

Poems On A Medical Condition

DEMENTIA

Edited By
TASNEEM



Dementia

Poems On A Medical Condition

Edited by Tasneem, India



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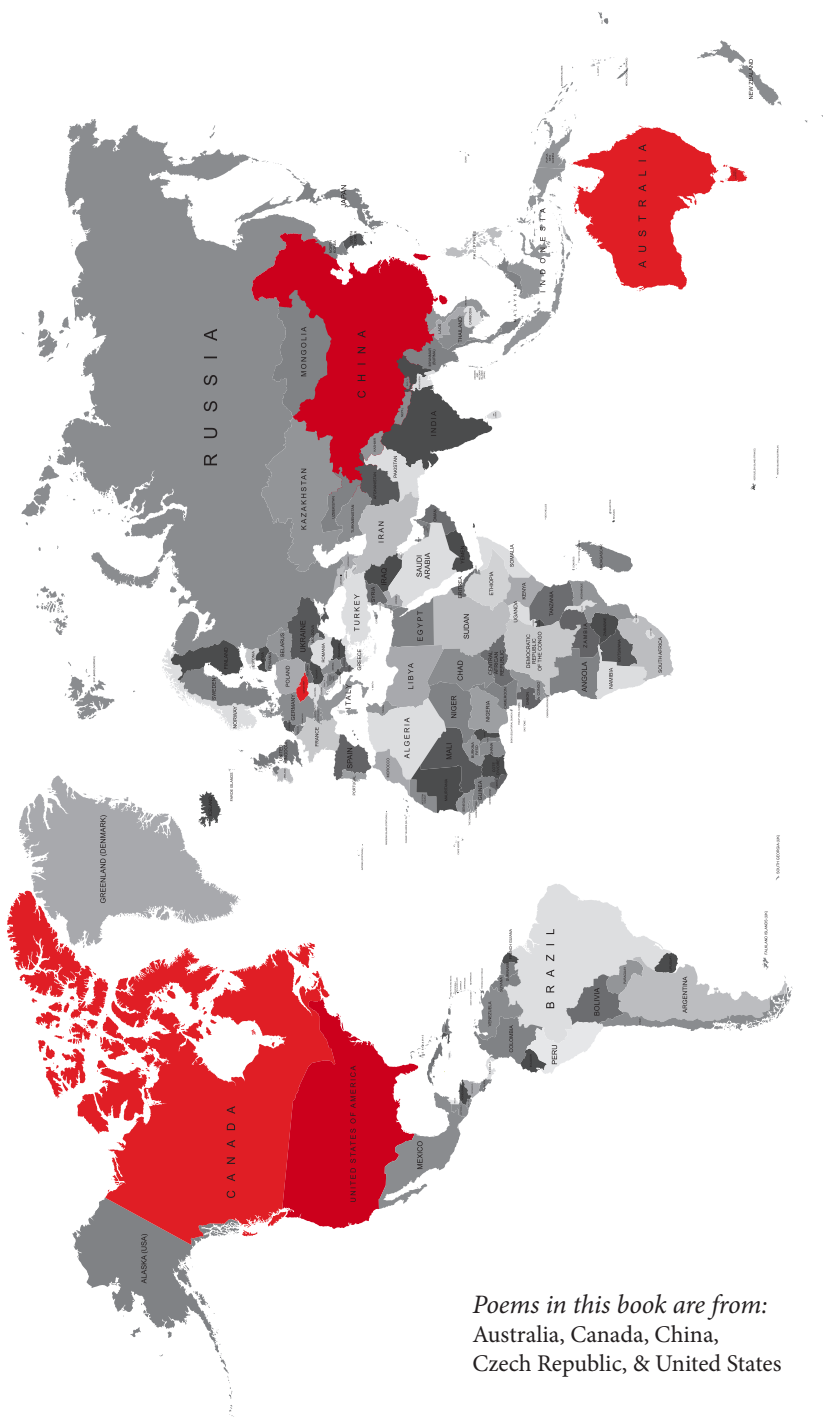


