

BACON SOUP



BY
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Bacon Soup

A short story with meaning

by Scout Prior

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OMG mum did it again! all I want to do is go see the Gurg play one time, one time! but she's like "you're too young" and she's always like "what have you been up to", "let's cook together", "I bought you a dress" Ugh just leave me alone! if it wasn't for Mel, I'd literally go insaaaane!!!!

— ● —

Astrid rummaged around in the cupboard, shoulder deep.

Her eyebrows raised as she grabbed something and brought it into the light. The transparent plastic container held a white powdery substance. She shook it. The powder flew about inside.

Hmmm, she couldn't remember when she had put it there, let alone what it was. She needed *plain* flour, what if it was something else, like corn flour? And what the hell was the difference between corn flour and plain flour anyway?

She snapped the container open and sniffed the contents with a frown. Her eyes wandered in thought as she weighed her options.

After a while, she realised she was looking at the calendar hanging on the fridge, and noticed the two handwritten notes on today's date – "Mel back from hols!" and "Best Friend Dinner 7pm!"

Wait, Mel would be here in a little over an hour, and I don't have the right flour! And the grocery store doesn't deliver at this hour!

Her chest tightened, and her mouth snatched in pockets of air, faster and faster.

Placing her hand on her chest, she closed her eyes.

Nothing I can do, stay in the moment.

Nothing I can do, stay in the moment.

Nothing I can do, stay in the moment.

After a minute, she opened her eyes, closed the cupboard, and placed the miscellaneous flour on the bench.

"Stay in the moment," she whispered, and let out a long breath, tracing a finger along a scar that followed the length of her jaw.

She surveyed the bench. Everything was ready. Well, as ready as it could be, with a flour of unknown denomination.

The pan sat on the stove, and she set the heat underneath it with a twist. Holding her hand over the pan, she waited. Soon, she felt a warmth on the bottom of her hand, and wriggled her fingers at the pleasure of it. Two fingers a little more bent than their neighbours, but not so much that most people would notice.

The butter was out of the fridge and had been out for some time – *Make sure the butter isn't cold as ice*. Two tablespoons fell into the pan, and almost immediately they began to make their way slowly towards the side, leaving a yellow trail. But it would be a couple of minutes before they melted completely.

The singular brown onion was separated from its plastic bag and placed on the wooden chopping board – *Always a wooden chopping board*. The top of the plastic bag was folded back, and the ends of the onion were thrown inside. A quick wash under the water to avoid tears, halved, then sliced thrice – *The smaller the pieces, the larger the surface area, the bigger the flavour*.

The bubbling butter threatened to burn, but given the onion for company and a quick stir, they soon became friends. Next, three rashers of bacon – *Three, not four, and make sure it's not shortcut, but middle cut. Get the cheaper stuff that's more fat than pork*.

Sliced and diced, the bacon joined the party in the pan. *Give them all a few minutes, and they'll be the best of mates. But don't forget the mushrooms, and for heaven's sake, don't get shitake or portobello, just get regular buttons – I'm not running a restaurant you know*.

The recently retrieved flour was introduced to the butter and the grease from the bacon – they soaked it up nicely. Milk and water then followed, then a single stock cube.

Crank up the heat, stir it about. Crack in salt and pepper. Simmer for three.

And bingo bango, you've got yourself a bacon soup.

Astrid blinked and checked the time.

How long was that, like twelve minutes? Her eyebrows rose. For a first attempt, that was remarkably quick.

Her phone buzzed, and she glanced down.

6:00 PM – 4 hour update – No change.

— ● —

Melonie knocked for the second time. *She better not have forgotten*.

Inside, hurried footsteps approached, and then the door flung open. Astrid appeared in a green dress. Her chest and shoulders moved up and down in quick sequence as her breath came in and out. A loose end of hair puffed out to one side, and she carried a pair of heels in one hand.

"Sorry," Astrid said. "There was a weird flour, then I made bacon soup, and then time got away from me."

Melonie looked down at her jeans, t-shirt, and boots, and smiled with a slight shake of her head. "Did I miss the dress code part of the invite?"

"I just wanted to dress up," Astrid said as she leaned against the door frame, trying to put on one of the shoes. A frown crossed her face as she leaned against the door frame, one foot on the ground, the other searching for the shoe she held. Losing her balance, she fell back onto two feet. "Damnit."

"I just had them delivered," Astrid said, as tears welled in her eyes.

"It's okay, let's go sort it out," Melonie said, and walked inside past Astrid.

Astrid stood alone in the open doorway. Realising there was nothing between herself and the outside world, she rushed to close the door.

"Everything's alright," Melonie said. "You're safe."

