

Mind Adrift

By Zachary Sturman

I continue to sit by myself on a bench in a large room. Small groups of people talk to one another; one in the corner, a couple in the aisles and one around a coffin at the front of the room. Flowers surround the coffin, some of which I hope I had put there but can't for the life of me remember if I have or not. A young lady, maybe in her 30's, wearing a long black dress approaches me. She is rather attractive, but if Cassie catches me staring I'll never hear the end of it.

"Hey dad, how are you holding up?"

The young lady is already sitting down next to me putting her arm around my shoulder. How could I forget my own daughter? I knew I recognized her face, but now if I can only put a name to it.

"Dad? Did you hear me?"

I should probably quit trying to think of her name and think of a reply before this gets awkward.

"Well, my knee still hurts a bit from the surgery a few weeks ago but besides that I couldn't be better. How are you doing dear?"

"That surgery was over a year ago dad. Do you remember why we are here?"

No, no, I just had surgery and now she reminds me of the fact that I can't remember where I am. Great, now I have to try and figure that out too.

"This is mom's funeral. Do you want to go up and see her?"

Who's mom is she talking about? I suppose I should go up there and see who it is before a new question arises. My daughter stands up, grabs me by the arm and pulls me up off the bench. I could easily get up by myself, but I can see in her face she feels good helping an old man out, maybe getting some more badges for her girl scout club. I grab my cane and we both walk over to the open coffin. I stare into the face of the deceased for a moment. Her eyes, her lips, her nose slowly come back from my memory. I am standing directly over my wife Cassie.

"Dad? Do you remember who this is?"

I pull my arm away from the mysterious young lady confining my arm.

“Of course I remember who this is. This is my wife, and she is dead.”

I look around to see all the other faces in the room turn toward me. My cheeks are getting wet with tears. Who are these people? What is my wife doing in that coffin? Why can't that be me? All these strange people are moving closer to me, reaching out their arms. What are they doing? Why are they trying to grab me? I fall backwards.

I'm looking at the ceiling now. A shooting pain is going through my spine. The view of the ceiling turns to ominous, unknown faces above me.

“Oh my god!”

“Are you okay?”

“Let us help you up.”

What do these people want? Why am I on the ground? What am I doing in this room? All the faces back away from me in shock. Why? I'm screaming. Why am I screaming? I bite my lip and allow three burly men to help me back onto my feet. A hand comes out from within the crowd of people to hand me my cane. I get a proper footing, grab the cane and start heading back over to my wife. I take a single step and a shooting pain goes through my back.

“T'll take him out to the car.”

The young lady attempts to grab my arm again but I pull away.

“I need to see my wife!”

I pronounce my statement and no one speaks out against it. The crowd ahead of me separates for a clear walkway to the coffin. I continue to hobble toward my wife. Each step I take I feel a little weaker. I reach out and grab the sides of the coffin to sustain my balance. I look down onto Cassie's closed eyes. The pain I feel of seeing Cassie like this dwarfs the pain in my back. My wife of 47 years is gone forever. I feel my stomach begin to churn and the throbbing in my head intensifies but I can't stop staring. Is this the last time I'll be able to see my wife? Can I even remember the last thing I said to her? Can I remember what her face looks like with her eyes open? Can I remember the taste of her lips? I must remember something. If I can't remember I need to find out.

I bend down into the coffin and give her a kiss. I try to remember the last time I felt her warm lips but no memory comes to mind. Now the only memory I'll have

of her lips are cold and with the slight taste of chemicals. I see a constant stream of water hitting her cheeks and running down into the coffin. I know if she were alive she would be wiping her cheeks right now and telling me everything is going to be all right.

“Daddy...”

The young lady is back standing next to me crying as well. She throws out her arms and wraps them around my neck for a hug. My tears stop as I remember the young lady. I wrap my arms around her waist knowing that I need to be a good dad right now. I put my head on her shoulder still being able to see Cassie’s face from the corner of my eye. I need to do everything I can to remember this moment; it may be the last memory I have of her face.

