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ATLANTIS SHORT STORY CONTEST

WINNING STORY

Just Shoot Me

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I lied to my doctor. Not only to him but everybody else around me, who loves me and believes in me and never would think that I was a person to do it to them. I didn't mean to. But that's what I did. They say you can lie to your God, but not to your doctor.

They think that I'm not with it. They say I have lost it. Yes I agree that I lost it all. What is remaining is to live the rest of my life with him and all other invalid souls in the nursing home which was in the isolated part of the suburb away from human habitats. Sooner or later like everybody else, I was going to end up there anyway whether I like it or not. Why not earlier when he is alive.

He brought me Cadbury milk chocolate when he came to see me, those days, I was young with my long blond hair and unwrinkled creamy skin and white even teeth. Still, I have my hair but not blond, it's white, thin on top and short like corn silk. I have teeth, but those are not real and my smile is not real either. He kissed me on the mouth while sliding partly chewed pod of clove into my mouth, giving me aromatic flavour which tickled my nostrils to sneeze loud which was not that romantic. Who needed Ah- ah- choo of sneeze cloud when kissing. Not that we didn't have chewing gum those days, he liked the natural things over artificial. He ran his index finger over my lower lip, removing my lipstick and said "you are more beautiful without this", showing me his red lipstick stained finger. I thought he was kidding because without a makeup nobody could recognize me, my hair, skin, and lips were the same in colour.

I said, I would never leave him in this life. He believed me.

The sun was peeping through the clouds spreading the warmth along the rays. The wind blew, tickling the still water in lake making ripples like a smile on a farmer's face on first rain. I dipped my toes into the water while sitting on edge allowing hungry Guppy to bite my flesh. It felt pins and needles on my skin like someone tickle your sole of your foot making you laugh aloud which made you pull back the toes and scratch. I closed my eyes tight and wiggles the toes to chase them away. The sun rays pierced into

the water lighting up the silver scales on the body and tail of Guppy. They swam away waving their tails, like flags waving in the air when they sing the national anthem.

"Hey come on, swim with me." He shouted and waved at me smiling.

I slowly ducked into the water, my dress ballooned around my waist. I can only swim when I know that my toes can touch the bottom. I floated with open eyes underwater, enjoying the amazing emerald green, slowly deep into the water and I was drowning because I could not stand and steady me on silt to breath. I raised my arms above water and gulped the water few times to shout, but nothing came out from my mouth.

"God's sake, you told me that you know how to swim." he pulled me out of the water while gasping for air, his chest was heaving and water dripping from his ear lobes like swinging string of pearl earrings.

Yes. I can only if I could touch the bottom.

I sat down on my armchair in the living room, on which I spent most of my day time hours nodding and waiting. I was facing the glass windows with faded white chiffon curtains and deserted cul-de -sac, wilted frangipani petals falling off from the tree on to shining and melting tarmac. Other petals were waiting in the queue.

"It's so hot, I wish I could dip in the pool, what do you think?" I looked at him, but he was not there, only his ragged armchair was next to me. I touched the soft fabric of the chair, the bright floral design was fading away on the arm pads and the seat where he used to sit for hours, drinking his herbal tea reading reader's digest. He likes to swim, but lately, he could not go to the pool with his foot drop. It caught up with everything on the floor. His memory was waning and could not recognize that I was the one who ate his half chewed clove and sneeze on his shoulder. He woke up every 15 minutes to go to the loo, sometimes he was not quick enough to reach the destination, and he stood on the puddle of water.

Then my sons brought him pull ups similar to which they used to wear when they were little. When they came to see us, I knew that they wanted to close their mouths and nose to prevent them throwing up, but never suggested anything hurt me.

His nails were brittle, and falling off like dried leaves of a drooping rose, exposing mushy nail beds. I wrap them with soft plasters, to stop it from bleeding. He didn't bother to wince, it might not hurting him, and nothing could hurt him. They used to be pink, clean and long when compared to my nails, which is short, fragile and ragged edges due to constant biting. I wished, I had nails like him. He walked with a walker, his knees knocked, back hunched, vision blurred, hearing muffled and his speech slurred. He had all the teeth and most of his hair and beard, one of the reasons, I dated him in the first place.

I did not know that we have to pay the bills for water, gas, and electricity. Well, I know now, but I did not know how they are paid. Online or offline. I didn't know that we could ask for discounts, whatever we buy. My sons used to tease him, he would ask for a discount for his coffin one day. Well, he had already arranged our funeral arrangements with discounts a few years ago before his memory loss. We made the will not that we have a Buckingham palace to delegate, but still we did it. We planned ahead and we were waiting patiently.

My father was seventy when I was forty. His grey hair and beard which were untouched for days reminded me white candy floss. He touched my fingertips tight but he didn't talk because he was too busy with breathing, he didn't have time to talk. When I breathe once he breathes thrice. He had a lump in his liver a size of a rockmelon which pushed his lungs as high as into his armpits.

Oxygen cylinder near the bedside gave him life through the plastic tubing into his nostrils. He asked me "why I can't breathe" I looked at his palm which was full of lines, his fate line crossed his life line. I ran my finger along his life line. It was unbroken, curved and thick.

"You will be better soon"

He believed me.

When my mother cried near his bedside, I told her that everything would be ok at the end, she believed me.