Melonie took Astrid's hand and led her into the living room. Books were stacked high on a side table and the coffee table. Multiple sheets, blankets and pillows haphazardly covered the couch into which Astrid collapsed. *Same old Astrid*, Melonie thought with a smile, as she knelt on the floor before her.

"Shoes please," Melonie said, her hand outstretched.

"Oh, sorry," Astrid said, and handed them over.

"Have *you* worn heels before?" Astrid asked.

Melonie shrugged as she untangled the jumble of straps. "They're not my favourite, but there's been events where I've bowed to convention."

"Since I met you, I've only worn boots – docs like yours." Astrid's voice was quiet, and she looked away.

Damn, Melonie thought. *Sometimes I forget I really am the only friend she's ever had.*

"Well, that's about to change." Melonie smiled. "Point your toes and arch your foot. That's it." Melonie slid Astrid's foot into the shoe. "Now wiggle those toes and spread them out."

Melonie buckled the first shoe and repeated the process with the second. "There, all set."

"You always help," Astrid said, and in a quieter voice, "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Melonie said with a radiant smile. "Now, let's see this bacon soup!"

They made their way to the dining room table, where Melonie sat. Astrid shuffled off to get their soup, while Melonie looked at the dining room chairs. Astrid didn't believe in sets of chairs, no she bought each one individually on a whim, and result was eclectic to say the least. Melonie sat in a wingback chair, with a director's chair on one side, and a wooden farmhouse chair on the other. Astrid returned and placed the bowl in front of Melonie.

Melonie raised her eyebrows. "*You* made this?"

"Yes," Astrid said with a smile.

"Since when do you know how to cook, like...anything?" Melonie asked.

"Since today," Astrid said, lifting her chin high. "I cook now." She shuffled back to the kitchen to retrieve her bowl of soup. As she returned and went to place the bowl on the table, a heel wobbled, and soup sloshed over the edge, splattering the white placemat. With a cry, she tried to clean it with

a napkin, but the soup only spread further. “Damnit,” she said, tears gathering in her eyes. “It was supposed to be perfect.”

“Don’t worry, honey, nothing ever is. C’mon, just sit and enjoy it,” Melonie said.

Astrid wiped her eyes, sat down, and watched Melonie taste the soup.

Melonie smiled. “It’s good.”

Astrid beamed back.

“Where did you get the recipe?” Melonie asked.

“Mum taught me,” Astrid said.

Melonie frowned, watching as Astrid lifted a spoon to her mouth.

“How *is* Geraldine?” Melonie asked in a quiet voice.

Astrid’s hand stopped, the spoon almost touching her lips.

“No change,” she said, and gulped down the spoonful.

Melonie’s jaw clenched. “When was the last time you visited?”

“Do we have to talk about her tonight?” Astrid sighed, her shoulders slumped, eyes downcast.

“Astrid. When was the last time you visited your mother in the hospital?” Melonie said.

“A week ago,” Astrid mumbled, eyes fixed downwards on the bowl before her.

“Your mother’s in a coma, and you haven’t bothered to visit her for a week,” Melonie said, and shook her head. “Oh Astrid.”

“You know how I don’t like to go outside.” Astrid whined. “And besides, they don’t even know if she’s going to wake up. She doesn’t even know I’m there!”

“You still need to visit,” Melonie said.

“Why should I!” Astrid yelled. Her eyes flashed in anger. “She didn’t do the same for me.”

“What do you mean?” Melonie asked.

“You know,” Astrid said, her eyebrows pinched together in a sullen frown.

Melonie shook her head, trying to clear her thoughts. “Wait, you think your mother didn’t visit you in the hospital?”

Astrid’s eyes filled with tears. “When I woke up, do you know what I saw?” She jutted her jaw forward. “I didn’t see mum – I saw you.”

Wait, does she really not know?

Melonie let out a long breath. “After the crash, you were in a coma, for like, a month, right?”

Astrid nodded and wiped her nose with a napkin.

“Honey, for the first week she didn’t leave your side. She *slept* at that hospital. After a week, she had to go back to work or she’d have been fired. And even then, she came back every night and even

slept in the bed, holding you. When you woke up, she rushed to the hospital and stayed there. She did end up losing her job and didn't get another one until you were better. She's still in debt."

"What?" Astrid asked, her lip trembling.

Melonie frowned. "I told you all this."

"But I don't remember," Astrid protested.

"I told you it was on the day you woke up, just before the doctor told you what was going on," Melonie said, her head cocked to one side as she remembered. "He said it was lucky you woke up, and... Oh crap." Melonie gasped, as she held her hand to her cover mouth. "He said you might have some memory issues until you're fully recovered," Melonie whispered. "Oh Astrid, I'm so sorry. I should have realised."

