

## Spoken Candles for All Souls

### Men Are Filled with Grief

To Tom and Ron

Berkeley coffee beckoned  
us together father-figure and  
mentee sharing that pulse  
of pain down the right leg.

Between bites I conjured  
the memory, the anguish  
when unrelenting suffering  
locked you into a curtained room  
to wait out  
the end.

And he says:

*Men are filled with grief  
And they must walk through it.*

For ten months I  
gritted my teeth each morning  
walked the one block  
the fates still granted me.

For ten months I  
tossed for escape each night  
sought the comfort of  
curling sideways  
first right,  
then left.

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*Men must walk through grief.*

And the next moment grief  
cut off his voice.

Just like that recalled embodied prison  
the pain shooting down, weaving  
itself into the fabric of your life  
encasing me into upper body  
freedom, the silence stretching  
into dread of forever.

Grief lengthened wordlessly into  
a disembodied touch.

I wanted to hug you.  
At least extend my hand  
for one caress  
in solidarity.

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## Water on the heart

To Billy

In the hospital you missed foamy lather,  
the weight of wet hair curling in your hands.  
Under my towel I spot the red mark  
where lasers stung away brown skin.  
But you display your other scar  
between your ribs, witness  
to your heart trouble:  
It is the pump and not the blood,  
you tell us with a gesture,  
raised shirt like a white flag.

Water on the heart,  
pressing in on that limited organ,  
your human body shrinking slowly,  
pressing in on our squeezed soul.

Your voice splashes cheer at your survival,  
I coo along for good measure.  
When I leave,  
determined not to let my heart  
give out  
I kiss you good bye.

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