The sun pierces my eyes from where I sit. I appear to be wearing a thick black coat. I’m not sure how I got here but I seem to be in a cemetery, sitting in a flimsy chair next to a mysterious young lady who looks oddly familiar. Ahead of us is a man of God speaking about something I’m sure I’ve heard a thousand times. Behind me is a sea of unfamiliar faces and black suits. I hear the young lady next to me let out a little whimper. I look to her to see a line of tears running from under her sunglasses. She grips my hand harder, which I just realized she had a hold of in the first place. Next to the man speaking is a large hole and next to it is a large picture of Cassie? Why is Cassie’s picture up there? Where is Cassie for that matter? I’ve always had a watchful eye on her and I turn my head for one second and she disappears.

I search around the crowd of people for her. In the distance I see 6 grown men walking down a small hill holding a coffin. It can’t be Cassie in there, it just can’t be. I specifically remember waking up this morning and Cassie making me breakfast and me heading off to work. But why am I not at work? As I look down at my watch it is clearly only 4 and I should be at work for at least another hour.

I lean to whisper over to the young lady beside me.

“That woman up there on the picture, where is she? That is my wife and I can’t seem to find her anywhere.”

The young lady gives out another whimper and whispers back to me.

“Daddy, mom’s gone. She is in that coffin right there. Don’t you remember?”

Of course, how could I forget? This is my daughter sitting next to me. They sure do grow up fast. However, that isn’t the issue at hand. I need to find my wife.

The six men have reached the hole and placed the coffin on some rope that keeps it suspended. My daughter releases my hand and goes to stand in line with a group of other people, each one with a red rose in hand. One by one they throw their rose onto the coffin. My daughter throws her rose on, blows a kiss to the coffin and comes to sit back next to me. She is crying even harder now. I simply pat her on the knee and she in turn throws her arms around me to cry into my shoulder. I look around, still unaware where Cassie is, as they lower the coffin into the ground.

The session seems to have come to an end as everyone stands up and my daughter releases her arms from around my chest. She stands up and helps me out of my seat. I take a long stare at the beautiful picture of my wife before my daughter helps me back to her car.

The lights are dim but the smell of ammonia is strong. A young lady sits me down on a queen-sized bed in a small room, which is unfamiliar to me. The walls are painted dark and there is a picture of a sailing ship on the wall. A small, fat TV sits in the corner of the room, along with a VCR and some of my old movies.

“How does this feel dad?”

The memory of my daughter floods back into my brain. She sure does grow up quite fast, if only I could remember her name. I just need to find Cassie.

“Dad? Do you like the room?”

“It’s a very nice room. Is it yours?”

I lie to her about my opinion of the room because I don’t want to hurt her feelings.

“No, remember dad? This is where you will be staying from now on.”

What is she talking about?

“I’d like to go home to Cassie if it’s alright with you.”

I’m not sure why I’m asking permission to leave my own daughters house. I’m a grown man; I can leave whenever I want.

“Please remember dad. Mom died almost 2 weeks ago.”

I don't know why she is trying to make me stay here so bad. I look at my watch.

"I should really be getting home. Cassie will have dinner ready for me soon."

I stand up and head for the door.

A tear runs down my daughter's face as she stops me.

"You have to stay here dad. This is your home from now on. There are a lot of people here like you and a whole staff of people here to help you whenever you need it. You never have to worry about anything, just relax."

I don't understand what she is talking about, but I can tell she is very serious about it.

"Well could you please give me a phone so I can call Cassie to let her know I'll be a few minutes late for dinner?"

My daughter cries a little harder and sticks her head out the hallway to call for someone. Moments later, a large black woman walks in wearing a blue button up shirt along with blue pants.

"Now, Mr. Mavis," the woman begins to speak to me, sitting me back down on the bed, "How would you like to watch a movie?"

I'm not sure why they are hell bent on making me stay here but I am getting very uncomfortable about the entire situation.

"No, I want to go home to my wife."

"Dad please understand,"

My daughter gets down to one knee and looks me in the eyes,

"You have to stay here now, okay? Cassie isn't at home anymore. This is your new home."

What does she mean this is my new home? A man walks in wearing the same blue outfit as the black woman but in one hand is a small clear Dixie cup and in the other he holds a white one filled with water.

