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# Singular

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contents of performance art show

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# Story Telling

Your see, my mom, eleven years ago  
had breast cancer  
and the three girls  
flew to visit her at her home  
across the country  
and mom felt bad  
that she couldn't make our trip better  
because she just found out  
she had cervical cancer too

but we couldn't have come  
at a better time  
and so she had procedures  
she had surgeries  
and she had a radical hysterectomy  
and then... the cancer was gone  
she was in the clear

so for a decade  
she went to the doctor  
and they found no cancer in her  
and all seemed well  
she had beaten  
a killer

###

when I was almost killed  
in a car accident  
and I had head trauma  
no fractured bones,  
except my skull  
they never told me  
just my family  
but not me, the patient  
that I'm expected  
to have a seizure  
within six months of my accident

I had a grand mal seizure  
seven months after  
I was almost killed

no one explained to me  
what was happening  
and I had to figure it out  
as I went along

###

well, a decade after  
her bouts with cancer  
she went to the doctor again,  
had a fever, felt tired  
and they said,  
well, it's funny,  
you've got all the symptoms  
and most women who have had  
as much cancer in their history  
as you've had  
well, you're likely to have  
leukemia

and so she did

and when she found out  
at her home in south west Florida  
mom and dad traveled to  
University of Chicago Hospital  
(they're a good hospital, you know)  
and she had her chemo,  
lost her hair  
and *then* the doctors said she was in remission

now, this leukemia is a tricky thing  
cancer of the blood  
versus cancer of an organ  
it was easier when you could  
just remove an organ

and leave it at that  
but this was cancer in her blood  
and the cancer crept into her bone marrow  
and they had to periodically  
drill into her hip bone  
for a bone marrow biopsy  
to see if there was any cancer  
in her bone marrow

fun job,  
drilling into her hip bone

you wonder why there are so many  
hip replacement surgeries now  
well, look at how doctors test now

well anyway, the doctors said  
she was actually in remission  
but because this cancer-of-the-blood thing  
was tricky  
they're going to give her  
another round of chemo  
just to be on the safe side  
    because you know, if people  
    don't go through this extra round  
    of chemo  
    the leukemia is more likely to come back

so mom took the chemo  
and she recovered  
at my sister's house  
until she was well enough  
to go back home  
and recoup in her own home

I visited her in her recoup time  
just shy of my parent's fifty sixth  
wedding anniversary  
and when her hair grew back  
after the chemo  
it grew back curly  
and she wore a little white hat,  
curling the ends of her new short hair  
around her little cap  
.  
she looked so cute

mom would work in the mornings  
run errands, get groceries  
and by lunchtime she would be tired  
so she'd watch her soap operas

but who can blame her,  
she's still recovering  
from all the chemo Hell  
she went through

all of her neighbors said,  
it's amazing how well she's doing  
after all she's gone through

###

well, one month after I left from visiting  
mom started to feel tired,  
feverish  
so dad took her to the doctor  
and they said,  
Silly us,  
she wasn't in remission  
they wanted to put her in hospice care immediately  
but mom and dad went back  
to the University of Chicago hospitals

a different chemo for mom this time  
so she won't lose her hair  
but after she went through the chemo again  
they found no change in her condition

and then they said,  
“you've got two choices:  
because you're immune to chemo now  
you can go for experimental treatments,  
or you can decide to stop treatment”

she said,  
“I don't want hospitals anymore”  
so she made her choice

and the doctors said  
she had two to six months to live  
maybe as long as a year  
and I said to her  
    as she was getting platelets  
    at the Hospital,  
“When your father had cancer,  
doctors gave him six months to live.  
How long did he live?”  
and she said  
six years  
so this was something  
she could beat  
we Bakutis  
    come from a strong stock  
we can do anything

I know we can

# Wither Away

saw my mother today  
am getting used to seeing her sleeping

called hours before I came over  
“sure, we should be here,” my sister said  
“she’s napping now”  
so she should be awake when I got there

and they had game shows on tv  
one called Lingo, I think  
and mom’s eyes were opening  
and closing  
over and over again

she should be feeling better now, I think  
she should be on the road  
to getting home  
and feeling more at peace with her life

I gestured to say good bye today  
told mom that I didn’t know if she’d be leaving  
to go back home before this weekend  
so this is the last chance I might see her

but I could visit her at home  
if that’s okay with her

and she said  
“I don’t want you to me me wither away”  
and I said,  
“mom,  
we want to see you,  
we love you”  
and I kissed her arm  
and her forehead

and I did my best to not cry

wither away, she says  
even if I see her for weeks  
months  
years  
lying on the couch  
falling in and out of sleep  
my memories of her will not wither away  
the things she has given me  
will not wither away  
and my love for her will not wither away

it won't  
I promise

*(from "Story Telling")*

well, I don't think she wanted to fight  
I think the pain in her bones  
was too strong  
and I think she was tired  
of fighting a battle  
she couldn't win  
so she let it take over

they said two to six months  
and she lived just shy of three

she struggled through it all  
not telling us about her pain

just taking her medicine,  
so to speak  
and hoping everything would just kill her  
and get it over with

and...



