

BLEACH AND BACON

(A two hour glimpse into a pandemic day)

“What time was it?” Margaret thought rolling over in her bed. The bedroom was quiet and dark with the humidifier running.

‘To help keep the air moist and weigh down the virus’.

At least that was what one of the thousand articles that she’d read in the past two months said. Margaret stretched, feeling the stiffness in her joints. It had been another rough night for a myriad of reasons. Menopause. The upside down sleep schedule of the house since the pandemic. Her nearly thirteen year old daughter climbing into bed with her from nightmares. Restless animals. Racing thoughts and stress about the future. One to many glasses of wine and bad food. All of the above. Still, she was glad for the morning. The house had slept, safe and sound for another day.

She could smell coffee coming from the kitchen. Her husband got up earlier than all of them finding his own time in a day otherwise filled with the family cooped up together. She was glad he found the alone time. Feeling grateful, Margaret swung out of bed and grabbed her phone.

“11am! Jesus. That was late!” her mind screamed.

“It’s fine. What have you got to do all day anyhow?” She pushed back.

“Plenty!”

That was true. There was always a million things to do. In all her years of being a “home maker”, Margaret had never been bored. In fact, it was just the opposite. Life had become exponentially more overwhelming. There was always more to do, always more she could be doing. The lists started to build up in her head.

“Stop.” she thought. “Everything is OK.” Besides....coffee first.

Margaret swung her legs over the side of the bed and slipped on a pair of comfy socks. Cats and dogs followed her as she shuffled to the kitchen. Sunlight streamed through the window. Another beautiful day. Feeling tired but infinitely thankful, Margaret poured herself a cup of coffee. It was good and strong and she sat down to read the internet. It didn’t bother her so much in the mornings. She was somewhat rested and could sort through the piles of information good and bad, the funny memes, the statistics, the news of friends and family and more articles about what was best to do with the virus. New cures on the horizon. New treatments. Vitamin supplements, etc. etc. Halfway through the cup of coffee, her brain was already swimming.

“Did you sleep well?” her husband asked cheerfully, walking in from outside where he’d been reading and enjoying his morning since 7:30am.

She’d wanted to say yes cheerfully back. ‘She’d had a great sleep’. God knows, he didn’t need her bitchy response. Things were difficult enough already with the virus. ‘I’ll just pretend’ went through her head. But she couldn’t for several reasons. Some of them were selfish. Like she needed to bitch. Just to sort it out, just to get it out of her system and not carry it around all day. And then there was this mean urge to take his cheerfulness down a notch. It wasn’t nice....she knew it. And frankly, she really appreciated his good nature. She liked that her husband worked so hard to keep the house and himself upbeat.

“Rough” she answered, listing off the reasons. Margaret wasn’t proud of herself for telling him. His morning had been going so nicely before she pissed on it. He took it in kind stride with a sad “Oh” as a response. ‘Crap...she was a downer! No use in trying to hide it now.

12pm. Time for lists.

Margaret started ‘opening up the house’. Curtains open, windows cracked....

’for the fresh air throughout the house so the virus doesn’t just hang in it.’

Animals fed, couch tidied and and sprayed down with Lysol. TV remotes, tables, front door handle, light fixtures wiped down with Lysol. Margaret glanced at the floor.

“Had it been one or two days since she’d wiped them down with bleach solution?” she thought. “Two.”

She would have to get on that today.

Margaret went back to the kitchen. Dishes, countertops, handles wiped down, trash collected, floors swept. Somewhere in there she made herself a piece of toast with peanut butter. A quick, somewhat nutritious breakfast to stop the grumbling in her stomach.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” her twelve and 1/2 year old mumbled sleepily behind her.

There she stood at 12:00 in the afternoon in her onesie pajamas. The same one’s she’d worn day after day. Margaret let her wear them...there was no reason to get dressed in lock down. Margaret knew she should have woken her up earlier and she knew since she didn’t, it would be another impossibly late bedtime for her daughter. Last night she didn’t fall asleep until 2am....but the kid needed a break. These were weird times and she could sympathize with the bad sleeping.

