

A Plate of Eggs

He handed the paper plate across a pile of unfolded laundry, over the head of the sprawling toddler, just past the nose of the tweenager slumped over the videogame. Scrambled eggs for breakfast, whites and yolks distinct, hot and flat; more like fried eggs given a violent stir after being tipped into the pan. Beside the steaming pile: a short stack of turkey bacon, stiff and unnatural, but better for cholesterol, and a slice of wheat toast, high in fiber with a bare scrape of yogurt spread for flavor.

She stared at the food. The humble plate, softening from the heat, seemed suddenly representative of much more than calories to start the day. Was this the sum of this life, this marriage? Over twenty years, did it all boil down to careless rubbery eggs, overcooked faux bacon and dry bread?

She remembered breakfast in bed, careless smearing of jam and cream over croissants shared around bouts of passion. Delicate, creamy stirred eggs, rich smoked bacon, piping hot biscuits and sweet melted butter served on china with all the time in the world to enjoy the food and each other. Mornings spent working together in the kitchen to make French toast, or pancakes. Getting up early for the pleasure of each other's company.

Life got complicated, and we were too tired to waste time cooking in the rush to get the kids to daycare or school. No time to eat; hand the kids a doughnut because we have to get going early. Then we get home late, just call for take-out, too tired to do more than eat, help with homework, get the kids ready for bed. Too tired for anything but tv news, depressing and then to bed only to wake up too early to start again.

She looked down at the now-empty plate. Without thinking or tasting the food, she had eaten. The rest of the day was on autopilot; processing laundry, playing with the kids, putting together dinner from boxes and bags from the pantry. A day like any other without texture; no rough spots to catch the mind or imagination.

Five a.m. she woke, heart pounding. This is not going to be the rest of her life; smooth and bland. Quietly, she slipped on shoes, grabbed her keys, and went out.

At six in the morning, yawning, he stumbled into the kitchen for juice, and was startled by a kitchen filled with garbage bags stuffed with pantry boxes. The counters were piled with herbs, produce, meats and cheeses. A dozen eggs were in their paper box, open and ready next to a bowl with fresh milk and a whisk. Turkey bacon (still better for cholesterol) glistened in a pan, and fresh bread waited next to the toaster. Real plates.

She smiled at him, slightly manic, but with a spark he had not seen in so long, he only just realized it had been missing. "Wake up the kids. We are making breakfast together."