCIAL DISTANCING.*

*WHEN SOMEONE IS WALKING TOWARDS YOU, SWERVE TO THE RIGHT. IF THEY DO THE SAME EVERYONE CAN SAFELY GO ANYWHERE.*

*IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A SITUATION WHERE YOU ARE IN A CROWD AND CLOSE TO OTHERS, DO NOT SPEAK FACE TO FACE. TURN YOUR HEAD TO THE SIDE. DON'T WORRY COVID WON'T BE OFFENDED.*





*YOU LEARNED TO WASH YOUR HANDS BETTER THAN BEFORE. JUST DO IT, DON'T OVERDO IT.*

*DON'T BE AFRAID OF EVERY COUGH AND SNEEZE, BUT JUST MAKE SURE TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS.*

The Rhino King was real happy to hear all this. He then started clapping by beating his hooves together.

-I'm aware that you think it is alot to expect so much from you children when alot of you can't even tie your shoelaces yet, or are busy throwing globs of disinfectant to each other at school. But I trust you and I believe in you.

Then he brought everyone's attention to the mouse who was standing on his nose by holding on to the King's horn:

-Shabby Mouse has something to tell you all.

Shabby Mouse:

-First of all, let's not forget that Covid-19 which is a member of the Corona family is not actually an enemy. It is a living, strong-minded cell trying to hold onto life just like you are.

Black, white,

Rich, poor,

Good, bad,

Educated, not educated,

Good-looking, ugly

It is a fat covered cell which can contaminate all without differentiating.





One of the children:

-It doesn't contaminate us.

-For now.

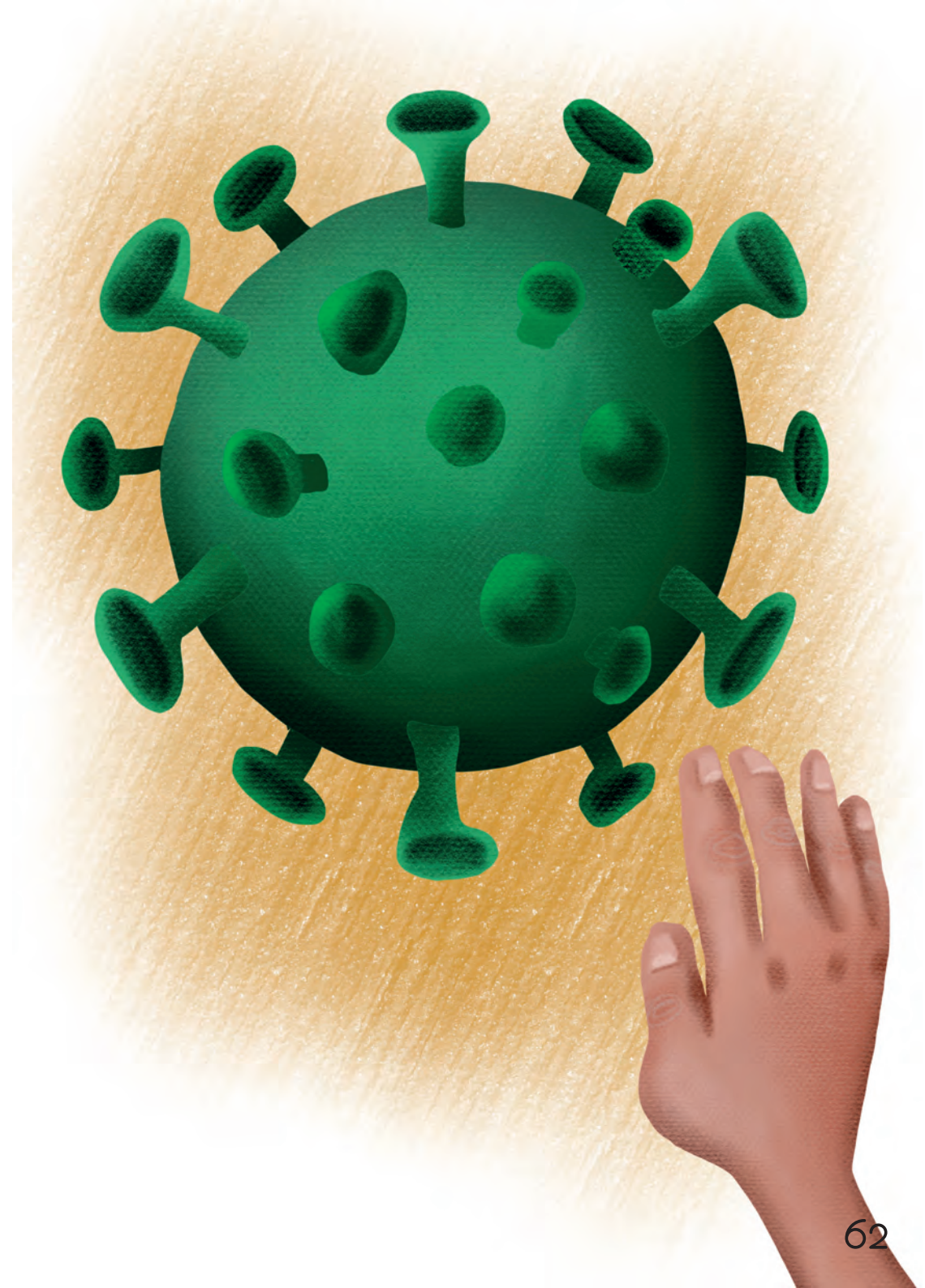
The Rhino King:

-That's a good point you've made. Now off with you all.

I'd like to address a point you had complained about and which has been a strain on you. Watch the news from a child's point of view just to get an update. You don't even have to keep track every day. It is a total waste of time for you to watch events that only cause you worry and fear. Adults have a way of turning everything into a show. Don't fall for this. Live your childhood.

There are many wonderful and informative shows on the internet showing and explaining the wonders of Mother Nature. You will learn to trust the world and that it will survive. This is not the worst that has happened to the world. It survived it all.

Covid-19 is only one of these occurrences. Come back after lunch.





All the children rushed back home not realizing that soon, they would miss this place.

Arda removed his mask and took a deep breath:

-Look at that Derin - a teeny tiny cell has the world on its knees.

Derin:

-Yes a fat cell. It enters the lungs and makes you ill.

Their mother had prepared delicious dishes tonight, just as she had been doing since the pandemic began. They went downstairs and sat at the table. Derin:

-Wow Mom, you've outdone yourself again. How come you're preparing so many wonderful dishes during the pandemic? You didn't use to before.

-I don't know sweetie. I've thought about it too but I just can't help myself. I think it's a way on holding on to normal life. I think this is the first we've had the time to be sitting at the table all together as a family eating good food and talking nicely about so many things.

The children looked at one another. Yes, each living organism strived to stay alive. Although they sometimes harmed each other. Derin couldn't stay quiet any longer:

-Just like Covid-19.





Their father came at that moment and the conversation changed topic. They ate their tasty meal. There were no problems and they joyfully continued without really understanding what they were going through. They rushed upstairs, put on their masks and they were there. They were used to it by now. It didn't matter what time it was when they arrived, they were always all there.

The Rhino King was chuckling to himself. The children's mood had improved, they weren't like when they had first arrived. This made him feel successful and he was happy.

-I want to introduce you to Rendo, an old member of the academy. A reindeer who learned and now teaches smiling with your eyes.

Rendo greeted everyone with his eyes. His mouth was not smiling. His antlers were like huge trees.

-Hello children. I had a problem during a session of antler training and wasn't able to use my chin at all. This forced me to learn to use my eyes more effectively. We then realized how important this was for children during the pandemic.

Actually the children were having difficulty understanding the other person's feelings when their faces were covered by masks.





When you were able to see the other person's full face, you could understand their feelings by their facial expressions, but with masks on, it was very difficult. You could only be guided by their eyes and this was something they had never done before.

Rendo had them do something akin to facial yoga. They could now express themselves a little better with their eyes. They could even teach their elders.

The newspapers had written that during the transition to normalcy, waiters with their masks on, had difficulty carrying their trays and had trouble using their visual and auditory senses during the first days the restaurants opened.

The children found them justified. Wearing a mask was an art and they were learning it well at **ANKICA**.

Derin couldn't wait and asked a question:

-Rendo how are you able to carry those heavy antlers on your head?

This time the kick from Arda didn't do much good.

-With time you become used to it. They grow slowly so, little by little you get used to it. Just like your masks. It's a good example. If I am able to bear my antlers, you can wear your masks.





Derin:

-I'd prefer not to have to wear them at all.

Rendo answered with a smile in his eyes

-Don't worry children, that day will come too.

Everyone clapped and Rendo disappeared with the satisfaction of knowing he had done his job.

The Rhino King:

-You have earned the right to participate in the wise crow's conference children. This means your graduation is near.

Just at the moment, the wise crow flew down to their side from above. Derin went mad with excitement when she saw him. He was wearing a top hat, and a round monocle which suited him very much. His bow tie was the cherry on top – he really looked wise. He was carrying a small bag. Everything in this kingdom was fantastic. Most of all, the Rhino King with his matte golden skin, the gold crown sitting at a rakish angle on his head and that magnificent solitary horn.