"Mr. Mavis," the man says to me, "I'm gonna need you to take your medication."

Medication? I only have a couple medications I take daily and he has about 6 different pills in that cup.

“These aren’t my pills.”

“Sir,” now the black woman has to put in her two cents, “I need you to take the pills.”

“Please daddy. Take the pills, for me.”

My daughter has streams of tears running down her face.

I look at the pills for a long while.

“Okay, I’ll do it for you honey.”

I grab the pills and the cup of water. I am hesitant on taking them but I know my daughter is only doing what is best for me. I put all the pills in my mouth and wash them down with the water.

“Please let Cassie know where I am.”

My eyes get heavy and fall shut.

I open my eyes to reveal a plethora of colors in the distance as the day turns to night. I sit on a rocking chair out on a patio staring off into a field. I see a small barn along with a heard of cows off in the distance. I try to enjoy the view until I hear an additional rocking next to me, which ruins my state of mind. An old man sucking back on an old corncob pipe wearing a baseball cap and littered with liver spots sit in a rocking chair next to mine. He wears slippers, pants up to his nipples and a concert t-shirt tucked under his belt. Apparently someone’s wife has stopped caring, how sad

“You know what I mean Mavis?” The man says something to me out of the blue, but I have no idea what it is he is talking about.

“I’m sorry, but have we met?” I ask him.

“Just about 20 different times. I’m Frank.” About 20 times? What on Earth does that mean? If I had ever run into this character I think I would remember.

“You wouldn’t happen to know my wife Cassie do you?” I ask him, hoping he can point me in her direction.

“You poor son of a bitch. I hope you figure this out soon cause this is getting exhausting.”

I’m not sure if I could get anymore confused, so I decide to exit the conversation. I stand up and begin to walk back inside. “Well it was nice meeting you but I have to get home, I’m sure my wife is worried sick about me.”

“Be sure to tell her I say hi when you get there.” The man replies to me as he takes another puff off his corn cob pipe and stares off into the distance.

I step back inside even more confused than I was before. There are dozens of elderly people sitting around; watching TV, eating at small tables, playing chess and all sorts of other meaningless tasks. I see a series of rooms down each hallway. I find the closest person who appears to work here, a black woman in a full blue outfit.

“Excuse me, could you point me to the exit please?”

The woman puts her hand on my back and walks with me down a hallway.

“Right this way Mr. Mavis.” Oddly enough she does not lead me to an exit but instead to a small room with a queen-sized bed and a picture of a sailing ship on the wall.

“How about you have a seat and I’ll go get your medication.”

I feel my blood begin to boil. “I don’t need any medication, I just need you to point me to the exit so I can get home to my wife.”

“Listen here Mr. Mavis,” The black woman begins to lecture me, “You don’t have a wife anymore. Cassie is dead.”

What a horrible practical joke to try to play on someone. I just saw my wife this morning. Cassie made me breakfast and then I headed off to work. As I am trying to complete my thought a large man walks in holding a small clear Dixie cup filled with pills and a white Dixie cup with water. He attempts to hand them to me.

“I don’t need any medication. I need to go back to my house.” I have done nothing wrong to these people. They have no right to keep me here.

“Please Mr. Mavis,” the woman continues to run her mouth to me, “I just need you to take these pills.”

The man puts the cups closer to my face. I knock the pills and the cup of water out of his hand. I attempt to walk out of the room but the two of them grab my arms and push me back onto the bed.

“Help! Help!” I scream because I don’t know what else to do. “Somebody get me out of here!” My throat goes hoarse from screaming. I try my hardest to break free from their grip but two more men run in to hold me down.

“Call his daughter!” The black woman demands to a young lady who stands at the door. Thank god someone is calling my daughter. She won’t make me stay here any longer.

Another worker runs into the room holding a mysterious needle. She grabs my sleeve and pulls it up. “Don’t put that in me!” I scream at her. “Call my wife! Call Cassie!” The woman shoves the needle into my arm.

