

PASSAGES

During the long silence of Kate's slipping away, he sometimes imagined himself passing with her, as if their two souls could travel together through eternity and share a consciousness, allowing them endless co-memories. Something with staying power this time. Not like the fading memories that now are and someday will no longer be.

But he knows it doesn't work that way. Thus, the morbid finality behind that 'until death do us part' pledge and the heralds of mortality like her breast cancer. Like his synaptic traffic jam snarling the flow of their once-weres. Still, he would have liked to crawl into her hospital bed, lie down next to her one more time and will his own heart to stop the exact moment as hers.

No matter. Kate pretty much scoffed at any notion of an afterlife and would have had trouble with the concept of two souls traveling together through eternity. He's sure, though, she at least would have given him high points for the proposed itinerary. She hated anything too predictable, especially when it came to travel. The best journey, according to Kate, was more or less made up on the go. Like their honeymoon trip to Key West to see the sunset. Spur-of-the-moment, like the trip he's making there now. A final drive into the sunset.

With him, his favorite photo of Kate, a faded color snapshot taken (according to her looping script on the back) in May of 1974, on a beach somewhere in the Keys. In the picture, Kate's straight auburn hair drapes across her breasts as she lures him with a crooked index finger and an exaggerated purse of her lips - her parody of a seductive pose. Behind her you can just make out his '68 VW Beetle nosed between two palm trees at the edge of the beach. From the shadows you can tell it was a sunny day. But, because the VW's convertible top is up, he's guessing it wasn't a particularly warm one.

Time has blurred nearly everything else beyond the borders of that snapshot, so the things that happened back then are now mostly gritty, out-of-focus images. Though he still recognizes the events, the details themselves are no longer crisp.

Kate could have restored clarity to the fuzziness. Details stuck with her. She'd remember the exact number of hours the straight-through drive took. Know the name of the cheap tourist motel where they made love their first afternoon in Key West. Recall titles of the songs they danced to until Last Call at the bar next door. That's the way Kate's mind worked. Even up to the end.

He can remember only that it was near dawn when they staggered back to their room and how, this time, they more fucked than made love until the sun came up.

When he thinks about this, about the sun coming up part, a sudden sense of finality overwhelms him. As if driving into the sunset now is the natural completion of the passage that was he and Kate.

He wonders what comes next.