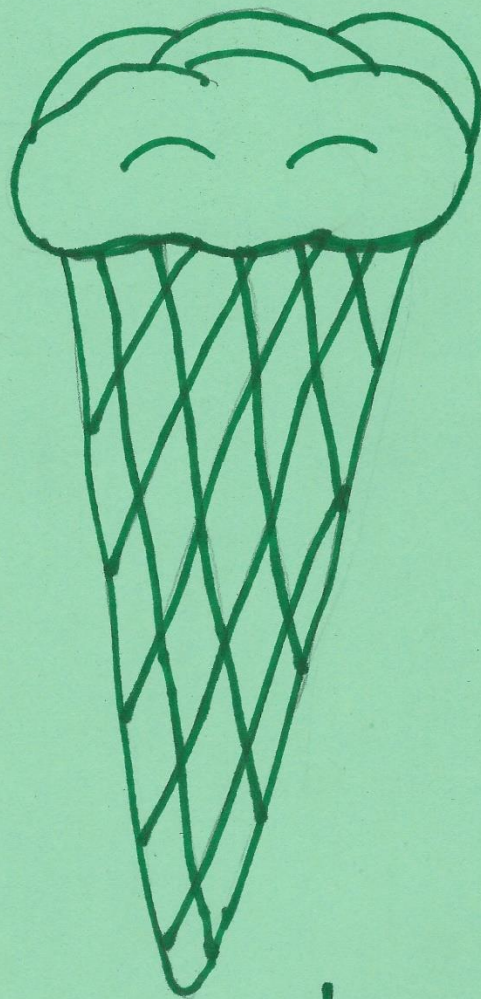


MINT CHOCOLATE



by Anne

Everything is so impressive here. It's so impressive that I cannot stand it—cannot stand another day—cannot stand another hour—cannot stand another minute. It's not impressive here. It's insane.

But I cannot find the closet door, the door that I came through, the entrance to this insane situation. That closet, the closet in my bedroom. I never know what will greet me when I open the door. First I see my clothes hanging and sometimes that's it. And other times—whammo! The door shuts behind me. The closet becomes a rocket. And...Boom! Boom! Boom! I'm being transported to The Red Planet Mars.

It's impressive. It's insane. It's insanely impressive. And it's happening right now:

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Soon! Soon! Soon!

I'll be away from my room

Away from the gloom

And among the stars

On The Red Planet Mars.

Soon I'll be with him, the love of my life. He makes everything wonderful, the touch of his hand on my hand, the kiss from his lips on my lips. And I'll be with him again very soon.

It wasn't always like this. Never before did I have the bliss of a true love, the peace and gentleness of a true love.

Bump! Bump! Bump!

We're here. We have landed. I open my closet door and what do I see? I see The Red Planet Mars welcoming me. And I see Lover. He is so handsome, the most beautiful color green. It looks great next to my light beige.

"Hi Lover," I say with a hug and a kiss.

"Hi Eloise. I have something for you in my case...Here..."

"A mint chocolate chip ice cream cone! Thank you...Yum! It's so good."

"Eloise, can I have another kiss in between bites?"

"Sure Lover...I don't know which is better, you or the ice cream cone—just kidding. Your kisses mean more to me than anything else."

It wasn't always this way, I'm thinking as I'm eating my ice cream. I remember when ice cream was the best part of my life. Thank goodness that's over.

"Eloise, how would you like to go to the Gardens? We can look at the beautiful flowers then eat at the café."

"Yes, Lover, let's do that. It's just a short walk to the Gardens...here we are. These flowers look so lovely and so is their fragrance."

Then everything goes dark. I'm back again alone in the closet.

"Eloise, where the fuck are you? I'm waiting for my breakfast."

"Yes, Ralph, I'll make you your eggs right away."

So I put out the orange juice that I squeezed last night, and I boil the eggs 7 minutes and 15 seconds. While they are boiling I make the coffee and toast. When the toast is medium brown I take it out and then crack the eggs.

