

# SEE THESE STARS

By Adam Kelly Morton

**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *A woman dying of cancer (actually, the starvation imposed by her ravaged cells) reflects upon her life as lover, mother and wife and the three men who animated and stirred it. This is a cry from the heart that tears apart the fragile myths we construct to protect ourselves and we cannot help being drawn into her story and affected by her words. Her dying moment is one the strongest last lines in any of the fiction we have so far published. It's also a technical triumph: a three and a half page story comprised of a single sentence inspired by Moll Bloom's immortal soliloquy in Joyce's Ulysses. But in the author's capable hands, Candace's elegiac stream of conscious is not so much dreamlike as tragically clear-headed. The writing is so beautiful, the voice so layered, we really want to quote everything but will limit ourselves to: ' it broke through the skin surface, a lesion of bloody stuff that looked like coral.' And, '...and it's just Pierre and me, and there's just a simple, almost red kind of feeling, that comes in behind my eyes and takes Pierre away for the moment, loyal Pierre.' Five stars.*

## See These Stars

I wish Pierre would stop shaking me—in my cherrywood, empire bed, warm duvet with rose pattern, May light making its way through the rain onto the yellow rug (that's been here since I bought the house with *him* in 1979) and my acidosis smell of rotten apple Cutex (which I won't miss at all)—because there's just no hope of stopping the cells from growing, first in my left, where Christopher preferred to nurse (probably because it was closer to my heart, the milk warmer) and now growing in other places I haven't told him because I want to protect him, though I know he'll miss me—my son the actor, just what I wanted—though there's no crescendo of applause at the final curtain, no white tunnel, no fade to black, no *Gone with the Wind* "Frankly, my dear," no "Tomorrow is another day,"

and if I am Scarlett, then I suppose *he* was Rhett: plain old Larry Mill from Arnprior, Ontario, textile dyer, *his* chemical smell from the coloured yarn, his few wisps of brown hair and slate-blue eyes, oh how he swooned me with his small-town charms, and we were happy here, in our Montreal home, and I suppose he did love Christopher—all pumpkin haired with his father's eyes—who could have been Dr. Christopher Maigris-Mill, renowned actor and healer, winning his Oscar while curing his very own mother, miraculously restoring her appetite—because I never refused a good *filet mignon méditerranée* from the Caverne Grecque restaurant (where I had my first date with Pierre, the first of many) with a bottle of *Notre Vin Maison* red, then home to white from the four-litre box, never too much (just enough to be pleasant) in our beige-tiled kitchen, my scarlet bathrobe, watching Mae West on the little black and white television, "What a dump," just sipping, though I know when he was a teenager Christopher sometimes found me passed out in the kitchen, and helped me to bed, I know that upset him, but with Pierre snoring like an aircraft, why even that I'll miss, along with his moustache, (I dyed it black for him whenever it began to grey—Larry had a moustache too, maybe I was a little obsessed with Rhett Butler) and his wire-rimmed glasses (looking ever-so-much the mathematician, Larry didn't wear glasses, though I think he does now, for that redhead who looks just like me, though much younger, at eighty-five pounds I weigh less than her now *so there*) I'm sure Pierre already misses how I was gorgeous once, (and will be again once they burn me into a discreet, cherrywood urn, leaving nothing but fabulous photographs of me behind, and Pierre knows I don't want to be put in the ground) though I wish he'd stop shaking me, it's so humiliating—at the funeral everyone will remember me only by my Polaroids, oh, I was always ready to pose for a Polaroid, (they will

