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Living in the Soul

by Caroline March

“In the end it didn’t matter of course”, she said.

“What the fuck, Laura, of course it mattered. Every bloody second mattered.”

“But he left you in the end didn’t he? So what’s the point in him telling you he’d love you forever? Being soulmates? Having plans for a long life together?”

Because he used his heart to communicate and meant every word, still does. What doesn’t matter is his physical entity now he’s gone, although I’d give anything to touch his face, to have his eyes look into mine again.

In that last hour he was laying naked, eye half open. No word to say he was leaving, no goodnight bubba.

I knew that morning though, sitting next to him in his sterile room, oxygen and morphine the only balance between life and death, when a white feather drifted down from a contrasting blue sky, floating effortlessly through the bird netting that stretched across the brick quadrant of the hospital, those walls our only view for the past few months.

I had introduced some distraction to the view, a photo of us in an oversized yellow deckchair on the prom last summer, a crude sketch I had done entitled ‘our dog Bill ‘ and Luke’s graduation photo. Desperate materialistic attempts to keep him here. I was still at it later in the evening, sat on the put up bed where I slept by his side.

I was on the iPad he'd bought to keep me occupied when he was going to be well enough for the bone marrow transplant at King's. A fucking colouring app, designed for mindfulness but I was mindlessly colouring a kid like image of a squirrel by numbers. It was what we did, I was going to show him it in the morning when he woke, he'd smile, he always did and he'd thank me and tell me how lovely it was.... it'd be shit.

I was hoping the squirrel would remind him of the ones he could see from his bed in the garden room at home. Remind him of the amazing cherry blossom.

I noticed his breathing had changed, this time he wasn't anxious, he remained in the drug-induced dream that had become his reality that day.

I woke Luke, his long youthful body curled impossibly on a blue, wipe clean, two seater in the family room.

We stood helplessly, watching over him, I don't know what we had expected but it was simple. Just a couple of deep exhalations as his face softened. Luke said he'd never seen him looking so young.

No more strategy, no more plan, no more 'Team Maskell' the cancer bubble we'd lived in for twenty seven weeks had burst and decided to take him with it, leaving us to clean up the debris of grief left behind.

And I know what you're trying to say, Laura, but it did matter, what mattered was that he bared his soul, he went beyond the outward image we use to protect us in life and let me in, I trusted him and did the same, that's where our journey began and it can never end.

Although that doesn't stop me wishing he was here right now to see the oak leaves unfurl.