“Here you are, Ralph, your breakfast. I’ll join you with o.j., cream cheese on toast and our coffee.”

We eat in silence. It is Saturday. Ralph is home today. After breakfast I clean up, make the bed, and then go back into the closet.

But Lover is gone. I go back to work. I always wanted a career. I do Ralph’s paper work for his job, keep the records, do the billing, and pay the bills. Too bad I don’t get paid.

Later...

“What’s for lunch?”

“I made you sardine salad with a side of avocado.”

“I wanted a side of spinach salad and garlic.”

“I’m going to the supermarket this afternoon. I’ll get spinach and garlic today for tomorrow.”

I go to the supermarket and buy everything I need for the next three or four days depending on Ralph’s moods. Lover is with me. No one can see him except me. No one can hear him except me.

Friday I go to the therapist, Dr. Vonons. But I don’t tell him about Lover. He is my secret.

“How are you, Eloise?”

“Very good Dr. Vonons. But didn’t get much sleep last night. Stayed up late doing schoolwork for college. It’s taking me a long time to get through college. It will be about ten years. That makes another year to go.”

“You are lucky you have a husband who is so understanding,” says Dr. Vonons. “You are very lucky. He tells me how much he helps you.”

“Dr. Vonons,” I say. “I need some space. I need some time to do my thing, just to be me. I need a career I love just to be me. How can I do this?”

“I’m going to increase your medication, Eloise. Maybe you will feel better.”

A few days later...

“Well, the increase in meds worked,” I say to myself. “The drugs help me get through the day. I still would like more time to devote to my painting. I’d better get ready to go to art class now.”

Later in art class...

I am standing at my easel painting. Professor Mike walks by and comments, “That’s very nice Eloise. It looks like a peoplescape. You are doing very well. You keep this up and you will be a fantastic artist.”

“Thank you, Professor Mike.”

I work as much as possible during class, then rush home to heat up and serve my one-pot dinner, beef stew, which I made yesterday. I’m home before Ralph. Then he comes home.

“Hi Ralph,” I say.

“Hi Eloise. I hope dinner will be on time.”

“Yes Ralph. I’m putting it out now. It should be very good. Let’s sit down and eat.”

So, we do.

Afterwards I say, “Ralph, I know you like to bring a sandwich to work because going to the lunchroom takes up too much of your time. But I’ve been thinking, maybe you can make your lunch yourself at night instead of me. That way I’ll have more time to paint. I get too exhausted painting late into the night.”

Ralph says, “OK.”

Then I say, “There’s a can of tuna and mayo and onions in the kitchen. You can make yourself a tuna salad sandwich.”

Ralph says, “OK.”

I feel relieved. I do the dishes, then set up my art supplies. Just as I’m about to paint, Ralph enters the room and says, “Can’t do it.”

What?

“Can’t do it.”

My heart sinks.

“OK,” I say. “I’ll do it.”

And I do.

Afterwards, I go into the closet:

Amazed am I

By the twinkling stars

Bump! Bump! Bump!

We're on The Red Planet Mars.

I open the closet door and there is Lover.

"I need you, Lover. Things are rough. I need you."

"Coming Eloise. I will be with you always—in the shadows where no one will see me but you. Don't fret Eloise. One day you will sing in the sunshine. One day. One day. One day. One day."

The following night our next door neighbor, Frank, is over the house.

"Frank," says Ralph, "you've been selling insurance for quite a while."

"Yes, Ralph, I have been and many people are grateful for the insurance I've sold them. Let me see what I can do for you."

"OK, Frank, let's sit at the table where I can write some things down."

Well, the two men talk for at least an hour or two. Then Frank leaves.

"Wow!" Ralph says to me. "I have a feeling I will need this insurance I just got."

"Why?" I ask.

"It's just a feeling," says Ralph.