remember my sultry days) my breasts were the envy of every girl on Esplanade, I was not afraid of *décolleté*, *non non*, scandalous in the 1950s, but they were the Mile End's main attraction, snagging Larry (the pig) and poor Pierre, oh, how I wish he wouldn't cry, it's about to happen and he's helpless (so am I, I suppose) because it has grown so much; it's not even what is killing me, it's starvation; I just couldn't get anything down, no matter how hard Pierre and Christopher tried, (in the last few weeks only an Ensure *Café au Lait* or two, I won't miss those either,) oh I wish Christopher were here, I am so proud of him, now taking on acting—his true calling—though my proudest day was when he walked up in front of the McGill university great hall and handed his Bachelor of Science diploma to me, "This is for you, Mom," and the tears rolled down our faces, just like Pierre's now, (I wish he were downstairs working on his math problems so I could be peaceful,) I should have listened to him when I found the first lump, right above my heart, an old milk gland shriveled up, I thought, but it grew, then hurt, years I was afraid to have it checked, seven years: I sat in the kitchen and sipped and watched Garbo, "I want to be alone," it broke through the skin surface, a lesion of bloody stuff that looked like coral, and Pierre begged me to see someone so finally I went in and the first doctor told me, (he had a moustache too, there's an irony there,) by the time I told Christopher it had already spread; he may resent me for it but it was to protect him, I didn't tell him about it spreading to my clavicle, though he must have found out, coming to all my chemotherapy appointments at St. Mary's, I will not miss that room one bit—they try to make it nice with light streaming in through the big windows, and pictures of flowers and children, and apple-green paint for health and nature, but I wasn't fooled for a minute, all those sickly strangers, no privacy, it's all a show—even the handsome, moustachioed, Doctor

Clark, taking me off chemo for a while because I'm not eating enough, fine by me; a few weeks off was what I needed, and the few weeks became a month, then two, now here we are—and Christopher left here this morning to meet some friends downtown, getting on with his life, (I wish I could have lived his life for him, I would have been a great actress,) but now it's happening and it's just Pierre and me, and there's just a simple, almost red kind of feeling, that comes in behind my eyes and takes Pierre away for the moment, loyal Pierre, I will miss our movie nights in the den, I introduced him to Hollywood, and Oscar night champagne and strawberries, (though he always fell asleep before the end,) I will miss our ritual Friday nights of making love, Pierre so careful and gentle, I loved his great weight on top of me... but now the red feeling is bringing me, and it is upsetting Pierre so, but he will move on and meet someone else, (she will never be as charming, or as funny, or as endowed as I was, ha ha,) plus, I cooked him Sunday roasts and baked lasagnas and apple pies, and taught him the world of cinema, like I did for Christopher who will inherit our little house, (paid for by his father, he did *that* much right,) and my little savings, (from Pierre's rent over the years,) oh, my only son: I pray you will have wisdom, and God's blessing, which is all I wanted for you, ever since you were a little boy... I'll be seeing Mama and Papa soon, and they will hold me in their arms and be proud of me too, and Mama will say "You're home now, Candace," and Papa will say "My little girl, the star," because when I was his little girl I wanted all the world to see me, to dazzle the silver screen and sign autographs: Candace May, in red ink, I can see it now, it's just too bad I never made it to Hollywood, to the Chinese Theater, (Hell, I never even made it to the Rialto on Park Avenue,) Pierre is shouting at me but the warmth of the duvet slides down along my cold, thin bones and skin, right down to my

feet... I do wish that Christopher were here for this... I wish he could see these marquee lights before my eyes, as he and I have always been together through everything... and I wish and hope the best for him, but most of all...oh, how I wish... I wish... he could see... these stars.

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *My mom passed away from breast cancer in 2011, and I had to do some writing about it. This piece went through many incarnations before becoming what it is: a single-sentence monologue, inspired by the final chapter of Joyce's Ulysses (60+ pages of stream-of-consciousness from Bloom's wife). I wanted the story to celebrate my mom's phenomenal expressivity, as well as her flair for the dramatic.*

**BIO:** *Adam Kelly Morton is a Montreal-based husband, father (four kids, all six-and-under), acting teacher, gamer, filmmaker, and writer. He has been published in Spelk, The Junction, Anti-Heroin Chic, The Fiction Pool, Open Pen London, and Talking Soup, among others. He has an upcoming piece in A Wild and Precious Life: A Recovery Anthology, to be published in 2020.*