

# *Seven Minutes*

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The nurse says, “Hold your arms above your head. This will take seven minutes.”  
My head begins to tick.

It’s like talk Muzak, the seven-minute weekly phone call between my brother and me. Made out of habit more than concern. Two aging men, the living remnants of a fractured family, checking in to make sure of what, that we’re alive? I play Solitaire on my phone as I listen to a familiar litany of unmet desire, misunderstanding, regret, and as the words drone by I try to think of how to end a chapter or what a dollar is worth against the Euro, and I wonder if I ever loved him. I make polite grunts—*Uh huh, Uh huh, you don’t say, really, yeah sure*—and as the seven minutes dwindle down by silent mutual consent we continue to hold back from saying anything to each other that might actually constitute connection, and then simultaneously we hang up.

The nurse says, “Try not to move, sir. Relax.”

It took me seven minutes to come inside her, my first crush, background music courtesy of The Delphonics, *La La Means I love you* but of course, she didn’t. I was her first Jew, she told me, and I thought, a sociological experiment perhaps, and I wanted to ask her, what’s next, an Eskimo? But she’d already slipped on hot pants, navy against cream skin, and her black bra and her Crucifix, shining, bobbing between her breasts, and little did I know this would be the last I saw of her. She was halfway out the door and my life and as I watched her ass twitch atop springy legs, I started to say something about love, but I wasn’t sure how.

The nurse says, “Breath.”

We needed a holy man on that damp, chill day. He cost five hundred dollars for seven minutes to recount the life of a woman he'd never prayed for, or talked with, or even seen before, not when she was alive at least, little more to him, I believed, than one more lonely soul, alone, living in a high-rise honeycomb full of dying queens in one-bedroom cells. At graveside, as he rocked from side to side he spoke with vigorous amplification if not emotion, projecting like you might expect the narrator to project in a high school production of *Our Town*. The fog from his breath was thick with hackneyed homilies, cant from a black book festooned with yellow sticky notes for bookmarks, which seemed all the more blasphemous. I muttered to my Uncle Max, *five hundred dollars for this shit?* That's what they charge, he said, holding me back by the leather elbow patch on my damp sport coat. Clumps of fresh-dug dirt with bits of stone splattered their goodbyes on the pine box and I wondered if Ma heard it, if she felt it, if she smelled the musky loam. After seven minutes and the obligatory handshakes the Holy Man scuttled back to his black Chevrolet, pale hands shoved in his overcoat, fingering my check no doubt and drove off, a cigarette between his teeth. We didn't see him at the house an hour later as we washed away our guilt in a basin of cold water on the porch and then went inside to eat. You'd have figured he'd have come for the food.

“Please try not to move. We need clear images, sir.”

182,500 cigarettes at seven minutes per equals angina at 50.

Seven minutes to fall asleep after 25 years of marriage.

Standing in line in St. Peter's Basilica behind two sweating Americans in matching Iowa Hawkeye T-shirts and fanny packs, it was seven minutes until I could get close enough to get a clear view of The Pieta. Oh My God.

In the gym at Morningside Junior High there are seven minutes to go, then six, then two, then one. The ball bounces to you, clean, and there is nothing but pebbled rubber in your hands, and you sight the orange rim, the white net, and white noise roars in your head.

“That wasn’t so bad, was it? You can get up now, sir. They’ll call you.”