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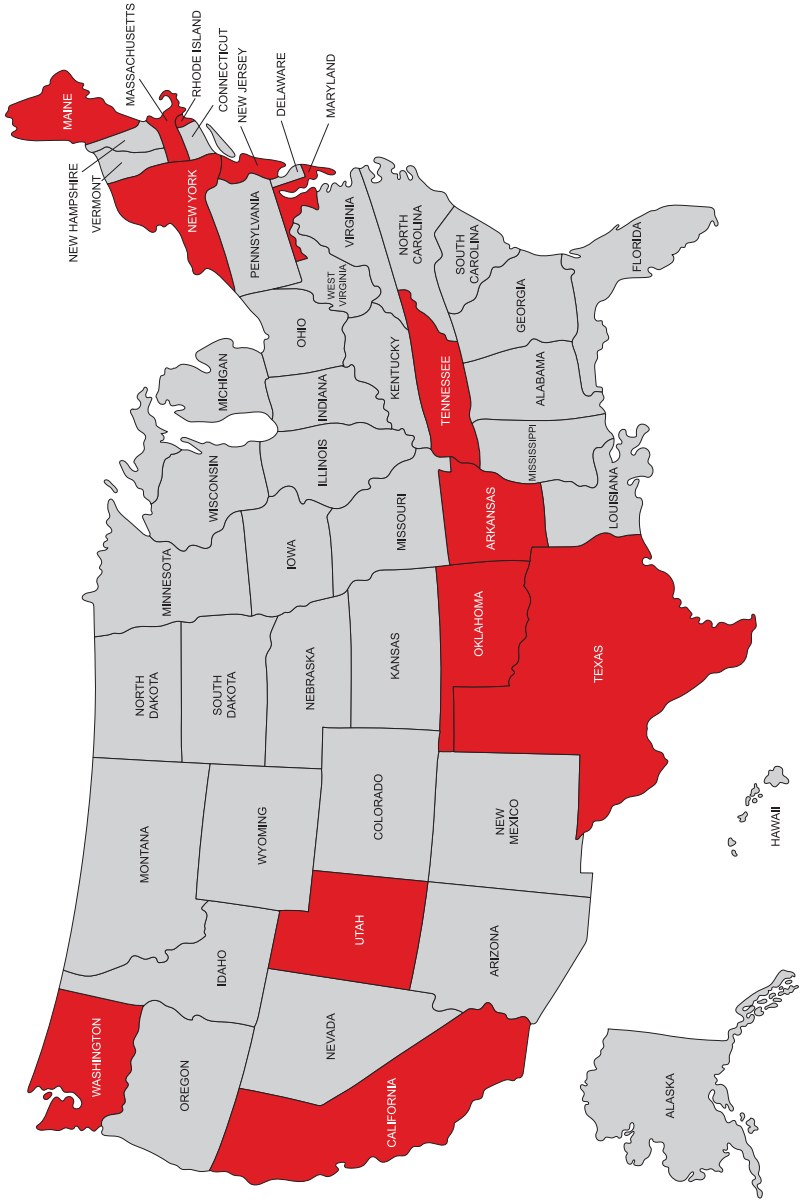


Table of Contents

<i>Publisher Page</i>	<i>ii</i>
An Ode To Milk - <i>Ray Umber</i>	<i>1</i>
Asking Again And Again - <i>Candy Eaton</i>	<i>4</i>
Bittered Prayer - <i>Poeticmoment</i>	<i>7</i>
Derangement - <i>Danshan Diane Yang</i>	<i>9</i>
Early Goodbye - <i>Andrea Stone</i>	<i>11</i>
Episode - <i>Erick Garske</i>	<i>14</i>
Eventual Stranger - <i>Porter Pfrenger</i>	<i>16</i>
Flight - <i>Eric Jason Silverman</i>	<i>18</i>
Forever Where You Dwell - <i>Russell Chamberlain</i>	<i>23</i>
Forget It - <i>Donna Beth Freeman</i>	<i>24</i>
Hanging On - <i>Mark Tochen</i>	<i>28</i>
Lest She Forget - <i>Emma Scott</i>	<i>31</i>
Lingering Warmth - <i>Bree Norton</i>	<i>32</i>
My Brain Is On Fire - <i>Laura Nettles</i>	<i>34</i>
My Grandfather's War - <i>Christine Caprio</i>	<i>38</i>
Socks - <i>Catherine Martin</i>	<i>44</i>
Stone Circle - <i>Austin Dunnahue</i>	<i>47</i>

The Bank Accounts - <i>Marjorie Stuckle</i>	50
The Slipshod King - <i>Scott Jonathan Nixon</i>	56
To Françoise - <i>JM Kehoe</i>	61
Vinyl - <i>Kacey Willow</i>	64
Who Is Here Today? - <i>Erica Berquist</i>	67
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	72



An Ode To Milk

Ray UMBER

Saddle River, New Jersey - United States

I sit by the hospital bed,
awaking in dread,
watching you die.

As I recall many years ago,
running away from an old lady
chasing me with milk.

“How will you grow
How will you bellow
If you don't drink your milk?”

From milk and milkshakes,
Ice cream and chai,
you helped me grow so high.

But milk can't cure malice,
actions that are callous,
or your mind, now an empty palace.

For years, tortured by selfish ideals,
that reality we continued to conceal,
we were all cowards.
And now I watch you die,
slowly, you writhe.
I wish that milk could cure the brain.

That heart monitor slows.
The advent of the crow
signaled your end.

The last words:
“There is no God but God...”
The messengers cawed.

Your shawl falls.
The wails call for the rain to fall.
But the sun illuminated your decayed skin.