The walls reflect bright light into my eyes. Tubes run in and out of my nose. A needle is pierced in my arm and connected to an I.V. next to me. A heart monitor beeps in my ear. Beep, beep, beep, beep. How did I end up in this hospital bed? Did I get into an accident? I must have crashed on my way to work. Maybe someone can help me.

“Hello?” I attempt to yell out the open door.

A woman in a nurse’s outfit walks in. “Hello Mr. Mavis, is there anything I can do for you?”

“What am I doing here?”

“Well, as I’ve told you before, your condition has gotten quite worse and your previous home was unable to suit your needs. You’ll have to stay here for some time.”

My condition? What is she talking about? Am I dying and just can’t remember? What is happening to me?

“How long have I been here?” Nothing seems to be making sense anymore.

“It’s been about a month Mr. Mavis.”

Impossible. I couldn't have been here for a full month without remembering any of it. This has got to be some sort of trick. I try to form a question as to ask what is happening, but can't seem to get the thoughts down to my mouth.

"I want to see my wife. Where is Cassie?"

"I'm sorry Mr. Mavis, do you not remember?" The nurse asks me in a calm tone as if to try to cover up some sort of horror.

"What are you talking about?"

"Cassie, your wife, died almost a year ago."

No, it's impossible. I need to get up, I need to get out of this bed and find my wife.

"Get me out of here." I rip the tubes from my nose. The nurse hurries to my side and grabs my arms.

"Please Mr. Mavis, you just need to calm down and breathe."

"Let me out of here!" I scream at her, hoping she will back away. She instead runs to the wall and presses a green button. An alarm rings out throughout the room and down the hallway. I successfully pull the needle from my arm before two men nurses run in to hold me down. I struggle and throw my arms around trying to get free.

"Sedate him!" I am unclear who says the words, but a second later a needle is headed for my arm.

"Stop!" A familiar voice yells out from the doorway. A mysterious young lady halts the nurse from injecting me with the sedative. I cease thrashing about.

"Please, can you leave us alone?" The woman asks the nurse.

The male nurses look at one another and step away from me. They walk past the young woman followed in turn by the female nurse leaving only the mysterious young lady and myself. The young lady walks to my bed and has a seat. The young lady holds a book in her hand. I push myself to an upright position as to see the book better.

"Who are you?" I ask.

“I’m Cindy, your daughter.” Of course, how could I forget my only daughter?

“What do you have there?” As I ask, she opens the book to reveal a montage of pictures. The first page has baby pictures of both Cassie and I. The next page contains pictures of me standing on the deck of a destroyer during my military days. Cindy continues to flip the pages, each one stirring up more lost memories. My wedding comes up a few pages later; the towering wedding cake, chocolate if memory serves, along with our first dance. Pages continue to flip with the first pictures of Cindy home from the hospital followed by her first day of kindergarten, our first house and eventually arriving to her graduation from high school.

While trying to pay attention to the pictures, my breathing gets increasingly difficult to regulate. I gasp for air.

“Hang on daddy, I’ll call a nurse.” Before Cindy gets a chance to yell, I grab her arm. She stays silent and looks back down to me.

I force my next sentence out, gasping for air in between words. “I... want to... go home.”

Cindy hesitates for a moment. “Okay.” She says with a small smile.

Cindy runs out of the room as I continue to gasp for air. My vision gets fuzzy and as a two nurses run in. They quickly place a breathing apparatus over my mouth and nose. My eyes get heavy. They attempt to keep me awake but it is no use.

I slowly open my eyes, unable to focus on anything as my eyesight is failing me. I seemed to have fallen asleep on my recliner. I try to push myself out of the chair to go to my bed, but unfortunately, don’t have the energy to do so. My breathing is slow and irregular. I look around for Cassie to assist but she is nowhere to be seen.

“Cassie?” I holler out but there is no answer. I assume she must be in the other room asleep. I look across to the wall in front of me and am able to make out a large picture of her.

My eyes are too heavy and my body too weak to try to get up by myself. My eyes slowly close as I fall back to sleep. Her beautiful blue eyes and her alluring fragrance slip back into memory. The memory of her soft voice and her warm lips calm my mind and puts a smile on my face. I release a long, strong breath and fall fast asleep.

END