

## LOVE

4 AM

It's such a lonely time. Who thought that placing a wall clock opposite a bed bound patient was a good idea? I can actually watch the seconds of my life ticking away.

The world is asleep and only the sights and sounds in my immediate vicinity remind me I have company. The chatter of the machines, the swooshing of the pump and the irritating beep beep of the monitors form a cacophony of rhythmic but soulless sounds. Maybe I'm not alive, maybe I'm in a metauniverse between life and death. I try to summon gratitude and hope but only manage irritation. I should be pleased, I should be thankful, but the sound of these machines, these sentinels of health remind me of jazz and I hate jazz. It's self indulgent and rambles on note by note, until the musicians or the listener falls asleep.

I decide to take stock of my current situation in an effort to while away the boredom and promote happy thoughts. That's another irritating piece of advice 'When you are in pain, just imagine you are in your happy place and think happy thoughts.' Yes, like it's that easy. I take another look at the machines and decide quickly that their empathy is not hard wired. The digital monitors showing wavy lines and ever-changing numbers appear to be doing their best to make me nauseous.

So, starting with my head. All OK there, although a random tear decides to flow down my cheek as I attend my own pity party. Shoulders and chest present and correct, if you discount the heart monitor tabs that are sticky and sore; two cannulas in my right arm with a drip pushing fluids in and a blood pressure cuff on my left arm inflating and squeezing my skin like some manic lover. The highlight though, must be the catheter, taking away bodily fluids to be measured. The sensation of passing urine into a tube is just unpleasant and feels unnatural. My legs and feet just lie there, unused, and useless in my current situation. I feel tethered to the world via tubes and wires, much like an astronaut on a spacewalk, but without the media attention. Right, there is something to be grateful for, the lack of public interest in my current state. I know that what is happening to me feels deeply personal but is a common occurrence in hospitals up and down the country. The staff are professional and capable but I have never felt so vulnerable and alone and this is unfamiliar territory. I am used to being in charge, making my own decisions. As a single parent I've had to be independent and I started a successful multi-million-pound business at my kitchen table.

But I can't buy or negotiate myself out of this. There is only one answer and I'm not sure it's the right thing to do.

I feel more tears appear and start to worry that I could upset my fluid imbalance if I cry, let alone the worry of choking on my own tears. Sniffing, I sigh, just as a nurse appears.

'Hi how are you feeling? '

I bite back the retort that after 3 years of training, that's the best she can come up with? Instead, I mutter 'OK, thanks.' She checks the infernal machines and presses buttons,

demonstrating her superiority over them, whereas I am just tethered, she is Mission Control.

She gently wipes my eyes and nose with a tissue and this simple gesture starts me weeping again. And then she does something amazing; she holds my hand and smiles at me, as though she really sees me.

'It will all seem better in the morning. Everything is going ahead. All the signs are good. The middle of the night is when you can let your imagination run riot, especially if you can't sleep. I've increased your medication so that should help.' She continues to talk in a low, warm tone that sounds like honey would, if it had a voice.

I can't keep my eyes open and I drift.

Some hours later I am woken by a team of intruders who surround my bed, discussing me and my case at some length. I am not invited to attend this discussion and feign sleep, reminiscent of numerous board meetings, although easier as I can keep my eyes closed during this session. They are all men and all sound mightily pleased with themselves and their 'planned approach.' I have nothing useful to add and they disperse having reassured me loudly that the action would start at 11am.

I feel both scared and relived but I must let this happen now. Choices were removed from me little by little in the previous months as my body let me down. I've paid for the best, so now I had to put my trust in them.

Suddenly the door opens and my whole reason for living walks in. Bright and beautiful, my daughter lights up the world simply by being in it. How did I produce such an amazing young woman?

'I bet you didn't sleep at all did you Mum? You were awake half the night looking at all the options and deciding you couldn't go through with it.'

Yes, I was awake and you're correct, I can't let you do this.'

'Do what? It's just a kidney. You gave me life 25 years ago and now it's my turn to return the favour. You know how hard choosing a gift is for you? It's nearly your birthday so that's solved a problem for me. And I don't even have to gift wrap it. I need you in my life and this way, we have all the control, as always. Do you concur?'

My daughter, the lawyer, can argue that this wonderful gift is just like any other.

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