“Was it very expensive?”

“It sure was,” says Ralph. “But if we need it we’ll be happy to have it. Also, when you finish school you can go to work, or even before you finish.”

“What kind of insurance did you get?” I ask.

“Mainly health insurance.”

“Oh, and you mention my going to work. I would like to go to graduate school. Maybe I could teach art on a college level. Or maybe work in some kind of art studio.”

“You don’t need any kind of degree to work in an art studio,” says Ralph. “You also won’t make very much money.”

“Maybe,” I say. “But I do have dreams.”

“You could work in an art store and sell art supplies,” says Ralph.

“Yes, I know. But I’d like to do more. Anyway, let me make your lunch for tomorrow and get ready for bed.”

“You’re making a nice lunch,” says Lover to me a little later.

“I hope so. And I’ll squeeze orange juice for breakfast.”

“Things will work out, Eloise,” continues Lover. “You’ll see. You’ll see. You’ll see.”

“Well, I am going to college and doing my art.”

“Yes,” says Lover. “Yes.”

For the next few weeks everything goes as usual.

“Eloise,” says Ralph. “How would you like to eat out tomorrow night?”

“I’d love to,” I say. “But that’s Thursday night. Don’t we usually eat out on the weekend?”

“Let’s do it Thursday this time instead of the weekend. I’m in the mood to eat out. I have a doctor’s appointment tomorrow at four. You can come with me to the doctor and we can go to the Star Diner afterwards.”

“OK Ralph. Sounds good.”

The following afternoon Ralph drives us to the doctor. We park in the parking lot and walk to the doctor’s office. I wait in the waiting room while Ralph goes in for his appointment. Soon the doctor calls me into the office.

“Hello Doctor.”

“Hello Eloise. Are you aware that Ralph has been having ministrokes?”

“What! I never knew that! No one ever told me that. When did this start?”

“We first noticed this a few months ago,” the doctor says. “It is also essential that Ralph eats right. No more saturated or trans fat. No more fried food.

“What! He’s forever eating French fries.”

“No more French fries. And he will have to cut back on his work schedule—maybe give up his present job. Seems that he is too stressed from it. It may be a good idea to take a vacation—better still, if possible, a staycation.”

“Yes, Doctor, a staycation would be good. There is a pool near us and a park where we can barbeque. Ministrokes! Oh my!”

That night I talk to Lover, “Lover, I don’t like this. The more Ralph is home, the more I will be abused.”

“Don’t worry Eloise. Things will work out. They will. They will. They will.

The next morning:

“Ralph. Get up. It’s time to get up for work.”

“I’m not working anymore at that job. Too stressful. Doctor’s orders. Let me sleep.”

“Oh. OK. I have to leave at one for school. But lunch is already made for you in the fridge.”

“Let me sleep,” yells Ralph.

Ralph gets up about 10:20am. I make him breakfast.

“You know Eloise,” says Ralph, “it’s a good thing I got all that insurance from Frank. We can use it now. I’ll also get a pension from my job. And you will graduate college soon. You will be able to get a job, especially since you can’t work for me anymore.

“But I intend to go to graduate school,” I say.

“There will not be enough money for you to go to graduate school. You can paint at home in the evening.”

My heart sinks.

One day follows the next and soon there is graduation. Ralph is there. Lover is there. I receive my diploma. But where am I going? I need to look for a job. But what job?

A week later:

I find one! A home goods store is looking for a sales person. I apply and get the job. And in a mall right near me. However, between the job and the household chores I am too exhausted to paint.

My heart sinks.

But all of a sudden—whammo! Lover has an idea.

“You like to write too, Eloise. You can write poetry and stories and sell them. After all, that’s creative writing, which is painting pictures with words, but less tiring. Next time you go to the supermarket get yourself some notebooks, pencils and pens.”

A few days later:

Bam! Bam! Bam!

“Ow, that hurts.”

