Janet's Prayer

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Noon is cold and full of sun. Trying to pray for you, Janet, I watch bulldozers and backhoes knock down the house across the street, the one we used to stare at as we sat and rocked, rocked and talked, talked and worked together. I am thankful, dear friend, that you didn't laugh when I said I would pray for you—I, a Jew, you a Catholic, both of us fallen away more times than the bricks tumbling across the street.

I am trying to find some way to stay with you, a thousand miles away in that sterile room where they are drilling through your cranium in search of a tumor that branches exquisitely, you say, just like the oak tree across the street. You say you saved the X-ray film, will frame the tumor's mysterious beauty, hang it in your office. Just to remember, you say, if you survive.

To answer your question, yes, I did notice a stumble or two, a slur, a drift, but we're in our fifties and who am I, forever forgetting things, banging into furniture and people, to find it odd. We're all odd and getting odder. In the restaurant, we still laughed. Just another bit of slowing down, I thought, not a tumor speeding up.

I am sitting where we have so often sat, watching. Now, Janet, everything is down, tree stumps and rubble carted off. Sure the house needed work, and perhaps the trees were a bit weary, but something could have been saved. Now there is only one tree left, roped off with a fence tied with pink ribbons, fought for and saved by neighbors. Yellow cranes and dusty dump trucks fill the space. All else is gone to make room.

Is this prayer, Janet, to speak of gravel and re-grading instead of pleading with G-d for what I want? I want you well, to sit together again, laughing, cursing at the work we have to do, then glancing up to watch that huge oak play host to ivy and a black squirrel scurrying down towards hidden nuts. Can I pray by telling you of one last tree amidst dirt and dumpsters?

I will keep my eye on those pink ribbons fluttering around the oak, the squirrel scampering there, and let my heart do its work, willing you well, willing you here. When you come in spring, perhaps the buzz saws will be gone. Perhaps there will be a garden with low flowering cherries as the new couple has promised. Perhaps young trees will be in full pink bloom. Perhaps.

These are only words, Janet, like I promised. Words about trucks, a tree, things old and new. Words about aging, anger, loss. And hope—hope that right things remain and wrong things are removed. This a prayer for you, Janet. I hope.

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J Gen Intern Med 29(2):420
DOI: 10.1007/s11606-013-2607-x
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