Even with all my flawed defenses,
I now desired spirits and sins to build more flimsy fences,
Yet all I am offered is a glass of milk.

I raise it high,
this drink I once despised
so that I will not forget you.

Here's to you,
Grandmother.
The last cup of milk between us.



Asking Again And Again

Candy Eaton

Holladay, Tennessee - United States

Warm and comfortable in bed with pillows adjusted just right,
I hear the snoring of someone else.
There is another bed across the room.
Who is that? Where am I?

Lights flash on, so bright. “Good morning”
“Time for a bed check”.
Someone snatches the covers and flips me this way and that.
“You’re wet, time for a new pad.”
Who are you? What are you doing?

“Time for your medicine”.
“Time for a shower”.
“Time for therapy”.
What time is it? Where are we going?

“Let’s dress for breakfast”.
“Let’s take you down for lunch”.
“Let’s see about your supper”.
“Let’s get you ready for bed”.

Who are you? What time is it? Where am I? Who am I?

Again and again the Alzheimer patient asks,
Until there are no more questions to be thought of to ask.



Bittered Prayer

Poeticmoment

Chino, California - United States

My mother will see me get married
my mother will see me have kids,
and she will know who I am
and they will know who she is.



Derangement

Danshan Diane Yang

Shanghai - China

Let wails transform to demented mirth,
Let tears fill up till the brim of the skull.

Asleep I shall be at the dawn's rebirth,
Awake I shall stay at the midnight's lull.

Make bones that should rise sink under the ground,
Make ears meant to hear ring with endless sound.

The closer the future, the farther I flee,
The heavier the pledge, the lighter the plea.

While others toss coins in the wishing well,
Into the well, myself I propel.



Early Goodbye

Andrea Stone

Stonewall, Oklahoma - United States

Read a story about a man with Alzheimer's
Today and it left me broken and crying
Knowing your fate would be the same
That soon you'll forget me and mine
You'll forget that I'm far away now
You'll forget that I was your child
You're gonna forget everything
And I will be lost from time
You will be gone one day
And I won't be able to
Move on from loss
You are leaving
Us ever so
Slowly





Episode

Erick Garske

Anaheim, California - United States

an episode of dementia
is like replaying a forgotten rerun
of Wheel of Fortune.

you're certain that there is the letter 'H'
in the word
or at least a character
from the alphabet.

the next day
after a good night's sleep
you remember it completely
as though Vanna White
has revealed all the letters
hidden between the sheets



Eventual Stranger

Porter Pfrenger

Greenbrier, Arkansas - United States

The clock hands turn, but time feels strange,
A name once known is out of range.
The phone rings twice—was something planned?
A note half-written in trembling hand.

The words drift off like scattered leaves,
A thought takes shape, then twists and weaves.
Their tongue trips twice, the meaning slips,
A story lost between their lips.

The air feels thick, the voices sharp,
A spark ignites within their heart.
A harmless question, laced with blame,
They lash out, though they're not the same.

The days unwind in tangled thread,
Familiar paths now filled with dread.
The mirror hums a hollow tune,
A stranger's eyes stare back too soon.



Flight

Eric Jason Silverman

Natick, Massachusetts - United States

For Raquel Welch

I don't think age nor dementia
Could erase
the planes of your perfect face
Nor intelligent almond eyes

Fantastic Voyage, 1968,
Persistent, twitchy organisms
Attached to your body like
G-forces of adolescence unleashed

I was hardly twelve
The language you spoke solved
the unknowable riddle
For my inadequate tongue

After watching you perform
Like a curved Jesus in white spandex
I barely spoke, my involuntary breath

Under the weight of those images
hormones sped uncontrollably

Forget the briefcase I carried to school
the taped glasses, and painful taunts
ensuring no girl would ever talk to me

Your mother's loneliness,
And your father's distance and anger
We had that in common, at least I imagined
Something had to happen

One Million Years B.C. 1969
The famous poster, in *Shawshank Redemption*
Astride Canary Island outcrop,
The world's first bikini made
from some envied animal

World-class beauty
Taut, Latina dancer's legs, 22-inch waist
Some call it
terrible sci-fi cheesecake

1970, *Myra Breckenridge*
Sparring with the outspoken Mae West,
who—you later made the claim—
was *probably* a man
Disguised in drag all those years

Celebrity brunette, big bosom and hair
jousting with Johnny Carson,
Bounding past stereotype
and Hugh Hefner's offer to pose nude for *Playboy*

Single mother of two
You smile through
the four marriages that did not last
And many dark turns of fame

Hair cut short
In your forties
You work hard, reinvent yourself
Dancing, singing
In the role of *Woman of the Year*
Destroying sex doll idol
with one Broadway kick

Never anyone's fool, but, in recent years,
with tragedy of Alzheimer's
Your obituary reduced to a single paparazzi image,
the confused, aged former star
never bothering to mention
your 140 IQ

Or, all the times I heeded
My desire, unwearied
Knowing how
the world is no closer to knowing
Nor that night

You appeared in a flightless, twelve-year-old's
dream

Big smile, a soft, seductive angel

Winking, you bade bye with a wave
and hello, too

That left me vigilant with longing
Heading back into your limousine
off into the clouds.

