

The Most Formidable Foe: M.Giles

She had always been a fighter. Nothing had come easy in her life; alcoholic parents, a string of useless boyfriends, bad lungs, and a dickie heart. But she had survived all that.

She made a successful career that lasted well into her sixth decade. Then things began to go wrong; the wheels started to fall off, and life began its inevitable downward spiral. But still she fought. She had an indomitable spirit.

But cancer has a way of battering down even the strongest defences. This was a battle she was destined to lose, even before the fight had begun. We all knew it; deep down I think she did too, but she remained resolute; right up to the end.

We watched on from the sidelines, feeling helpless and impotent to do anything but observe. Those final days were the hardest; both for her, and for us; her family and friends. There are things that you cannot say, thoughts you cannot express; until it's too late to say anything. Nothing left but the echo of failed intentions.

It's funny how reality can feel so unreal at these times. You stand around, with a group of strangers, everyone lost in their own thoughts; waiting to say your goodbyes; knowing that the train has already left the station, long ago, on its final journey. You make up metaphors to hide the pain, until normal life returns.

The service over, the rituals of death completed, you return to an empty house, comforted only by your memories. You laugh at some, cry at others, try to come to terms with losing a part of your life forever. Grief can be selfish.

Gradually you begin to put the pieces back together, knowing that one vital piece is now missing, leaving the picture incomplete, like a careless child's jigsaw puzzle. The days pass, and the healing, slowly, begins. You still wonder though. Was there really nothing that could have been done? If only we had known earlier, you say to yourself.

But what's the point of beating yourself up, trying to justify your guilt and attempting to heal some invisible wound, only to make it bleed afresh.

Then finally you realize the truth. It wasn't you, or the cancer that killed her. Not her bad heart or wasted lungs. She had faced her most formidable foe, the one that defeats us all in the end. Time.

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