When she was in the nursing home with dementia, I went to see her every day. She didn't know, who I was or why I was there. I was just a thing that moves in her head. She didn't know that I was the one made her laugh when I found the cod liver oil tablets, which she hid inside my banana. I hated the disgusting smell and taste of fish oil. She told me, fish oil make my skin looks young forever.

I wrote the date and the day on blackboard with a piece of chalk, like a today's special in the pub.

I added on Today is your birthday.

She looked at my moving hand and blinked few times, I thought, it implied who cares.

Her eyes were different from my father's eyes. His eyes showed me the pain of difficulty to let the stuff go. Her eyes showed the calmness of letting go or not knowing what's happening around her. I might be wrong, but if I was given 3 beans to select, how I want to die, I would select my mother's way to heaven or hell. No pain. No suffering. Just there. Neither you nor I care.

It was like you're floating in the space, detached from everyone and everything, away from the attractions. No gravity. No control.

Yet I wish, I have the choice to be a horse, then someone could shoot me and get rid of me when I'm invalid.

I looked around the living room of the nursing home which was dim and still apart from the humming of the air conditioning. There was a very unusual smell in the air. One might think that it stink like meat section in Coles. When you sniff the air, half way, you decided to breathe from your mouth rather than your nose. The floor was covered with smooth dark green carpet which did not match with the off white walls like in hospitals. Few residents were nodding on comfortable armchairs, their necks bend to a side, arms floppy, and hanging over the arms rests, their cardigans stained with spilled streaks of pureed food, wet with water and corners of the mouth drooling. The celebrity chef was cooking lamb chops for dinner in TV mounted on the wall. His lips move up, down and sideways like a yo- yo with excitement but no sounds come out, like when you were in a dream, nobody hears you even when you scream.

The carer was pushing a stainless steel trolley full of food trays to each of the residents and placing the tray with so- called food with purees and mashes. It reminded me, Heinz baby food. We were going backward in time.

Half of the food spilled before it reached the mouth and then rest was trickled while it's in the mouth. Only a half a teaspoonful was going in. I tasted it with my fingertip before I put it into his mouth. I immediately swallowed it without tasting before I throw up. When I kissed his cheeks to say goodbye to go home, he held my hand tight between his fingers, he was becoming a child, whatever he touched in his hand he made a fist hold it tight. He was regressing yet developing his original impulses in childhood.

Lately, I could not recognize what is the right or wrong thing to do in everyday life. When someone was given a death sentence like when you got trapped with prohibited remedies in Bali, one might think he deserved it, the other one might think nobody deserved death no matter what the crime was. There

were no hard and fast rules in life. No right or wrong answer for any of the doubts in life because nobody is perfect enough to find out what is right and wrong.

One of the psyches told me that I would be famous one day. I believed her and still I'm waiting to be famous.

The world around me is changing in rocket speed which I didn't have a clue. What my doctor says today with evidence-based medicine will be a lie tomorrow. I laughed at him, "you just told that this tablet will change my life, but now you say it gives me a heart attack, can't you keep your word for your patients."

"I am sorry I lied to you. But I didn't mean to. Look at this research they have done" he scratched his head and smiled at me.

I thought lying is difficult, you need a good story, facts, figures and evidence to prove you are right and you have to make them believe your story. But it was not as difficult as I thought. It was easy like 11 times table.

The story is weird and bizarre and difficult to believe then they realize something is wrong. It did not take long, to them to realize that I wasn't safe to leave alone. I needed 24- hour care. Nobody allows me to cook or wash or clean because it's a danger.

They didn't allow me to cook because I forgot to switch off the stove. Well I forgot it few times, that's because the stove knobs were tight and I could not turn them fully with my arthritis in the wrists and fingers. I could not see the flame properly without glasses. I forgot my grandchildren's names some times. Who doesn't?

They checked my Webster pack for medications and they noticed I have been taking few days of tablets within one day. Sometimes I didn't take the tablets altogether.

I had lived enough to see the life. I didn't want a cholesterol tablet or a blood pressure tablet to make my life prolong by a second.

The doctor did few tests, he asked me to draw a clock face and then two pentagons crossing each other. I couldn't do it. I could not remember the name of the prime minister. Who was that? Julia Gillard or Turnbull? They are changing all the time. I lost it all TV, newspapers, radio or Facebook.

It's like you are dead but fully aware what's happening around you. It's just like you are sitting on the white satin covered comfortable cushion in the coffin, looking here and there, watching others and listening to them.

It's like, you are an invisible ghost but floating and swooping like a war aircraft over the sea and waiting to be fired. You are given the notice to vacate but the exact date of handover is unclear.

My sons looked at both of us, they are good children, they love us, never hurt us no matter what. Yet, I knew that they will go and see a doctor at their earliest and ask for a gene test to find out whether they carry Alzheimer's.

There is a way for every one of us, engraved on a line on the forehead, which was the reason you cried as a fresh born just knowing what could happen to you within next few years of life. Nobody laugh when they were freshly squeezed out from their mother. If you do not cry, they hit you on your back hard and make you cry which was not a pleasant way to start a new life.

I looked at his eyes. He looked at me. I peeped into his pupils and I could see my face inside them, I was whirling into those black holes deeper and deeper to finding my way to the gate keeper.

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