XX



ДЛЯ КОСТЕВ
ТИШКА

Forever Where You Dwell

Russell Chamberlain

Duvall, Washington - United States

The past stretches to strain a memory,
like sand slipping through a child's fingers.
Grab more, but each grain flows through
the delicate hands poorly designed to hold
the tiny fragments of shell and coral.
A history to be lived with each day,
the dull and the gruesome in equal measure.
But also, like a specific scent sparking recollection
of beauty and quiet joys, yesterday is more vital than today.
So, if you find the doors locked, it is for your safety,
in a place that is not quite as final as death,
nor is it alive with the presence of mind.
A suitcase packed each day to escape to a place
that has not been your home for over fifty years.
Your destinations are becoming hazier
each day, replaced with bewildered determinations.
Memories of days long past feel most real and defining.
The future stretches into your past while the present vanishes
into the receding tides with all the sand you cannot hold.

Forget It

Donna Beth Freeman

Wakefield, Rhode Island - United States

I say cacophony
yet character is what I mean.
The letters don't matter in my head
tumbling out with extra or error
or even instead.

You say, "Forget about it."
What do you know?
I, Pandora's box, filled with pictures,
faded pastels of vivid past,
a locked clock without a key
not even a memory.

Still I travel down the drain
or what I called my brain.
I understand, you say.
but who are you anyway?

Did I meet you before?
Was it at the doctor's office
or at that big department store?

Tell me, whoever you are,
will you speak for me
when the tongue lies still,
the voice long gone,
and words seem empty sound
...and nothing more.



BURSA BÜYÜKŞEHİR BELEDİYESİ



Hanging On

Mark Tochen

Camas, Washington - United States

November 2024

how are YOU doing?
asked our daughter's friend
knowing I'm caregiving a precious wife
eight years post-diagnosis of Alzheimer's
I was smitten by his loving query
and almost cried—this old guy rarely cries
but I've felt the tears welling up in my eyes
more than a few times in recent months

I tried to answer by explaining
my survival mode—smiling and coaxing
during every minute of personal caregiving
if I'm demanding or impatient I fail
my partner may show her love
with a pat on my arm
if I am too demanding, she may say,
why did you do that?

I may get lightheaded and sit down
lest I hyperventilate and faint
which would be unkind to my wife
so I pause to take slow, deep breaths
she takes pity and pats my arm
because she loves me as I love her
after the drama of caregiving
we may sit together
looking at old photo albums
or listening to music
usually side by side
with laughter as our companion

I described these mood swings
to our daughter's friend
implicit in the daily drama
of my caregiving gigs—
*the swings of our love more dizzying
than a carnival ride—every day
every hour every minute*



Lest She Forget

Emma Scott

McDowall - Australia

They both recalled their wedding 50 years ago,
And before that, the moment they first met
In a pub near Central Station, Melbourne.
She went with the Coles girls after work that Friday
When he walked in with his mates,
Handsome, turning heads in their uniforms.

That moment imprinted in her brain forever
Yet she cannot remember how to use the washing machine and
rinses her clothes in the bathtub,
Doesn't know who the prime minister is or what day it is today.
She relies on him, her hero who soldiers on,
Remembering their bills, appointments, groceries
Lest she forget.

Lingering Warmth

Bree Norton

Herriman, Utah - United States

My hands have always been cold,
Freezing blue.
But someone used to warm them.

When my hands would freeze in winter,
I'd bury them into someone's pockets;
They'd interlock their rough fingers with mine,
And warm me.

I have flashes of remembrance,
Though I can never see his face—
The face belonging to him
He who'd warm me.

Though my mind has long forgotten
The name and face of this tender soul,
I know that my hands,
Devoid of his,
Will never forget the ways he warmed me.



My Brain Is On Fire

Laura Nettles

Oceanside, California - United States

My brain is on fire,
With the possibilities of my future.
Where the past may coalesce with the present,
Like it is currently doing with my grandmother.
Her tales grow taller and splinter,
Like the tree in her old garden in winter.
The tree she'll never see again.

My brain is on fire,
And already on so many medications.
I see things not there and remember falsities.
What memories are real, and what are mutations?
But that's not dementia, that's schizophrenia.
If they combine, will my soul accelerate in its decline?
Only time will tell.

My brain is on fire
With images of my mother as she paces the floor,
Trying to contact her own mother who's forgotten how to charge
a phone.

