

The Great Mimic 2402

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I was being bitten whilst in my bed. First on my elbows and shoulders, which made me think of flea bites because they weren't always covered. I soon felt lumps on my stomach and I felt pin-prick sensations from my ankles upwards. I checked between my fingers in case they were scabies. Nothing on my hands or inner thighs, or in my armpits.

Did I have the dreaded bed bugs?

I decided to buy some anti flea and bed bug powder and sprays. I used them on my mattress and the blankets on the bed. I tried not to use them on my sheets in case I had a reaction to them. I just changed my sheets. I heard that those OTC products weren't as good as those used by Pest Control bodies, either Civic or private. After a week of being bitten regardless of what I did, I decided to contact the Local Authority. I could only pay by credit card, not cash. I am registered blind and am 76 years old. I thought this was discrimination against the working class and low-paid, not to mention the elderly. I asked a friend if he could pay the Local Authority on my behalf and I would pay him back. He told me that I would have to take all the pictures off my walls. That was going to be difficult. I have to say here that I was an artist until my sight became so bad. My partner was also an artist before he died and I'm looking after his works until I can sell them. This is not easy at the moment as the middle-class are trying to get their children through university or on the housing ladder.

My friend contacted the Local Authority and paid the £258. I contacted the Local Authority Pest Control. I said I was, or had been an artist and had over a hundred of my paintings on my walls. There were other

canvases stacked against the walls, too. She said that wouldn't matter. Or words to that effect and that nice George would be coming the following Monday, a full week away! In the meantime I used the spray and powder with no effect whatsoever. I hoovered and sprayed the carpet, which meant lifting the pictures off the floor and placing them elsewhere. I also bought half a dozen sticky fly rolls. I remember them hung over the ham slicing device at the corner shop, just a couple of doors away from my grandmother's abode. They had lots of flies and blue-bottles stuck to them. Not as bad as a butcher spraying his raw meat with DDT in Afghanistan!

Sorry, I digress. I thought some bed-bugs might get stuck to them as I stuck them down on strips of wood and put them just under the four sides of my bed. To gather evidence, so to speak! Patent that if you like! At least, I had a full week to spray behind my pictures that were stacked against the walls. I started collecting my dirty linen and clothes. I put them into plastic bags. Some I washed in a friend's washing machine but it was on a low temperature wash and afterwards, I had to put them in my deep freeze compartment of my refrigerator, which isn't very large. I kept them there for four days. That was the recommended time!

I also thought it wise to throw my foam mattress away. It was only three inches thick. I had to cut or tear it into small pieces and put them into plastic disposal bags and put them in the communal refuse bins. It took seven bags before it was all gone. I sprayed the ends of the wooden struts that went across my bed. There were four hardboard pieces over them. On the top of the pieces of hardboard there was a piece of carpet that was just the right size! It was a leftover after my living room was carpeted. This had to be my mattress! Still I had lived on the streets for over two years, albeit from Belgium to India! So it was a little softer than

the pavement.

Nice George duly came and did a wonderful job. And he wasn't critical of the amount of my paintings, finished or unfinished that were all over the place. Afterwards, my piece of bedding carpet was soaking in whatever he sprayed on it. I left it as late as possible and had to put a sheet of plastic over it before I made the bed. I haven't had my central heating on for two years! I want to have some simple treats in my life! I believe that people should work to live and not to live to work.

For the next two nights I waited for some improvement to being bitten alive but that was not forthcoming. Even after I had taken a pain killer I was up at around 4am trying to wash myself followed by some self-spraying with garden pest repellent, OTC of course. A good night's sleep evaded me!

On Wednesday the 8th of November I went to the local hospital to be Triaged! However, it didn't take long for me to be called in. I had my blood pressure, pulse and temperature taken. Shortly afterwards, I was shown in to see the doctor. The doctor asked me, "How long have you been suffering from the symptoms."

"Sometime after the 3rd of October," I said. From that date I was suffering from Laryngitis and I think Covid, the Government had instructed hospitals not to test for Covid anymore, it's just like a common cold, now!