# Your Soul is Shaking

can you imagine a water glass  
filled with crystal clear water  
and

I don't know what an earthquake feels like  
but imagine something you have no control over  
starting to shake everything around you  
and

and everything just starts shaking  
and the water in that glass is rippling

and it's starting to splash in its glass  
and you want to hold on to that damn glass  
to make the water stays in place  
but you're shaking with that glass  
and

you don't want anything to fall apart  
you see everything around  
unexpectedly start shaking  
like everything's about to tear in half  
and

you watch the rippling of the water  
and you realize  
that your soul is shaking like that too

# Seven Ten, Seven Twenty

received a phone call today  
“this is Hazel in Naples  
your dad can’t talk right now”

it was probably around seven twenty  
Central Standard Time  
and she told me  
my mother died  
about ten minutes ago

dad got on the phone  
said I’m the only child he called

my husband watches me  
as I listen to the news

my mother has died  
and my father is falling apart  
a thousand miles away

I  
I tell him I’m sorry  
I don’t know what else to say

I rested my hands  
on the arm rests of my desk chair  
everything suddenly felt very heavy

I didn’t want to lift my hands,  
my fingers

it’s almost as if  
after I heard  
I’m too numb to cry

I’ve been crying enough before she left  
and the tears will come later

trust me

# *Knelt and Cried*

I waited at my father's house for a while  
so we could go to my mother's services  
well, they weren't services  
she didn't want that  
but dad thought the kids would want  
to see my mother  
before she was cremated  
so there we were, the family  
in ties  
in black dresses  
sitting and waiting  
to go in dad's minivan  
in our little hearse  
to drive us to Fuller Funeral Home

we were in the car  
and my husband in the far back seat  
and he knew I was sad  
he sensed I was crying  
while the hearse took us to the funeral parlour  
and he reached his hand forward  
to take my hand  
to touch my shoulder,  
to something

and I couldn't see his face  
but his hand  
was a grave consolation  
as our hearse rolled on  
to our chance to say farewell

I was trying not to cry  
in the ride in the hearse  
to the funeral parlour  
I've been a good Marine  
I've been trained to not cry  
but I couldn't help the tears at that point  
and I did my best to stifle them  
so no one would consider my faltering emotions

we had to take two separate cars  
and we were greeted when we arrived  
and we asked where to go  
and they pointed the way

and I think we were all afraid  
to go into that room

to see her

well, I can't speak for anyone else  
I know I was afraid  
afraid of what I'd see  
afraid of

afraid of I don't know what  
afraid of seeing how she looked  
afraid of the finality of it all  
just afraid

so, I'm the littlest one  
of course I let everyone else go in before me  
and we walked in  
and there were many seats  
for the Funeral Home's usual larger services  
and you could see her face,  
asleep,  
peeking out of the coffin in the distance  
and we all just instinctively sat down

dad finally walked to her  
and knelt before her coffin

we watched him  
watch her  
pray for her  
talk to her

he was with her  
and we all wanted that with her  
one more time  
one sister went next,  
knelt  
cried  
then a brother  
then another brother  
and I watched a procession of family members  
and  
and my husband asked  
if I wanted him to go with me  
when I walked up to see my mother  
and I thought,  
no, I need to do this on my own

you see, we had to decide before today  
what my mother would wear for the services  
what she'd be burned in  
what ashes would remain with her forever  
and we chose the dress she wore to my wedding

so I finally walked up to her  
knelt before her  
looked at her  
and thought she looked so beautiful  
she looked so peaceful

she looked like she was sleeping

and I hadn't seen her that peaceful in a long time  
every time I came to visit her  
since the disease started  
she always looked tired when she was awake  
otherwise she was asleep and looked fitful in her rest

and the earrings we picked for her to wear  
were so dainty and so lovely  
and the dress was so nice  
and she looked so peaceful  
and that's all I could keep thinking  
that she looked so well rested  
that she was just taking a good nap  
and she would be just fine

###

I looked at my mother  
one last time  
these were my final words to her face  
this would be the last time I saw her

make it good, girl  
you're the one with the words  
tell her the meaning of all of this  
in fifty words or less

all I could say to her  
was that I loved her  
and I told her that I hope  
that I carry on any of her kindness  
because that's the way she'll live on  
because the world is filled with so much hate  
and losing her  
makes the world a worse place

people have told me that I am kind  
that I am nice  
and I only hope I can do you justice  
that I can somehow make this world a better place

like you did

I only hope that I can do the world justice  
because the world needs you now, mom  
and you had to leave us

so what do we do now

before I left her  
I started to run my hands along my chest  
into a cross  
because I wanted all of the spirits to know  
that you are there  
and that you are to be welcomed  
because you are blessed  
even if it's only from the likes of me

