

completely knowing look. She has been waiting for this acknowledgement for too long.

I know you had to leave there and not go back. Her eyes are filling with tears. Her jaw is so rigid from the drugs it is difficult for her to speak. I pass her kleenex to catch the drool.

It was so hard for her, she manages to say, *no one knew how hard. I was so afraid of him, to go anywhere with him.* We sit, my arm around her, so unfamiliar this holding her, or her me. But she has this past year, held me in large hugs and kissed my cheek.

It is after this the psychiatrist tells me my mother's brain is destroyed and the best that can be is if she can give my mother enough drugs so her behaviour is controlled, even if it means she has to be strapped in a chair for the rest of her life. That the drugs themselves might make people crazy is not something she considers worth discussing.

It is discovered not long after this that my mother's *aggression* is due to pain and tests indicate the pain is likely from metastasized cancer from her breast. The anti-psychotic and other drugs are eventually withdrawn, but not before she has a heart attack and a bleeding ulcer.

Now she is having palliative care on the medical ward, with morphine to manage pain. It has been seven weeks since my mother was brought to the psychiatric unit. She has thirteen days left.

A geriatric specialist stands across from me, my mother lying silent between us, under neatly folded sheets. He talks of cancer cells in the fluid building up around my mother's lungs. I motion him to stop.

She won't understand this, he says. I look at her hands that have clutched mine as he says this. He walks out of there and I never see him again.

Cancer? Cancer? what did I do wrong? my mother tries to raise herself up, grips my hands. *Did someone make a mistake? I don't know where to go...* she says it over and over.

A palliative care doctor comes by a few days later, says outside her door that *she doesn't look like she's dying.* I

read her chart, I'm from Manitoba too, he tells me, walks in, leans a rather large, beefy face into hers.

Do you remember when you were a little girl growing up on the farm in Manitoba? My mother has never seen him before. She lowers her head.

I've been a lot of places since then, she says, quietly, to herself more than him.

My daughter comes from Ontario to say goodbye. My sons don't make it in time. We sit together, my daughter, my mother, semi-conscious now, and me. We feed her tiny spoonfuls of things she will eat, like vanilla ice cream. She is losing her ability to swallow. She wakes up, looks at my

daughter.

I'm tired...I'm sore...I'm old...I'm young...she says.

The night she dies I realize I have fallen in love with my mother, her breath gone, into me...

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Men Have a Way of Disappearing After the Kids Come

not that they aren't good husbands and fathers,
aren't there for dinner,
weekend tussles, family vacations
and pouring iodine on open cuts

but if they decide suddenly
it's time to join a club
or pull the old clarinet out of the closet
and play in a band on Tuesday nights
or do overtime at the office at double-time
because you need the money

what can you say? He works hard
(not that he doesn't play with the kids);

but who rubs mentholatum on blazing chests
and hushes nerve-jangling coughs
so he can get his sleep?

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