A grandmother who prays we will just show up at her door.
But she's in another country far away.
We must save up day by day,
Just to see her face.

My brain is on fire,
With guilt and fear that I'm seeing my future played out.
I'm predisposed and already ill.
Is it catching beyond a shadow of a doubt?
I fear I'll never see my own trees again,
If I'm put away, no, when.
Is my tree already splintered?





My Grandfather's War

Christine Caprio

York, Maine - United States

The edge of your bed gives beneath the weight
of the photo album I lay at your feet
on top of the rumpled blankets.

I do not want to disturb the peace of sleep
that has settled on your long, frail body
like a warm quilt.

I look for a moment at your closed eyes, your tousled white hair
and I wonder what you are dreaming of right now.

Are these the moments when your memories,
cautious and furtive as stray cats,
let you see them?

I'm a perched gargoyle in a rickety chair
between the window and the bed
the photo album is streaked with dust
from years of standing, unopened and forgotten,
in the little back bedroom of your house.

I retrieve the book from where it waits for your attention.
Today we will practice a strategy, as the nurses called it.
Memory immersion of one sort or another.

While you doze in the dapple of sunbeams across your bed,
I idly turn the pages,
soft protestations crackle from the album's spine.
Each image is held by glue and time.

I pause at one page, holding it mid-turn,
to look at a younger you looking back at me.
Your sailor's hat is askew, cockeyed and daring,
dipping downward toward your impish grin.
Your pose is relaxed and loose.
This is you in the War.

When you wake up, I'll listen
as you tell me again about the coffee.
I'll nod along in mock surprise
while you recount how you and other sailors
smuggled coffee grounds hidden in clean white socks
And tucked clandestinely in your sailors' blues—
because the French loved American coffee
and you could sell it for enough money
to pay for leave on shore.
I'll smile, impressed,
while you recall the long hours onboard the *Lucky Ludlow*,
gazing with trepidation or with awe at the roiling indigo seas.
She was a lucky ship.
You will be sure to remind me.
And don't I know?
You always played her number—438—
every week in the lottery
because you knew those numbers were sure
to come through again.

I continue turning pages,
the photo album telling your story
while you continue to embrace the oblivion
that comes with the sleep of the old.

Here you are, holding an infant version of me.
You are decked out in a pink shirt,
you are wearing wingtip shoes.

Here we are, holding hands by the huge elm in your backyard.
I am wearing a flowered dress
and patent leather shoes.

I pause.
This must have been a Sunday.
We'd always walked on Sundays
leaving the porch to sag in silence,
gently sighing after lunch.
How long had it been
since we were able to walk together?
The last time I saw your lawn,
it ambled, weedy and haphazard, along the brook,
and you shuffled beside me in a slow swagger,
smiling that wet, distant grin of age.

We walked your yard to listen for the planes.
Small, twin-engines brightly painted, striped and sleek,
their low, tumbling buzz creasing the plush fabric
of blue sky and summer clouds.
They flew overhead, emerging finally
from behind trees or houses

low enough for us to read their names.
The colors would race ahead of sound,
until all traces of the planes had gone
and the sky would fold in on itself.

I remember.

You never understood my sadness at their leaving,
the rhythmic fading of their engine noise
dipping beneath the horizon.
You liked to guess where they were going
You told me to not miss where they had been.

From my reverie I hear you stirring in the bed;
you are saying something pretty
that started in your mind minutes ago.
It becomes vocal and trails off into a jumbled silence.
Your eyes flash open and I can tell as your lips smile
around the nickname that only you call me
that today is a good day.

Today, you will talk to me about the War.
We will look through old photos.
You will be here, in this room
but also there, in those memories.
And it will be OK
because today there will be enough of you to share.

Tomorrow a battle will rage.
Or maybe tonight.
Where am I?
Why am I here?

I want to go home?

2 am.

3 am.

4 am.

You'll call our house.

And call again.

And again.

It will be the same sad battle.

You won't know your enemies' names,

but you will fear them all the same.

Our family will huddle in our foxhole of anguish

waiting for the ceasefire in your addled mind.

For now, we sail together into stories of the War.

We are in the Mediterranean.

We are on the deck of the *Lucky Lud*,

shells exploding as plumes of angry water

all around us, *never* on us

We share a content laugh at our good fortune

We wipe bittersweet tears from the corners of our eyes.

I won't leave until you drift again into sleep,

until the afternoon sun begins its retreat,

letting evening rush the borders of day.



Socks

Catherine Martin

Ahwahnee, California - United States

Wandering halls, rooms, and dreams
Lost in a haze
Eighty years line her face like a maze

Fuzzy, warm, thin, and thick
White, tan, blue, and black

The number one pick
The familiar hunt begins

In pockets, on the highest shelf, under the sink
Sock piles swell

“These need to be cleaned as well!”