"I told you I didn't remember." Astrid pouted.

They sat for a while, each lost in their own thoughts.

Melonie stirred and took a sip of soup. "You know, this is very good for your first time. Earlier, you said Geraldine taught you to cook, but in all the time we grew up together, I don't remember that happening."

Astrid blinked. "Sorry, what?"

"I said I don't remember her teaching you to cook. I do remember her having that old cookbook though – do you remember it?" Melonie asked.

"Yeah," Astrid said, "that big yellow one."

"Full of photocopies, handwritten recipes and cut-out articles," Melonie said.

"Yeah, she loved that book." Astrid gave a small smile.

"You know, one time I came to visit you in the hospital, before you woke up," Melonie said. "And I heard her talking to you. I didn't want to interrupt, so I listened outside the door. She was reading you the recipes in the cookbook, with all sorts of extra comments like 'whatever you do, don't do this' or 'for heaven's sake remember to always do that.'"

"When I cooked today, I remembered her saying stuff like that," Astrid said. "Wait, *that's* where I remember it from?" Astrid looked down at the bacon soup, her brow wrinkled in confusion.

They both sat in silence for a while, until Astrid spoke again. "I haven't really talked to Mum for a long time, you know, like...properly, not since before high school. She was always asking about what I was doing and what I was interested in, but I shut her out. And then I thought she didn't care about me while I was in the coma, and just thought she spent all that time with me afterwards because she felt guilty."

Astrid lapsed into silence again.

"You know, she phones me every Sunday night to see how I'm going," Astrid said. "Well, she used to, before the stroke." Astrid took a deep breath and clenched her jaw. "Now she's just lying there hanging on, hanging on for..." Astrid's eyebrows rose, her mouth wide open. "She's not just hanging on...she's..."

Standing, Astrid threw her napkin onto the table. Her abrupt movement bumped the table, and the soup sloshed out of both bowls. Melonie pushed backwards in her chair to avoid the splash.

"She's waiting!" Astrid exclaimed. "We're going to the hospital, right now." A frown of determination marked her face, she walked past Melonie and up the stairs.

"Where are you going?" Melonie called.

"There's something I need to get – you just start the car."

Melonie jumped up, grabbed her bag, and rushed outside to her car. Moments later, Astrid strode out her front door holding a box in front of her, bare feet slapping the concrete, her dress billowing behind. She jumped into the passenger seat.

"Don't you want to put on some shoes?" Melonie asked.

"There's no time, just drive," Astrid said, her gaze fixed straight ahead. "She's been waiting long enough."



Astrid ran down the hallway past reception, bursting through the door to Geraldine's room.

Breathing heavily, she walked over and sank into a chair beside the bed, box on her lap, eyes closed. Slowly, she opened them and looked at her mum, who was motionless on the bed. Asleep.

A few minutes later, Melonie arrived, and Astrid looked up at her. "I don't know where to start," Astrid said.

Melonie took a seat on the opposite side of the bed. "Why don't you start with the box?"

"Oh yeah," Astrid said. She laid the box on the floor, rummaged around, and pulled out a small notebook covered in purple glitter.

Melonie raised an eyebrow.

Astrid smiled at Melonie. "It's my first journal. I started—"

"Don't tell me," Melonie said, nodding towards Geraldine. "Tell her."

"Right," Astrid said. She turned to face her mother and took a deep breath. "Mum, when I was ten, I started a journal. I had some stuff I wanted to write down, but didn't want you to know." Her lip trembled and she paused for a moment. "I've kept writing ever since. But I didn't really get back in the habit of talking to you again when I grew up, and I don't really know how to do it." She paused and chewed her lip.

Melonie nodded in encouragement.

"And I know you visited me when I was in the coma," Astrid said, her eyes downcast. "And I know you care, and you just wanted to know about me, and my life...and you've been waiting for me to talk. Anyway, this is the only way I can think of." Astrid turned her head up to look at her mother's closed eyes.

She reached out, held her mother's hand, and whispered, "Sorry it's taken so long." Astrid wiped a tear from her cheek and held the journal up so she could read it. "So, this is what life was like for me..."



Sunlight streamed through the hospital window, highlighting journals scattered across the floor, Melonie asleep in her chair.

On the bed, Astrid lay curled up next to Geraldine. Astrid nestled in closer, frowning in her sleep, her green dress contrasted against the white hospital sheets.

At some point during the night, Geraldine's arms had moved to hold her daughter.

"I made you some bacon soup, mummy," Astrid murmured.

Geraldine's face held a slight trace of a smile, but she heard no more.