The Rhino King greeted the Wise Crow, then motioned for the children to gather around. The Wise Crow perched on top a tall pillar in the center of an area resembling an amphitheater. He put on his monocle and started to go over the documents he had taken out of his bag.





He resembled an orchestra conductor. When all the children had taken their places, the Wise Crow greeted them and started his presentation:

-Children are you aware of what is protecting you?

They all looked at one another and the Wise Crow continued:

-Love!

It's a very important concept. There is enlightenment wherever love is present. You are protecting yourself because you love yourselves. Because you love your parents and grandparents. You don't want to lose your friends.

You wish for everyone to live - that is why you are taking precautions to protect yourselves.

You are also establishing a balance when you protect others and yourself at the same time. You can accomplish it simultaneously. One side does not need to lose in order for the other side to win. Covid-19 has taught you how important this is.

This concept has been our most important gain.

During difficult times like this, sometimes you can not see the love, it is hidden.

For example:





Your mother is so preoccupied with protecting you, keeping you clean and cooking that she may not show her love to you. Someone becomes sick and love may be forgotten. That is when you need to ask yourself “is there love here?” and go into action. Be brave and coax love out of its hiding spot. You have to do this. The world needs this.

*Truth be told, all the children in the world are connected to one another by an invisible thread. Take good care of yourselves. But that’s not enough, you need to take good care of your friends too. At that point, because of that invisible thread connecting you all, this wonderful behaviour will reach everyone. The world will become a better place to live with thoughtful and sensitive children. You will be the unity on the world.*

*Goodbye for now, don’t forget to love.*

The Rhino King rattled his hooves together. This time he was very serious.

-Children, your time with us has come to an end. It is time for you to receive your diplomas.





At that moment a flock of sparrows appeared overhead. Each carried a stick wrapped in ivy vine in their beak. The diplomas of the children.

One by one, the children stepped on the turtle backs in the lake and proceeded to go to the Rhino King to receive their diploma.

He was so huge close-up and gave off very strong feelings of trust.

Then the Rhino King bid farewell to them all:

-You are all done with your work. You will not be returning.

The small child:

-Never?

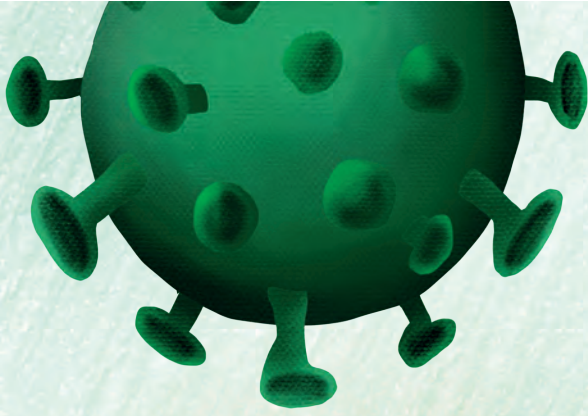
-Not until another crisis occurs. But do not forget that we are always here watching you. You are not alone. You never were.

For the first time, the Rhino King stood up from the throne he had been sitting on. It was as if he become bigger. The children waved and took off their masks. When they were putting their masks back on to return home, they heard the Rhino King's comforting voice:

-Try to hear that which has not been said and you be the voice that says it: say "I love you". Crown your heart with unconditional love. I believe in you.







# THE ENCHANTED MASK

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## Dear Children,

*Covid-19 is not the first calamity to happen to our dear old World. These mountains, seas, horses and dogs were always here. And so were the people. Our planet has gone through similar plagues and pandemics before. Days, seasons and years have passed. Even centuries. But our Earth was never defeated. Humanity has continued to enjoy life.*

*As they have polluted, the world has cleaned. Corrected. The sun continued to rise every morning. It warmed us, whether through the clouds or the branches of a tree. Birds continued to compose songs about budding flowers, and sing them. Mobile phones and electric cars have been invented. The internet has connected everyone living on the planet together. Much has changed. Human and childrens' rights have been rewritten and revised. Now, many diseases have a cure.*

*Even though it was hidden at times, there was always enough love around to re-create everything, in spite of wars.*

*It is not easy to defeat the Earth, when you are a virus. Nobody has yet succeeded in doing this. There is no reason for fear. This pandemic will also pass, and Covid-19 will take its place among history books. To even be forgotten.*

*So, take good care of yourselves without worrying. There are still very beautiful days to live, and a long and happy life ahead of you.*

*May love's way always be open to you.*

**Şebnem Congar**



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