In the garden, many blooms
White, tan, blue, and black

The fog continues to loom
Frail and gentle hands carefully pick

Now a vase in the home full of cotton blitz
A textile love fills the room

A woman named Cinder
Who sits in her chair

So soft, so sweet
Her perfect porcelain teeth

She lets out a chuckle
Looking at her cold bare feet

“A sock I must find!”

“A sock I must hide!”

Fuzzy, warm, thin, and thick
Always the number one pick



Stone Circle

Austin Dunnahue

Red Oak, Texas - United States

I wonder where my grandfather went
when he became non-communicative.

did he go to the small stone circle he built
with his own hand—some quasi-colonial henge

somewhere a stretch further back his muttering would divulge,
I now existed as figures of some unabashed past.

In waning afternoons,
where momentous men grapple on
the summits of lucidity,
where playing spectator to the worst form of sport,
I learned how to mourn a man I could still see.





The Bank Accounts

Marjorie Stuckle

New York, New York State - United States

*Remember how COVID made everything a little harder?
Even the simple act of cashing a check at the local bank?*

I walked to my neighborhood bank as I often did, on Saturday mornings. The streets were quiet since many stores in my neighborhood were closed during COVID. However, the bank was open—appointments only. Waiting for my time slot, a teller waved his hand and yelled across the lobby in a shrill voice, “You! Come now. Hurry!”

Presenting my bank card to this teller—a short, balding, middle-aged fellow wearing thick glasses—he said my card was invalid. “This is my card, there must be a mistake.”

“The account is closed,” he said. Even though he wore a mask, I could see the irritation in his eyes.

He must be mistaken. He must be new to this job. Perhaps he didn’t understand me. I raised my mask above my lips. “I want to access my savings account.”

He warily looked me over. “It is closed too. You have no money at this bank.”

“And the credit card?”

“There is no credit card account.” The teller looked at me with suspicion. I asked for the manager. “Managers do not work on Saturdays.”

“I must have been hacked; I must have been hacked,” I insisted. He was sweating, rubbing his forehead and looking around as if he was going to call for help, not for me but against me. My head was pounding and I thought I might faint.

He handed me a number on a card and circled it. “Go home and call the fraud division,” he said. I tried to focus. I did not want to seem like an idiot, or a crazy person, or worse, a criminal. I walked out of the bank and then ran the three blocks to my apartment. I passed the supermarket, the nail salon, Starbucks so quickly I almost tripped on the uneven cement sidewalk. When I entered my NYC apartment building, our doorman looked at me curiously. “Are you all right?” I nodded to him, yes.

But I was not.

I felt I was living out a scene from the *Twilight Zone*. In my apartment, I opened the bank app on my computer. My accounts had disappeared. I dialed the number the teller had given to me, and heard a voice repeat the same questions over and over, with no inflection. I repeated my account numbers in response. “Where are my accounts?” I frantically asked.

I collapsed on my sofa, my hand shaking as I clutched my phone and explained that my elderly friend also had money in my accounts, much much more money than me. Now I was horrified, worried about her funds as well. “Go to the bank on Monday to meet with a manager.”

Panic set in.

Before COVID, my friend proposed that we link our accounts, giving us both access. It made sense. I was much younger; we were best friends for many years. “ If anything happens to me, if I become ill, pay my bills. Ok?”

She had been a great mentor to me in the past. In recent years, even before COVID, I took care of anything, almost everything that was important to her: difficult interpersonal situations, weekly shopping, and driving her to medical appointments. I was a daughter to her, a very good daughter.

If all accounts were closed, then were her funds missing as well? What had I done? Could it be that I created this mess by using too weak a password, or maybe I left my online banking account open too long?

I sat alone on my sofa, staring out the window, ruminating as that Saturday dragged on. I felt so alone. I needed to reach out, to expose this situation. I craved a tiny taste of compassion. But I hesitated to call my friend and worry her.

By the end of the afternoon, I gave in to my anxiety. Since we were restrained by the COVID pandemic, I could not visit her. I had not seen her in person in many months.

When I called to reveal what happened, she just listened. Looking at the teller’s card, I dialed a 3-way call to the fraud department so we could both be on the line. The representative in the fraud department heard the story and directed us to speak to the bank manager on Monday. “Wait till Monday”—again?

I noticed that while we were on the call, my friend did not sound anxious. I certainly was.

And then all of a sudden, she said in a never-heard-before haughty tone: “I wanted to take my funds back.” She sounded strange. “I changed my mind.” The bank representative quietly listened. He said that now he was free to explain (since she was on the phone

too) that my friend was responsible for the removal of all of her money and mine. She instructed the bank to transfer all the monies in both of our accounts to a new individual account, causing all of my accounts to be closed.

