

Scenario 18 – Covid at home without precautions

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First it was her voice – shimmering through *Summertime*. Then her cooking – oh the risottos, the curries... And after forty years of marriage, her voice still shines and her curries still sting. You've always been a team, working in the shop together until you decided to call it a day a few years ago; and you've always shared a belief in working hard and staying positive. Your two children have done well for themselves, your son now in a good job in IT in Germany, and your daughter, having caught a love of cooking from her mum, becoming a chef in a fancy French restaurant. She was always a plump child, but all that cream and butter has made her pile on the weight, and she was recently diagnosed with diabetes.

A few weeks before lockdown, she split up with her partner and has been camping out in the spare room. Once the restaurant had to close, she transferred her skills with soufflés and gratins to your little kitchen, though lately your wife has confided that the dishes taste rather bland.

To keep your spirits up during lockdown, you all spend many hours singing your favourite showtunes, with you doing a passable job of accompanying them on the upright piano. After one such evening, your wife complains of feeling very tired and goes to bed early. The next morning she is running a temperature, but assures you that it's nothing and she'll be as right as rain soon enough. She's normally right about these things, but when your son happens to phone a few minutes later, he is concerned, and tells you in no uncertain terms that you must call the doctor.

"But she doesn't have a cough", you say.

"Call him anyway!"

He also urges you to move out of your bedroom and to avoid spending time with your wife. Just in case. But where can you sleep? There's only a small sofa in the living room that's not long enough for you to stretch out on.

You say you'll think about it, but when you put the phone down, it all feels too dramatic. Your son has always been over-anxious. It's probably not Covid. But you do call the GP who arranges for a test. In the meantime, you sit by the bed, mopping your wife's brow and fanning her, and your daughter brings in broths and tisanes, and you both muddle through *Summertime* and *Send in the Clowns* which brings a smile to her lips.

It is Covid. The GP says he'll arrange for community nurses to come round if necessary, and to contact him if things get worse. Your wife insists that she's fine to be by herself and that you really shouldn't be coming into the room, but you can't resist popping in frequently to cool her brow and adjust her pillows so she can sit up, which seems to help with her breathing. At the urging of your son, you've ordered masks online, but they don't arrive for four days, by which time your wife takes a turn for the worse.

When your GP says she should go to the hospital, you are both horrified. You're sure that she'll recover, because she's always been a strong woman, but if the worst comes to the worst, you want to be there with her. And that won't be allowed. There's no way you can be

separated. So you both say no. The GP says he respects your decision but urges you to reconsider, adding that he'll visit tomorrow. He leaves a box of medication and instructs you how to administer each drug.

As soon as he's gone, you feel weak at the knees contemplating whether you'll be able to remember everything he's said about the medication and how to judge when to phone for help. But your daughter reassures you, saying she'll see to the medication. "I'm much younger than you. I'm not afraid. And Mum will get better, you'll see." She has already persuaded you to move into the spare room, while she somehow manages to sleep curled up on the sofa. But neither of you sleep well.

During the next few days, the community nurses who come in are very kind and do a sterling job in keeping your wife relatively comfortable, but the whole thing is very tiring. After two more days, your wife shows signs of improvement, but you develop a cough.

Your deterioration comes quickly. Your son is furious that you didn't take enough precautions, and insists that you go to hospital as the doctor is recommending. You don't have the energy to resist. In any case, your daughter is exhausted and can't look after both you and your wife, who thankfully seems to be on the mend.

The hospital ward is clean and bright, and it's lovely to lie in fresh, crisp sheets. You will get through this, you think. You will go home. Stay positive.

It's hard. It's hard to think at all.

You are given morphine, and you dream many dreams, some nice, some not so nice.

Summertime runs through your head, but the long phrases keep disintegrating. Not enough breath.

Send in the Clowns is more like it – short phrases – "*My fault, I fear ... sorry, my dear*" ... Not enough breath. Not enough breath.

Sorry, my dear.

You turn your face to the wall.

Unbeknownst to you, your daughter has been admitted to the same hospital. She dies three days after you.