“What do you want for breakfast?” Margaret asked, kissing and hugging her affectionately.

“I don’t know. I’m just going to go in my room and hang out for awhile.” Her daughter gave her a smile and headed back to her cozy room with a humidifier, a sleeping dog and the hole of the internet.

‘She should do something else today’ Margaret thought as the lists began to formulate in her head about what she should do with her daughter and at what time.

“Calm down. It’s still early. I have the whole day to work out a pause from screens for her” she thought to herself. The panic subsided a bit about her daughters well being. “She’s fine”.

And she was. At least as fine as a child could be in the middle of a pandemic where everyone’s lives had been totally turned upside down and backward.

Margaret got back to work, throwing in the first of many loads of laundry. Two or three of them on average with the virus worries. Next was the bathroom. Her husband had taken the mantle of cleaning the cat box each day but there was still the issue of wiping and cleaning. They were all using one tiny bathroom and she wanted to make sure it was kept properly clean. Margaret wiped handles, knobs, the toilette. Poured a bleach solution in the shower and swept up the scattering of cat litter that always seemed to escape onto the floor from the cat box. She glanced at the clock.

12:43pm.

Her daughter needed breakfast! Margaret grabbed the veggie bacon from the freezer, a tube of yogurt and some toast. Her daughter had eggs yesterday so there'd been some protein in her diet recently. She fried up the bacon with butter making sure it was 'floppy' like her daughter liked it. She plated the meal including all the vitamins those articles said were good to keep the immune system strong. A multi-vitamin, a magnesium, calcium and zinc vitamin, a glass of vitamin C and liquid vitamin D. None of them were getting enough sunshine right now. Margaret poured a large glass of water.

'To keep the body flushing toxins and the virus'.

At least that's what the doctors were saying to do. She wasn't sure if any of these were effective in keeping the family from getting the virus but she figured a good immune system was never a bad thing and it didn't hurt to try them. Margaret delivered the food to her daughter and glanced at the clock.

1pm.

OK. Coffee and one more hour of cleaning. She'd be done by 2pm. Plenty of time to get some of the things done on her list. Write, exercise and maybe even get to a bigger thing? Photo organizing, picture framing, movies organized, landscaping, painting, fix the fence.....

"Woah. Slow down. Be realistic" she scolded herself.

Margaret sipped her coffee and took a breath. There wasn't time for all of that. She just had to make sure she got her kids outside at some point that day. 'At some point' was a dangerous statement. She'd learned that these past two months in lock down. Had it been months? Or weeks? Margaret thought back to her son's birthday at the end of February. He'd celebrated with his friends, had a dinner out, opened a bunch of presents. Jesus, that hadn't been so long ago. It seemed like a year. What she wouldn't give just to go out for a meal again with the whole family.

'The things we take for granted' she thought as a wave of sadness washed over her. "No" she pushed back aggressively. She wasn't going to let the sad eat her. "Time to get back on schedule or the day would get away."

Margaret grabbed a cleaning rag and soaked it in a ten percent bleach solution.

"That's what the experts said".

She got down on her hands and knees and started wiping in wide sweeps across the most heavily trafficked areas of the house. Wiping at this invisible enemy that had so changed everyone's lives. She got up to rinse and re-load, running the towel back and forth under the warm water. An odd mixture of surreal content flowed over her as the smell of bleach and bacon filled her nostrils. The floors were clean of the virus and her family was safe and healthy and altogether in the house for now. She savored the feeling because it was what got her through the million fears and uncertainties of these days. It was this monkey swinging from one tiny bit of relief to another that gave her strength and hope for the long haul.

"I'll just have to work on my attitude" Margaret thought, squeezing out the rag and feeling the creak in her knees as she started in on another swath of the floor. "I'll keep fighting this thing" she thought determined. "As long as there's bleach and bacon. I'll keep fighting."