

Nancy Hatch Woodward – Two Poems

The First Step

Sloshing through cold, slanted rain,
footing four miles with a hacking cough,
outpacing mall moms pushing their strollers,
hitting the pavement after only three hours of sleep.
It is the least I can do,
the least for my daughter who
set 10,000 steps a day
as her goal during chemo and radiation.
Some days I log more,
but she always beats me,
every
 single
 day.

Some days I try to beg off.
“I’m old and decrepit,” I say.
“And I have cancer and just had chemo,” she replies,
laughing.
We laugh a lot.
10,000 steps we can count on our wristbands,
hold in our hearts.
It’s solid like sidewalks
taking us to some new destination.

Last Rites

I have placed your umbrella and
favorite gold handled cane at the entryway.
Your dog-tired peacoat hangs by your bedside,
the 1928 Book of Common Prayers in its pocket.

You were just a father,
home some, gone often,
a believer in individual achievement
as long as we served you, but never eclipsed you.

For me, you died months ago –
when you said I shouldn’t let my daughter’s cancer
interfere with my time for you.

Really, what is the point of lingering now?

My heart is anxious to rush along, to let go.
I yearn for the abandonment
of your leave.

Missing you would be such a gift.
A needling, hollow place a blessing. Even now
rambling, occasional tears might convince me of something
about us I had not uncovered before, but
even now I have forgotten who you were.

Letter to My Husband

A puppy showed up at our door, beaten, toothless,
tongue hanging out the side of her mouth.
Wait until you see the two tones of taupe
I've painted the dining room, and how much
weight I've lost this month, because
the girls and I have lived on
cornbread and pots of vegetable soup
you've never liked.

The washing machine is still making that weird
ca-chunk during the spin cycle, so
I'm trying not to use it much while you're gone.
Two days ago a kamikaze squirrel divebombed
the birdfeeder and almost lost its footing –
I swear he bowed a ta-da at us as we laughed.
I miss you so much when you are gone,
yet life goes on in new rhythms.
Last night after the girls were asleep,
I sat with a wee glass of Amaretto on the porch
and watched the moon play hide and seek with the clouds.
The girls threw a party for themselves inside Vanessa's tent.
I made them caramel brownies and probably
ate more than they did.
Sometimes – I won't share this with you –
I'm sad with your return.
You fill our lives with so much of your presence.
You don't mean to, I suppose,
but time without you
lets me find myself again.
And, yes, we are keeping the puppy.

Nancy Hatch Woodward lives in Chattanooga and spends her time writing and painting.
Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Southern Cultures*, *Autumn
Sky*, *Haiku Journal*, *Seeding the Snow*, *Four and Twenty* and *Working Mother*.