My friend was silent, until a lone, child-like giggle escaped, her only response. She giggled again. She had never done that in the past. Never. Slowly, I realized what I had been refusing to acknowledge all through the weeks of COVID when we were physically separated. Dementia had begun. I had not wanted to know I was losing my best friend during COVID.

The bank representative advised me to meet with the manager on Monday to have my funds returned into new checking, saving and credit card accounts, in my name only. I did.

After COVID, as we re-engaged face to face, it was clear my friend had left me. She recalled the bank event and angrily blamed me for the transfer of funds.

When I think back to those days of COVID, I remember the problem with my bank account, how I thought I had lost all of my money. But that was easily repaired.

It is much worse now to remember my friend losing her mind.





The Slipshod King

Scott Jonathan Nixon

Prague - Czech Republic

The Slipshod King
once derailed trams by
stubbing cigarette butts
on the street tracks
as he coughed up
a leaping heart.
So, he's given up smoking.

His crown, a houndstooth
scaly cap stains
scars on his noggin.
His throne, porcelain,
Ideal Standard.

His reign falls short
of the sovereignty
of big cigars,
embroidered fantails
and last month's newspapers.

At times, he's a man-about-town
dressed in a tattered tuxedo
and Darth Vader helmet,
strutting his stuff to the sounds
of Tin Pan Alley
and full-tilt boogie.

Other times, he's the lowest man
on the totem pole, gazing
into a black bauble
on the ceiling of
a looney bin in Bohnice.¹

What he's seen in the abyss
he cannot say except for
the viper staring at him
until he spits on the floor
while being strapped to a table
and the snake's eyes disappear.

A crooked-nosed knave,
a flop-doodle, a muck-spout
he's been called,
shaking profusely
at the backfires
of a Bolshie jalopy
and the ringing bells
of a passing velocipede.

1 A Czech psychiatric hospital in the northern neighborhood of Prague.

Poor devil in
a mouse-colored coat
or a wolf gussied up
in a woolen monkey suit,
not even he can tell
as he nods in solidarity
to the Bohemians in bloody shirts
at Malostranské Náměstí
and bows to street urchins
who applaud him under gaslights.

The only emperor is
the emperor of 31 Flavors.

All that he carries in
his pockets are a box of matches
to light ladies' cigarettes,
a Trojan in case he
ever gets lucky instead of
a Blue Ball Backrub,
a stack of business cards
for every opportunity
that knocks him dead,
and a penknife with red ink
to defend what he's written.

Things aren't as bad as they look.
They're much worse.
Having been in danger once,
and all the way to the end,
he can go no further

without becoming
singular as a superhero.

A tear in the eye is worth
Two in the bush over how
he should play his part
by giving 'em back the fist,
giving 'em the wrist,
and giving 'em the finger.



To Françoise

JM Kehoe

Ottawa, Ontario - Canada

You were the love of my life
I'm not sure when I lost you

The disease works slow
but it is methodical

First came the paranoia
and everyday it lashed me

Then the forgetfulness
almost turning me paranoiac

Then the confusion and anger
at me, painfully—but I knew

Then, briefly, the understanding
oh, how it killed me to see you break

Then the wistfulness
together we learned silence

When I met you, you
had started my life anew

So, don't tarry too much, my dear,
for now, now I wait for you



Vinyl

Kacey Willow

Nanaimo, British Columbia - Canada

You remember the house
the farm, the animals,
but that's not where you live anymore.

is it? wait,
where do you live then?

and where has everyone gone? It's just the three of you now.
Kevin is coming tomorrow,
oh, but the other two went to the store,
right, right

and it's just pouring outside, isn't it?
oh no, no, that's just dirt on the windows
of the house, with the farm, the animals,
but that's not where you live anymore

is it?

Kevin is coming tomorrow,
should pick you up around lunchtime
but what? they said you were trying to kill Kevin just yesterday
no way, that couldn't be true, or at least you can't remember.

speaking of which

where is everyone else now?

Kevin should be coming tomorrow, he told you he would,
oh, and the two are just at the store now,
you hope they make it okay in the rain out there,
but what? dirt? oh, you see, it's not rain

and who tried to kill who? no, that doesn't make sense,
Kevin shouldn't be here until around lunchtime tomorrow
anyways,
then you can go back to the house

You remember the house.



Who Is Here Today?

Erica Berquist

Towson, Maryland - United States

Here. Here is yellow wallpaper, cheerfully peeling in places,
adorned with prints of mundane paintings
holding places on the common walls.
These are the shared walls, not my own walls that I decorate
with my photographs and my newspaper clippings.

Nodding to the man in the wheelchair
driving past me, I push my walker forward.
I don't think I knew that man, though he smiled at me
in a friendly manner. He would have spoken
if we were well acquainted, though my ears
aren't very good. I hope I can hear
when I find the person I'm looking for.
My in-law? My daughter married his son,
and he lives down the hall from me.
I see my name outside my door—what's my name,
all the aides here expect me to ask,
but I know my name, and I know his name too.
I walk several doors down, but only see women's names.

