

The Nurse Said

We met when we were 14 and we would sneak kisses behind the iron bark tree at the back of Maitland Skate Park. He is my soul mate, my best friend, the love of my life. He made me laugh, he made my body stir for him and he made me safe. He knew when I needed him and he would squeeze my hand as a way of saying "I am with you". He would wink at me when we were at parties and we would leave early to be together. He made me so happy and we have a beautiful family.

The nurse said he would die today.

He was so strong, hunky, clever and kind. His blue eyes always gentle and his generous mouth, so kissable, so warm. We have had so much fun together, laughing and loving all hours in our homemade bed. I loved kissing him, dancing with him, swinging arms, twirling, tickling and singing American Pie together. I loved his muscles, his hardness, the skin behind his ears, the hollow of his hips, the arc of his back, the hair on his toes. I loved watching him get out of the shower, sleek, strong sexy. We would make love most days.

The nurse said to turn him every 2 hours to stop his skin from breaking down.

Our life had been a dream. A fairytale. Even our wedding day was framed with sunshine and rainbows. Our three children arrived like miracles and we were close. We always had music, good food and wine and a menagerie of pets and stray friends filled our home. He was a foodie and made his mum's roast every Sunday. His specialty was pastries, samosas, Portuguese tarts and flans. The smell of his cooking was a complete welcome. I would sneak up on him from behind when he was cooking and he would turn and hold my face with his floured hands and kiss me

and say "it just doesn't get better than this".

The nurse said not to feed him now, just to keep his mouth and lips moist with swabs and spray.

Our life was busy and noisy. We always had Lateline or repeats of Q & A on, kids coming and going, dogs barking, cats purring, phones ringing, and the hum of home life. Sing-alongs were part of our family ritual and our repertoire changed over the years, Joni Mitchell, Elvis Costello, Red Gum, Wiggles, High 5. Now indie music on various iPod filled all our space and Triple J had become religion.

The nurse said that hearing was the last of the senses to go. She said to be careful what we say in front of him. She said he would be comforted by the normal soundtrack of home life.

I thought about all our talks. We would talk about everything and we were always loving and honest. We grew up together and he helped me be who I was meant to be and I hope I helped him to be him. We would even talk on our bike rides, I thought about him on his Harley, his strong tanned arms in a white T shirt and blue jeans, our rides on the Putty Road. I would yell "slower", "faster" while I snuggled into his sun warmed leather jacket.

The nurse said that his breathing would change, that it may get faster or slower. The nurse said that his breathing may become rattly and not to be worried.

I thought about how the cancer had rocked our world 4 months before. We are all circling zombies now, faces stony with fatigue and sadness. Broken. Crying.

Frightened. Defeated. Long wordless hugs. Days punctuated by cups of tea that go cold and visitors that don't leave. Equipment arriving, morphine syringes, vases of flowers renewed, jellies that he can longer swallow, sheepskin booties for his feet and shifting pillows.

The nurse said that I should take my time when he dies. The nurse said not to try CPR or to ring the Ambulance. The nurse said it would be time I would never have again. The nurse said I needed to think about a Funeral Director and an AH number for the doctor. The nurse said that I might want to think about what to dress him in, she said it would help if I could be a little prepared.

She hugged me today when she was leaving. She said to stay strong.

I see him slowing; his skin is translucent, like the inside of a swallow's shell. His impossibly long lashes are damp and his lips are blueing. He is limp and cool to touch. He cannot squeeze my hand or sing to me or wink. I lay my cheek on his cheek. I can feel his life leaving. The sky is opening up and time is stopping. I hum American Pie and hold his hand in mine. Time stretches between his breathing... I hold my own breath. I kiss his lips and I start choking and sobbing. "I am with you. I love you, we love you, beautiful beautiful man. Love. Love. Love. Thank you for my life". Silence and stillness. There is no more. He is gone.

The nurse said that he would die today.