

## Give Sorrow Words

*A long time ago two lovers climbed into bed and pulled up the covers. But Fate, appearing like a cruel magician, performed a trick. With the help of his assistant, Time, the magician then pulled back the covers, to reveal the lovers had vanished, and in their place lay a patient and his caregiver.*

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*"Give sorrow words"* Shakespeare advised, for, *"the grief that does not speak whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break."* I feel this fracture in my own heart, so I must give my sorrow words, if it is to continue beating.

Where to start? My thoughts, if I entertain them, will surely invite me to their pity party. And I don't wish to be their honored guest. But worse still, my words, if I write them, might be hurtful to my love. So I will try to calibrate my writing, with his tender heart in one hand and mine, *fraught*, in the other. Pulsating side by side in this bittersweet moment.

I'm living in the shadow of Michael's aging and declining health, ten years now since his Parkinson's diagnosis. Like a lonely astronaut on a solitary space walk I drift through my day, never straying too far from home base, tethered even. But there are a few celestial bodies in my orbit.

There's Judy at the checkout at Food Lion. She has "a hair appointment at three." Then Disha at Walgreens dispensing Michael's meds. She could "kill for a hot dog right now." Pleasantries exchanged are like oxygen to fill my depleted tank. There's a silent plea for more in my pauses. They are kind, and offer more words. Do they know I am carried by the updraft from their angel wings?

At Food Lion I buy mac and cheese. That's Michael's favorite, not mine. This little sacrifice is the love language he understands. And in return, he will show concern and ask what about me.

At home there's more separation and withdrawal now. Is it practice for letting go? He's in a chair in the bedroom slumped over. I'm treading time in the living room. Each passing day, we drift apart as the current of dopamine deficiency draws him deeper into Parkinson's abyss. He's getting harder to reach. A visiting therapist calls this *the long good bye*.

There was a time his music used to play my soul. His touch produced a lovely sound in me. But now the vibration has all but stopped. We used to hold one another in concert. Now it's just me propping him up. How I would love to be held again and feel that quiver of excitement.

At lunch he's like a small child. He can't hold the sandwich. And having difficulty with swallowing now, he chokes. He asks if I see the two naked guys in the kitchen? One's a redhead. They are both coal miners from West Virginia, and we're all going to a family barbecue later today. I allow myself to be amused by his hallucination. "Sounds like a blast, I'm up for that." I reply. Some hallucinations are funny, some are not. I fill his water glass and separate out some medication.

After lunch I steal away to lie for an hour by the neighborhood pool. I say *steal* because it almost certainly feels wrong to be in the sunshine, where parasols and palm fronds are fluttering in the breeze. The pool is full of joyful splashing and sounds of laughter. A man with a sexy smirk says, "Jump in, the water's refreshing." "It's tempting," I reply, "But I have to get back." Back to Michael's shadow. Because out here I feel like I'm cheating on him. Cheating on him with life.

There's a ton of laundry to fold and put away. The top drawer of the maple dresser sticks. Its jarring triggers a memory.

Michael had a truck. I remember us searching the dealerships for just the right one. I teased the size of the truck was a measure of his manhood. Our little joke became - *the bigger the truck the bigger the fuck*.

I hear the echo of me laughing. And it makes me realize that now my memories are more animated than my life itself.

Turns out size does matter. While real men are visualizing gun racks and space for deer carcasses in their truck beds I was only concerned that there would be room to carry *this* very pretty maple dresser home from the antique mall over in Hendersonville.

There are dachshund teething marks along the side of the dresser, naughty Nicholas. And there's a ghostly ring mark on the top where Michael's coffee mug sits. There's so much shared spirit instilled in our belongings. I know that I will be haunted by our home when he is gone.

I wheel his chair to the storm door. August is giving way to September. "Look Michael, do you see the yellow butterflies?" I turn his head to see them gathering, as they do at this time of year. They dance with the Mexican petunias growing by the door. Yellow wings opposite the purple petals, fluttering in unison. Their coupling is lovely while it lasts. Sadly all these short lived blooms will have dropped by days' end, leaving lonely butterflies to face a new tomorrow.

"Let's go make supper." I say. "What are we having?" He asks.

"Oh I don't know, something with a side of mac and cheese." And right on cue, he says, "Mm, that's my favorite, but what will you have?"

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*The cruel magician stands resolute. The patient and the caregiver cry out from the bed, "What happened to the lovers?" The cruel magician replies, "Oh fools, you are they! Drunk and in love all those years ago, don't you remember the terms of your contract? Did you not read the fine print? Let me remind you -"*

*...only through loss will you truly realize that you had something precious to begin with at all.*