# The Good Ones

once I'm back in Florida now,  
at my mother's house  
where everyone on these little streets  
knows everyone's name  
and everyone likes my mom  
because she's such a sweet woman  
well, every time I walk down the streets here now  
it seems that over half of the people I pass  
have to stop to tell me they are sorry about my mom

and you get used to hearing that  
I mean,  
not that it doesn't mean anything  
or anything  
but everyone is sorry she's gone

but one woman hugged me  
and said  
"they always take the good ones"

and that's when I started to react  
that's when I was just about ready to cry  
because yes,  
they do always take the good ones  
and it made me that much more sad  
and it made me that much more angry  
to know the injustice of it all

she didn't smoke  
she took care of her husband  
and her five children  
she was so sweet  
and tried to make everyone  
as content as they could possibly be



and she fought with breast cancer  
and then cervical cancer  
and she fought those cancer attacks, and won

you'd think she had gone through enough  
for crimes she didn't commit  
but, you know, cancer doesn't fight fair  
so later cancer struck back by not attacking an organ  
but all of her blood instead

I know she's a strong woman  
but how could any one woman  
fight every cell coarsing through her body

so yeah, it's unfair  
it's completely unjust  
I want to kill someone for doing this to her  
someone has to be held accountable  
because it makes no sense  
and she's one of the good ones  
and she really shouldn't have been taken  
I hate them for putting her through this Hell  
and I hate them for leaving us to grieve this way  
I don't care who you are  
but I hate you

(from "Story Telling")

###

and now I sit and write this story  
and my father is sleeping  
in front of the tv  
in his lounge chair next to me  
    he says it's more comfortable there  
    to fall asleep  
and I'm listening to his breathing  
while he sleeps  
and I hear him panting  
every thirty seconds  
while he sleeps  
like he's having nightmares  
about it all still

and as I tell this story  
there's still a panic in the air  
even while we sleep

# *A Little Angel Inside*

it seems strange,  
that on the day the towers fell five years ago  
where every television station and newspaper  
is praising our resolve for all of the death  
that has been forced upon us  
well, it seems strange  
that 9/11 is the day the death certificates  
became available from Fuller Funeral Home  
and this is the day we pick up my mother's ashes

seems eerily strange

so they came to us with a neatly packaged  
cardboard box of mom

and Kristina from Fuller Funeral Home  
even handed me a small maroon bag  
tied tightly shut  
and she whispered to me,  
“these are your mother's earrings”

I knew the dress we chose for her  
the dress she wore to my wedding  
would be burned with her in her cremation  
but it never occurred to me  
that the earring would survive

and here they are,  
in a little velour bag for me  
like how people try to keep something  
from the fall of the World Trade centers  
who lived through that horrendous day on 9/11  
well, I think, maybe this is what I'll keep

if anyone argues about them  
I'll say,  
I lost her dress  
from my wedding  
for the cremation  
so these earrings are a gift to me now  
sorry

I know, they're clip-on earrings  
and they're not real diamonds  
but they are three pretty little stones  
today, tomorrow and forever  
and they look so dainty and delicate  
and they're a good token for me to remember her

when we left Fuller Funeral Home today  
dad carried the paperwork, the death certificates  
and I carried mom with us  
in her little containers  
and I think I held that little red bag  
like there was a little angel inside  
and I had to be delicate  
to make sure nothing happened to it  
because I was it's keeper now  
I'll treat it well  
and treasure it always  
I promise

# Just Let Her Rest

it was heavy  
heavy the way I felt  
after I let the news sink in  
that my mother just died

my sister told me to take mom's ashes

ashes of her coffin,  
and ashes of the dress she wore to my wedding

the ashes were so heavy

so we were at Fuller Funeral Home today  
and we asked if the ashes were ready

they brought mom to us  
in a container, sealed tightly

along with all the necessary paperwork  
to prove that yes,  
these are my mother's ashes  
this is really it

and I carried mom out to the car  
with my dad  
so we could bring mom home  
one more time

we got back to her house,  
and she's resting on my bed right now  
all tightly wrapped up  
like she was covered, in a blanket  
because she used to get cold

there are a few polyester/  
cotton button-down tops  
we keep in the hallway closet  
you know, for additional warmth  
for mom

we kept them in the closet still  
because the kids visit  
and I've even been wearing one of them  
because I get cold  
in the dad's air conditioning  
in the Everglades afternoons here

we keep some of these things around  
like her crocheted blankets  
because she'd get cold sometimes

and maybe I can think  
she's resting now on my bed  
her ashes in plastic  
like a blanket around her  
to keep her warm, and to keep her together

###

I probably sound delirious  
talking this way  
but saying these things  
makes it easier to handle right now

I don't want to think  
that my mother's remains  
are now only ashes  
in a plastic bag  
closed with a little white twist-tie  
in a cardboard box  
on top of my bed

I don't want to think of it that way  
really

I'd rather think  
she's resting now  
before I bring her back  
to where she used to live

she's my mom  
I even just had to put her  
under the blankets  
you know,  
    with a little room at the top  
her her head  
wherever it may be

I even had to  
    put my arms around her  
like I wanted to do  
while she was still alive,  
dying  
so I even put my arms around her  
and cried

so give her a rest  
she's needed it for so long  
just let her rest

# Singular by Janet Kuypers



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