

Love Song for the Wind

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The breeze followed the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers and joined at the Ohio, tussling my hair on the way. My friend Bettina and I were seated outdoors on the terrace of a restaurant overlooking the confluence of the rivers.

I let my mind relax and enjoy the sunshine and warmth of summer even as my thoughts were ceaselessly drawn back to the cold, ancient winter. I'd been accumulating and processing ideas for several months ... quietly, and alone. In my brokenness, the results were often baffling, but now I had the opportunity to find some relief in their expression. And so, as we waited for our beverage orders to arrive and scanned our menus for a sandwich or a salad, I shared my observation that acceptance does not supplant the profound realization that follows my every thought and action—the realization that Janice is not coming back.

Just as I was vocalizing the words, my senses were jolted by the sound of Norah Jones singing "Don't Know Why." I was instantly transported.

Morning in late February. I roll off of the inflated bed where I nightly wrap myself in a quilt and fall asleep while holding her hand and listening for her breath over the hum of the healthcare machinery. Stepping into the kitchen I grab a can of liquid food and the sack of morning medicines and return to the living room, the room where her physical world is now defined. As I approach the head of the hospital bed, Janice is watching me. I smile and begin talking to her, saying cheerful good mornings of the sort I'm certain had been neglected in days not so long ago.

I open the blinds to let the natural light of dawn into the room and begin arranging the personal hygiene materials on the rolling bedside table. I place the medicines and nutrients on a narrow, hand-carved table that is wedged between her bed and the window, and I complete the prep work by queuing up our favorite morning playlist on an iPod. As the loving chores begin, Norah Jones begins to sing.

Threading the plastic tubing through the feeding machine and connecting the nozzle to the catheter in her stomach is a step-by-step process that offers a perfect moment to sing along with Nora.

When I saw the break of day, I wished that I could fly away, Instead of kneeling in the sand, catching teardrops in my hand

Having heard the songs every day for several weeks, the words flowed naturally, but I don't have much of a singing voice. At best it is a musical growl. It's warbly and unconcerned with key, but such nuisances don't bother Janice.

*My heart is drenched in wine, but you'll be on my mind,
Forever . . .*

The right corner of her perfect mouth bends just slightly, and her eyes embrace me with a look of adoration that makes my heart flutter. Sinatra, Elvis, the Beatles—she places me above them all in a single loving gaze. When the song "Come Away with Me" starts, I am in the midst of what would normally be considered remarkably intrusive actions, yet she endures the violations without the slightest hint of embarrassment or indignity.

Come away with me, and I will write you a song

I stop my activity for a minute to just sing along with Nora, squeezing every ounce of musical possibility out of my ragged vocal chords. Janice bats her eyes mischievously at my little solo, and I lean over and gently kiss her, our eyes never breaking contact.

*And I want to walk with you, on a cloudy day,
In fields where the yellow grass grows knee-high*

I break character long enough to whisper "like Andrew's Bald," then I catch up with the song.

*Come away with me, and we'll kiss on a mountaintop
Come away with me, and I'll never stop loving you*

We share a giddy, adolescent moment, capped by gentle lip kisses and soft caresses, and then I resume getting her ready for the morning.

Each breath we draw between us is loving. There are no more lines of intimacy to cross, no more barriers between us of *any* sort. In the midst of this terrible nightmare, we have reached a magnificent summit of love. And just like the climbers of Everest, our time at the peak will be brief before the necessary descent, a part of the trip we both know I'll soon be making by myself. Our journeys are beautifully joined yet eternally distinct.

My face turned toward the restaurant, searching for the speakers, as if finding the electronic source of the music would somehow remove my intense emotional attachment. Facing Bettina, I mumbled an explanation about the song.

In the brief silence that followed I again felt the breeze from the rivers, a delicate breeze that slipped under my arms, nuzzled my cheek, and held me gently ... even as she continued swirling on her unknowable journey ... and my shattered heart smiled.