My throat felt like shards of glass and my taste had gone. I had orange juice with my Swiss muesli and it was like swallowing acid – no taste of oranges whatsoever. I had just visited a hospital in west London, thought !! And I had to wait for two hours in the waiting room before a hired car

would arrive to take me home, just like everyone else. The two hour wait is to discourage patients from requiring hospital transport. The hospital was in a part of London I wasn't familiar with.

I'm virtually, a recluse now after my partner died in 2018 and the Covid pandemic that followed. The doctor asked to see my chest. I took off my shirt. I had already taken off my coat whilst having my blood pressure taken. I took off my T-shirt and he said, "Oh! You poor thing. I think I know what it is! Turn around."

I turned around to show him my back.

"Oh! You poor thing. I think I know what it is!"

He asked to see my legs. I pulled my trousers and underpants down.

I showed him all I had, all the bites over my body.

"Pull your underpants up."

"I'm wearing long-johns."

I turned around and wondered when he was going to tell me what I was actually suffering from! I turned to face him and pulled up my long-johns and trousers.

"You've got scabies."

"I've been fingering in between my fingers and there was no evidence of scabies there, nor in my armpits or inner thighs."

"This is another kind of scabies it mimics flea bites and the bites of bedbugs. It's called, The Great Mimic Scabies. One place you can get them is..."

"Hospital waiting rooms," I interrupted him, he didn't correct me.

The doctor typed out a prescription for two tubes of cream and some antihistamine tablets so I wouldn't feel the microscopic critters tunneling away under my skin.

"Put this cream on I'm prescribing, all over your body. From head to toes, scalp as well."

"Can't you get the treatment in hospital?" I asked.

"We're not allowed to do it anymore."

"How do I put the cream all over my back?"

"Haven't you got a friend to help you?"

"No, he's out of town, besides he's eighty-six."

"Can't you ask a neighbour?"

"Not really!"

"Go to your local supermarket and get one of those plastic handle things, with a sponge on the end. The things you wash plates with. That should do the trick!"

I wasn't convinced it would work but what could I do?

I asked if he could call for a porter to take me to the Pharmacy.

"They're all too busy! I'll take you there myself."

As we were going to the Dispensary he asked me what my journeying around India was like.

"How long have you got? I was there for over two years."

I thought he might have been from Goa but there was really no time as we were almost there. He gave me my prescriptions and we said our goodbyes and he left. I handed in my prescriptions and sat down to wait for the anti-scabies cream.

"I wondered how these small critters could work out how to mimic the bites of fleas and bedbugs. I mean, these critters' brains must be so

small and to work out how to imitate other critters wasn't that simple! However it would give them a few generations to carry on breeding and burrowing under the skins of humans like myself. Waiting a week before the pest control experts came and another few days before realizing that it wasn't bedbugs or fleas at all and having to get triaged at the local hospital. And did those little critters have a parliament to discuss their strategy. It doesn't bear thinking about. We are, after all, just finding out how intelligent other creatures really are. And don't get me on the subject of the intelligence of octopi.

I was eventually given the anti-scabies cream and the tablets. On my way home I went to the local supermarket. I found the only dishwashing sponge on the end of a plastic handle. When I got it home I was dismayed to find the sponge had a thin abrasive layer stuck to its surface. There was only one thing I could do! I dislodged it carefully. It came off with hardly any trouble.

I applied the cream using it. I had to pay special attention to my upper back and shoulders. It seemed to work. However, time would tell. In the meantime, I had to go across the road to where the launderette was located. There, I went sixteen times. I carried a bag of washing, twice the size that would fit in a domestic washing machine. A 60° wash was the thing! Three spins, too. Carried the bag of laundry on my head, I did. My white cane was in my other hand. There's an epidemic of the critters. Or, so they say!

Whatever next!

A shortage of anti-Scabies remedies, no doubt!

PS: The Trojan horse.

Of all the things it was my heavy duty black Covid masks. I forgot to wash them and put them in the deep freeze for four days. After a while, I felt two adjacent spots on my jawline. This was followed by the slightest of pin pricks on my legs and stomach. The critters were at it again!

Colonies of Great Mimic Scabies had to be treated once more. I went to the doctors. And I did have trouble in getting some medication for the blighters. It's the shortage, you see!

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