“And there’s more where that comes from.”

Bam! Bam! Bam!

“Ow.”

Later with Lover:

“You are all black and blue,” he says.

“I don’t know what I did wrong...well, maybe...I raised my voice.”

“Things will work out. Things will work out. Things will work out,” Lover says.

“Look at the stuff I bought,” I say. “Notebooks, pens, pencils, erasers. I’m all set for my next career.”

“Write on,” says Lover. “Write on.”

And so I do.

The phone rings. “Oh hi Suzi. You’re pregnant! I hope you are happy about it. Wonderful!. And how’s your husband? Wonderful!”

Oh my, I’m thinking. I hope that doesn’t happen to me. I mean, I’d love a baby, but not now.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I can’t come over anymore. Ralph is home all the time now and he has so many needs. But you can come here...Oh, OK.”

I don’t quite get it, I’m thinking. No one ever wants to come to my house.

“Hi Eloise. I’m back from the doctor. Fix me some coffee and a muffin.”

So I do. Later, Ralph is napping. I go into the closet.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The Red Planet Mars

“Hi Lover. Oh another mint chocolate chip ice cream cone. Thanks...I love it.”

“Let’s go to the Gardens and take a rowboat around the pond,” Lover says.

“What a lovely, lazy, balmy day,” I say.

“Eloise, would you like to stay here on The Red Planet with me? We could raise a family and spend our days in the Gardens.”

“I’d love to Lover, but I have to take care of Ralph.”

“We’ll see. We’ll see. We’ll see,” says Lover.

I answer:

“There’s nothing more

I’d like to do

Than spend the rest of my life

With you

Way, way beyond the stars

Far away on The Red Planet Mars.”

Then everything immediately turns black.

“Eloise, where the fuck are you?”

I rush out of the closet.

“Oh, Ralph. I didn’t expect you up so soon. I’ll make lunch.”

“Lunch isn’t ready?! What’s the matter with you?!”

“I didn’t think you’d be up so soon from your nap.”

“What’s the matter with you? What’s wrong with that insane head of yours. I forever have to put up with your insanity. Why isn’t lunch ready?”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t expect you up so soon.”

“Stop yelling.”

“Ow, that hurts. Stop that. It hurts.”

“I said, ‘stop yelling.’ “

“Ow! Ow!”

“Oh, by the way,” says Ralph. “I think I’ll go for a jog before lunch.”

“OK,” I say.

While Ralph is jogging, Lover appears.

“That’s a nice sardine salad you are making for Ralph. I hope you are making one for yourself too.”

“I am. I’m serving it with spinach and garlic that I made last night. I’m glad I have some time. After Ralph jogs he always showers before he eats. Everything will be ready for him. Then we’ll both eat. And I have some mint chocolate chip ice cream in the freezer.”

Ring. Ring. Ring. goes the phone.

“Oh hi Mom...Everything is good. How are you?...By the way, Mom, do you think I can come home and stay with you a while? No. Why not? No. OK. I have to get off the phone. I’m making lunch for Ralph...Bye.”

“You know, Lover, do you think I could go to the police station and have them put me in a shelter?”

“No, Eloise, that would never work because you have a home. They would just bring you back here. And even if you went to a shelter, you have no money.”

“Yeah! I don’t even have that job in the store anymore. They fired me for some reason. The boss didn’t seem to like me. I couldn’t remember all the rules. There are so many rules to live by—rules—rules—rules.”

“OK,” says Ralph after his jog and shower. “Let’s have lunch.”

And so we both eat and Ralph, afterwards, leaves the table.

Then, few minutes later, “Mmmm, this is so good. Thank goodness for mint chocolate chip ice cream.”

My Story

All my life I had been diving
Into waters murky and cold
Although I had been surviving
I had to be patient. I had to be bold
But the waves now have turned into ripples
The sea is now a gentle stream
The surviving now has turned into thriving
And I am now living and loving the dream.