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COVID CHRONICLES SUBMISSION:

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Life Upside Down

The coronavirus has been raging several months. It has affected me in odd ways, my energy has disappeared, usually a sign of depression for me. Getting up in the morning is pushed farther and farther toward afternoon. Living at the new house, instead of being a joyful and beautiful time, proves dark and difficult. The slightest disagreement provokes an argument. Neither of us sleeps well. It brought out a cruel side of David, poking Lester and tormenting him in ways that cause both me and my dog anxiety. What was I thinking, how could I start this whole consuming process of selling both our houses and buying one special place for us to once again be an officially married couple? Help, how do I fix this mistake? Is it a mistake, or just a side effect of COVID 19?

For many years I had an escape to use, a fantasy rendezvous with a man who had stolen my heart when I was 24. It was a fleeting, passionate time in my life I recreated entirely in memory. It was the ultimate romance, a love affair with a ghost. Can't get to sleep? Husband unresponsive? Work not satisfying? Just think about Dewey. Instantly, I was transported to a place better than the usual things, alcohol, drugs, money. In a moment of desperation, I contacted my ghost in reality, by email. We agreed to meet in Washington, DC.

A weekend of sightseeing, free of spouses. Or at least I was. His lived nearby in Maryland and had a strong grip on my imaginary playmate. It was exciting, romantic, thrilling to contemplate my youthful desires, still in my memory only. Unfortunately, it unexpectedly killed my escape fantasy permanently. Afterward, I was even more alone.

Recently, my granddaughter Vita had a painful breakup with her longtime boyfriend and had experienced panic attacks related to it. She and I are the only ones in the family with this affliction. I had not suffered a full blown attack in many years, in fact I was convinced that they were in my past, never to cast their shadow again. But COVID 19 had other ideas.

In the middle of the night I awoke to terror. Fear of the coronavirus gripped me. Fear of everything imagined and unimagined struck my brain and body, reducing it to a trembling, sweating, irrational horror. My mental gymnastics failed me, nothing could stop the onslaught. Nothing except Xanax.

As I sit safely on my couch next to my dog in my living room, I puzzle at my fall from grace.

Yes, the virus frightens me. Advanced age, preexisting conditions. Pandemics for Public Health Nurses. What else?

Trump's fascism.

An aging brain that fails me frequently.

The world in general, so many warlike leaders.

Loved ones far away.

Trying to live with another person.

Dying.

What to do with that fear?

So much good in living every moment.

Santa Cruz, a beautiful place to feast my senses.

Friends and family, old and new.

Creativity everywhere.

Share it.

Dogs and cats.

Change.

When I try to think of something my mom said that might be helpful, the time she yelled at me, as a teenager,

Don't be so insecure!

And that was one of her more sensitive moments. Strangely reassuring, probably because I have always tried to do the opposite. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Be thankful to live in California!

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