

VISITING DAD

by

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Dad...I'm knocking on your window. The curtain is suddenly pulled open. I yell again, Hi Dad! His eyes smile at me with that smile that's all for me. The one he gives me every time he sees me. But this time I can't see his nose and mouth.

I've come for a visit. Of course he can't hear me well. So the nurse holds up his phone. I smile and dial my cell. I hear his muffled voice say "hello sweetheart". He always calls me that. I tell him good thing you're on the first floor, Dad. Otherwise I'd have to get stilts.

I tell him to wait a second and I unfold the chair I've brought and sit down close to the window where he can see me best. I open a thermos of tea and toast him with my cup. The nurse hands him a glass of something and he toasts back. We always do that when we're together. Look in each other's eyes, smile and raise our glasses. It might seem like a small thing, but I want him to feel as close to normal as possible. Seven people in his home have died. I can't imagine the pain of their families.

I stand up and peer into his room. Are they taking good care of you? Don't pull any of your tricks on the nurses. He's on speaker phone, so his nurse laughs and give me the so-so gesture.

I spread out my hand and place it on the window. He reaches out and mirrors my hand. Touching without touching. But it's better than nothing. Like two mimes trying to escape from a box.

Suddenly it's raining and I've left my umbrella in the car. He gestures for me to go, but it's too soon. I want more time. I lean up against the window and kiss the wet glass leaving bright red lips. I tell him whenever he wants a kiss, to touch my lips.

Finally say goodbye...he doesn't want me to get any wetter. And his curtain is pulled closed. Like the end of an act. That's what scares me...the end of his act. I want to take him on a walk. Go for coffee once a week like we always do. Have him tell me his familiar stories that I know by heart. But we can't. Not now. So I leave him in the care of these kind nurses and slosh back to the car in the storm.

End