

Title (up to 20 words) - The home pandemic

Strapline (up to 40 words) -

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

Zara

Three weeks since lockdown was first announced in London. Meaning: three weeks since I last went to school, three weeks since dad had to stop his work, three weeks since the pandemic really, hit. We're handling the situation like any other family – lost. No one knows what to do and the anxiety heightens when even doctors don't know what they're dealing with.

But our situation is one of the difficult ones. Grandma is 75 with a heart condition, mum is 6 months pregnant and can't go to work, dad had to push his passion aside to work in a supermarket in the meantime, he's the only one bringing something in. He's also the only one that can really leave the house.

25 minutes till my online class starts. I walk into the kitchen that smells like bleach and detergent. Mum is wiping down the kitchen surface, right after washing dad's clothes for the second time this morning. The routine she's had the last three weeks.

"Morning," I call out, opening the fridge. No bread.

"You'll have to go buy some bread later. I don't know why it keeps running down so fast," she responds "I'm sure it's your grandmother. It apparently "stops her from smoking." Don't ever smoke Zara. If you must, do it now while you're young."

I bring out the milk. Cereal it is.

I grab the first bowl I see on the drying rack and head for the dining. Cleo is already sat there with her own bowl. 45 minutes till her class starts. Cleo is 7 years old, with no real problems except she can't see her friends anymore or have a birthday party like she planned.

She talks with her mouth full. "There's no bread."

"I'm aware." I grab the cereal box on the table.

I let the cereal dissolve into the milk till it loses it's original colour.

“Zara!” Mum calls.

I turn around immediately, “yes?”

Her arms are folded tight and her mouth has formed into a frown. Trouble.

“I want you to see someone.”

“Like a therapist?” I ask.

“Not a therapist but close enough.”

This woman has lost her mind. “Then what?”

“Then a Suzie.”

“Your friend Suzie, really?” I’ve met Suzie more times than I would have liked to. She’s nosey, loud, invasive and incredibly boring. She’s 47, no husband or wife and no children. She retired at 40 after winning the lottery. She didn’t win much. “Why though?”

She gives me a look, like I shouldn’t question the fact that she wants me to get deep and personal with her best friend. “These are depressing times and you should talk to someone! I can’t be the parent, teacher, cleaner, entertainer and pregnant all at once!”

“You don’t have to be. I’m very okay. I don’t cry at midnight when everyone’s asleep or scroll through images of people that are prettier than me or feel lonely with no one to talk to.”

She scowls. “During this time, I’ve really been able to do my research on the internet and I’ve found a lot of articles about teenage mental health and suicide.”

I let out a laugh that increases the frown on her face and grabs the attention of Cleo. “I would know if I had a problem. Even if I did, I don’t think your best friend from uni can solve it.”

Here comes the parenting side.

“Well, I’m the one who know what’s best for you. So your first meeting with Suzie is at 4pm today. Right after your classes so you can run off to the store. We’ll need eggs as well.”

Just great.

Joelle

The past three weeks of lockdown has felt more like three months. Days are going by and my life has become a repeat. Mum goes to work more than she did and dad comes home even later so really, I’m on my own. In this big house that echoes to the point that I have to turn on the TV to stay sane. My “friends” try to check up on me. We only ever talked to each other because we

only each other. Now, there's no reason for communication. We've only texted twice. In the first week.

When I'm not doing work, I'm watching TV and when I'm not doing that, I'm sleeping. I sleep a lot. I sleep because I know the next day will be the same, I sleep because I have nothing else to do; I sleep because it's an escape from everything happening. I do get lonely. I feel frustrated, tired and I'm scared.

But I'm one of the lucky ones. I'm still doing well. Both my parents are healthy, they both have their jobs. We don't have problems like everyone else does. My biggest worry is wondering when my parents will come home but also that they're being safe because dad doesn't believe in the virus. To him, it's all being made up by the government and the media. But the numbers don't lie.

I'm sat on the couch, watching my second movie of the day 'Home Alone 2', which is not as good as the first one now that I think about it. Mum comes into the room, heels in one hand, purse in the other. She plops down next to me.

"What are you watching?" She asks.

"Home alone 2"

"Good movie?"

"Yeah."

She drops her heels. "I'm guessing you watched the first one?"

"Yup."

"Good. It gives you something to do all day."

I know I shouldn't ask but I do anyways. "Can you take at least a week off? I'm dying here."

She laughs, "Funny. Maybe when this all settles down we can go to Portugal for holiday. Something nice."

"That could be anytime."

"It'll be soon, I guarantee."

Till then, I'll just watch TV.

