

POETRY | SPRING 2022

Expecting

By Jennifer O'Brien

As in weeks to months,
As in counting the days,
As in “when” not “if.”

The night of our life-changing news we wept
and held each other in a weighty intimacy.
Then parted, me to call mine, you to call yours.
Incredulous and steadfast.
Still newlyweds,
at least it felt that way.

Cupping your hand at your belly,
caressing,
sometimes mindlessly, sometimes mindfully.
Random thoughts and brain fog,
your condition afflicted us both.
Your ankles swelled.
Moments of
Truth. Clarity. Inevitability.
Turning inward, toward, and each into ourselves.

Time gets weird in preview and review
Slow-mo, fast-forward, freeze-frame, in no particular order.
Like before our wedding, only more.

What started as a small gathering of cells has spread.

We have been preparing for months:
nesting, nestling
purging, purchasing
a new, smaller home.
One that better suits this future.
Everything is set.

It's happening. I wish it were me. If I could do it for you, I would. Really, I would.

I have placed my hand in yours, my wrist rests
on the safety rail of the hospital bed, awkward and
uncomfortable.

The sound no, the cacophony, of your loud,
deep breathing has me rattled and agitated
chiding myself for not being more peaceful and present.
Lost in thought, I doze off.

Suddenly, the nurse walks in, says,
“It’s quiet in here.”

And sure enough, you have
taken
your last breath.

My hand still in yours,
your hand still warm.

Good-bye, my love.
This changes nothing.

Jennifer A. O’Brien, MSOD, lives in Little Rock, Arkansas, where she is an artist and advocate for family caregivers and end-of-life preparation. She has been in healthcare management consulting and leadership for 34 years. Her art journal was published as *The Hospice Doctor’s Widow: A Journal* in February 2020 and has won a Nautilus silver award in the Death & Dying/Grief & Loss category, a Next Gen Indie Book gold for Relationships, an Independent Publishers (IPPY) bronze for Gift and an International Impact gold for the interior design of the book.

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