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Reflections for November

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LOVE IN THE TIME OF CORTICOBASAL DEGENERATION

I am holding your hand.

I am.

I hold your hand.

Your hand

In mine.

I am holding your hand.

I do not understand

What is going on with you

I mean it this time.

The doctors explain

But they cannot do so

Enough.

You are the strong man

In my life

My wall, my life

The love, the light

Of my life.

We built our home.

We made our family.

With both our arms.

Both our arms.

And hopes and hearts.

The doctor tells me

It is exhausting

To care for

Someone like you.

I am tired

Weary

Afraid.

But what do I do?

What can I do?

You deny your illness

And it is not you

Just being my stubborn man.

I wish I could

Have this

“Anosognosia” too.

How can that loving arm,

An arm whose embrace

I know too well

Ever be alien to me
As it is now to you?

You carried me
With that arm,
You drove me
Wild—to the hospital
You clapped
At the sight of our firstborn
And at her first step
And at her graduation,
You clapped.

Now you cannot write
After all those love letters
You cannot write.
Nor copy
Intersecting pentagons.
When you made
Our daughter’s dollhouse
With the most perfect measure
And love, and warmth.

I remember.

The doctors say
There is nothing—
Nothing wrong
With that arm.
Remains warm.
But your brain
Does not know
It is there.

How can you not know?
I am terrified
Of seeing
The panic in your eyes
“Where is my arm?”
“Where is my arm?”
The doctor holds your hand
And tells you she is holding it
You ask her
“Is that my arm or yours?”
The student is amazed
A grown man
Cannot tell
His arm is there.

That young doctor
Wrote a number on your palm
And you could not
Say what it was.
She could not know
That was exactly
How many years ago
I first said
I love you so.
And you said it back
Back to me—exactly
How I wrote it.

Neglect is a word
They often utter.
It is seen in the way
You move.
You cannot find
The door in the room
Or the chair
If it is on

Your bad side.
I never knew.
You had a bad side.
You never
Neglected me.
I will not neglect you.
You have forgotten
Your arm,
Yet you still look
To me
And you say my name.
You have not neglected
Me.
I am holding your hand.
I am.
I hold your hand.
Your hand
In mine.
I am holding your hand.

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