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The argument of our lives turns out not to be with God or other people; against their politics or worldviews versus our own. The argument of life, it seems to William, ultimately comes down to no more than one main contention; an argument against *that day*.

That day or for some, that night. For none of us can escape the reality that on some unknown day or night, our lives will end. He knows people who have had a brief glimpse of their last day earlier than others. They've suffered traumas that have made the rest of their time on this earth, however long, gloomier and bigger than all that has come before. These people are his patients. He talks with them in the abstract about death every day. "Oh doctor, I want to die." "I'm afraid of life as it is now, every day's so hard." At least once a week, usually more, he tackles the subject in depth and not in the abstract, leading someone through the extreme notion of the world without them in it, like Capra's fine movies, or someone's pastor at a wake. Gives them their eulogy in advance so they'll have something to hang onto, be proud of, even if he is only inventing as he goes along.

Yet, again, Bree is facing the reality of that day with no reprieve. And William cannot be sure how either of them will resolve these arguments now.

The night before had been punctuated with the normal spate of bad weather predictions on the news and Bree trying to be normal too, mostly because she was so exhausted with being otherwise. Last night she'd been quiet, demanding thoughts and space of her own. Rubbing the last vestiges of hand cream soft across her elbows, pushing over to the far left corner of the bed to be away from his reach. The blankets moved with her and far from him, same as a low-pulling tide.

To such assaults, William is only mildly indignant. For even without her, he can claim an open book as some kind of protection against promised insomnia. Of course he knows this joint pretense at any normalcy will fail; that in the morning, with sleep or without, they will both come up from their exhaustion to receive all the world's bad news.

But does that mean each morning and for every morning until her final days, he is doomed to fail her? Or will they both fail each other by not speaking more of this returning diagnosis? Will each night spent pretending to read books or holding hands in the newly grim dark devolve not only into moments lost, but utter failures of nerve?

In the morning, the phone rings before six; it is a call routed by the service from a patient who cannot handle his own anxiety, whose mind has crawled along so many corridors all night that now he feels like a rat, just as fecal and small-boned. After William talks with him for ten minutes or so, schedules him in for an emergency hour at four, he feels dirty himself and tries to crawl back into bed for quick repairs. But suddenly he is crying with such desperation he leans up against Bree, spoons her, until she lets him in.

Afterwards, William comes into the bathroom, only able to mumble, “Sorry, sorry.” This is his new posture with her since they’d heard from her oncologist weeks ago.

She turns around, the toothbrush poking up in her mouth. Is she worn out by the way he’d approached her this morning? Resentful? She won’t tell. Her blond-grey curls up along the brow seem thin and no signs of red off the cheeks or chin; just minty white paste.

“Sorry about,” he starts then regroups, “That call before the alarm.”

“A hospitalization?”

“No, just a new patient. Testing me probably. Don’t worry.” He dares another look, but she has bowed her head over the sink to spit. “I’m going to tell the service to not let those early calls through. We’ll need sleep whenever we can get it.”

“It’s not the service that pissed me off,” she says, turning. “It was when you came to me afterwards.”

He smiles. “That’s me being a selfish pig, right? I should’ve asked.”

“That’s not it. I was-glad.”

“Oh? Well, whatever you want. From here on out, you just tell me. I don’t want to hurt you. This morning I wasn’t careful, I’ll admit--.”

But she is tired beyond tired with his apologies, slams a wrist on the counter to let him know.

“Shut up, why can’t you?” she shouts. “Stop making me say yes or no about everything! Like I know what’s going on any better than you do. Sleep’s what I wanted most! So why couldn’t you just have started your day when the call came?”

Bree looks and sounds so childish with the toothbrush dangling, all her words garbled, and suddenly his guilt grows beyond reasonable bounds. Although William knows better, he feels like he's done something terribly wrong, He's molested a strange girl in bed only moments ago, not his wife of so many years.

This isn't a feeling to take on with everything else, so he doesn't. He shakes off the strangeness of the moment even as she moves back to the mirror and accuses, "So don't blame the service for getting me up, or anyone else. When you were the one."

She is going to die. For the second time in three years, they've heard this truth from the doctor she trusts most, *Bree's odds have shrunk even as the ovarian cancer's reconstituted, grown*. Shorthand, these words for a simple equation: Bree's going to die sooner than we were thinking fourteen months ago when all the scans were coming back clean. But we're sure now, we're sure. So now the future's all a subtraction, and the rest of our lives less, not more.

Out the window, the snowstorm has carved the backyard into curved surfaces and bulges unknown; piles of snow lean into each other like Bree's cake bowls stacked in the pantry. Scents too, informing visitors to the kitchen of Bree's past triumphs. The fang-toothed smells from the spice cabinet, the clouds of cinnamon sugar on pastries. How she knows to stiffen the cream in donuts so that their insides are as kissable as she; how her chocolate Swiss rolls are so smooth, they look like newly paved highways to his eye. But for the last three years in this home sugar has been poison, sugar feeds cancer. So all those wonderful desserts now memories and this kitchen reconfigured as spare and sterile as a laboratory.

William boils water for coffee, guided by the glow of the stove rings. He prefers going through these daily routines in the near-dark hours before dawn. For even unlit, the house makes him feel safe in its shabby splendor.

In this home, William has always been able to create routines to find comfort. Decades of uninterrupted living here; the oversized pantry lost a foot of space to a double sink merely twelve years ago. The kitchen itself is so poorly upgraded they still push about the dishwasher on wheels from sink to garbage and back again each night, like some begging dog underfoot. And never mind that their two grown children have each offered to pay for renovations, never mind. “You can do it after we’re gone, then recoup your profits selling it all,” he’d scoffed, refusing their offers. Now of course, those remarks only make him wince.

But safe, safe in this house for more than two decades.; ignore the yellowing patch of ceiling in the living room that warns of something rumbling through the bathroom pipes. Some clog of unknown origin and both of them Chicken Littles glancing up each morning for a falling patch of sky. Safe, for a half acre of yard in a prospering New York suburb nonetheless proved an ideal place for raising children and tending fickle gardens. Protected for nearly a century from vandals, speculators, flippers, and condo boards, this house has always survived.

“Survival once again the game,” he mutters as he flips the stove dial to ON. Time to let everything regroup around that word.

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