My knees don't want to bend.
My feet crunch with every step.
I find a chair and my muscles tremble in relief
when I sit, though I always wonder
if this will be the last time I've stood;
I am not ready to spend my days in a wheelchair, yet.

Looking around, I realize my in-law does not live here.
He was here once; he brought me my newspaper every day.
And then... he died. I remember being disappointed.
We weren't close, but we knew each other.
We joked about the gossip every time he came
to my room, since not everyone knew we were family,
and then the man I knew was gone.
Checked out after a head injury, and then
he must have died, since he's not here.
I remember thinking he gave up. Remember resenting him.

He wasn't the finest example of man,
but I do have high standards—I married a fine man,
a soldier, not a man who ever gave up.
My in-law enlisted in the same war,
but spent it in a prison camp, so it isn't a wonder
that he died before his time.
No, he was no fighter.

And he was not the person I rose today to meet.
Finding encouragement in this thought, I stand.
I ride the elevator to the first floor,
thinking along the way about the person I must meet.
“What is the date?”

Someone answers, and I know this isn't the day
I normally see my children.

"Does Hilda live here?"

Several Hildas do, but the last names helpfully provided
are unfamiliar. I find another chair.

Hilda doesn't live here.

We grew up together, grew old together,
but we did not die together—she's not here
and I can't remember when she died, but something deep
within me recognizes this as a fact.

How... have I managed to go on without her?

I suppose because I'm not a quitter,
but Hilda wasn't either; maybe a determination
to spit in the face of death doesn't make all the difference.

"*I knew you!*" says a quavering voice.

I meet a woman's eyes, and they are excited
Though they are sunken into her wrinkled face.

"From where? I'm sorry."

"*We worked at the club together.*

By the Harbor. We entertained the troops."

"I know the Harbor well, but I was married
by the war, and I left the state. What club?"

"*By the Harbor. We were good friends.*"

"Maybe we'll be good friends again." I pat her hand,
and it is even bonier than mine. My knuckles are large
and some refuse to bend, but hers are hot with arthritis,
her skin bright pink with it. Smiling,
she clutches my hand despite what must be pain,
and she tells me all about the club

I have never seen.

Who is here today?

The woman clutching my hand,
but I have just met her, so I didn't rise today to meet her.
I've seen aides, but they come when I press a button—
I did not leave my room to find an aide.
My best friend has died... she was more than a friend,
family. I feel like I am here to find family,
and I expect that I still have many of those
who are living. I look around the room,
finding it empty.
Hadn't someone been here?
Someone squeezes my hand, and I glance
to my companion who has left me.

In her place is a young man.
He has blue eyes and full lips I know are soft.
I scowl at him. "You quitter. You're dead."
*"You said earlier that I was a man
who would never give up, since I was a soldier."*
"Well, that was when I was feeling charitable,
but this is my dream and I'm alone in it
so I can be honest with myself. I could not be
more furious with you. You're my husband,
and you're not here! Why?"
*"I lived as long as most men do, and I had cancer.
I didn't die to abandon you."* He touches my sagging cheek,
and I want to believe him.
"I want you to come back. I'm supposed to be with you,
and I don't know why I'm not."

“You don’t know why you’re alive?” He smiles
when I shake my head. *“You’re still alive because you’re
remarkable. That’s why you’re the only one left
of all the people we knew—you were the best of us.”*
I wave away his comments. *“You’ll never get that stretcher
past me. You were the best one, the one who should be here.”*
“If I was the best, then you made me that way.”
My eyes fill with tears

and I blink away the tears as I yawn.
Someone is holding my limp hand, not noticing
my confusion as she talks about singing to soldiers.
Were we talking? She doesn’t seem to have noted my nap,
and she’s becoming more familiar with each yawn I give.
So I stop yawning. I tighten my hand in her grip,
feeling her respond with an arthritic twitch.
I shut my eyes, but sleep won’t return.
This must be the best I can hope for,
her hand in mine. I’m wishing for the museum piece
when all I’ll ever see are prints, but
they are nice imitations when the truth
is unattainable. I clasp this hand,
but feel my husband’s instead.

Acknowledgement

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Poeticmoment

In my opinion since technology has become the new normal today, it's cited a silent calling of the times to bring along a shift. This tilt is causing an upsurge of nervous disorders, neurological conditions and diseases associated with the nerves.

As I believe this era demands an excess of nerve function aka electric activity, beyond what is designed to be the natural capacity of one's body. Which in turn is leading to a phenomenon rife in an imbalance, speculated to have a majority who lack the ability to think.

Except those with abnormal developments, circumstances: futuristically speaking, threaten. Threaten the human race where Dementia may become a normal state of being, tomorrow.

A Few Of Our Authors

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