

## Reflections on Hospice

Paul Marcet

Humble home, or so it would seem, for the spouse of a prominent businessman. Wooden door, heavy, good craftsmanship. It groans as I lean the weight of my body into it, as if complaining, old and tired, it does not want to move. It is silly that we give life to such objects. This door was not cheap. Rainbows dance on the floor. Dispersion. These rainbows are the product of light that passes through the intricately carved crystals in the chandelier overhead, split into its component wavelengths across the visible spectrum. The chandelier is remarkably clean, signs of life, a stark contrast to the staleness permeating the air.

Pictures covering the ornate wallpaper display a large family, neatly dressed, with satisfaction and purpose on their faces. Which one is she? Perhaps the matriarch of this vast social familial structure sharing a common genetic code. What values, what struggle, what strength fortified the fibers of this tree? The caretaker smiles, whispering, as if not to alert the reaper, “she is awaiting your arrival”. We turned left down a long hallway, taking care to avoid contact with the wooden table, atop which stood more pictures of family, frames arranged carefully around a vase unsteadily sitting on its minuscule base, not too different from the countless vases broken by my brother and I as children. How many have stood here before, broken by one of the boys in these countless pictures as he kicked a well-placed soccer ball past his brother to score a goal.

Her skin contains but a mere fraction of the collagen that once gave it the soft, smooth look of youth. The cracks in her skin deep. A skeleton with skin barely clinging to it. She smiles, the cracks multiply and grow. Blue dress with a large collar of dignified elegance, matching the large blue gems on her earrings. Makeup, hair done. She lies in bed with the sheets drawn up high to cover an emaciated body.

Awaiting some introduction, she senses that she should know us. “I’ve been waiting for you” she feigns, hiding her memory deficit. Matriarch indeed. A&Ox2, to person and place, not time. Notes next to the bed to remind her to call her daughter. A daughter concerned for her mother’s health, but who’s life must also go on. Away from the neon lights, from the incessant beeping of a computer not sensing a heartbeat (to be answered by a nurse that finds a detached lead or a loose pulse oximeter), she rests in the comfort of her own home surrounded by memories of life. Undisturbed by unfamiliar faces and their obsession with the Bristol scale, she lies peacefully in her bed.

His steps grow nearer. Though her breath fades she lives on in the minds of others, her passing eased by the care of a dedicated nurse whom she feigns remembering once per week.

What can we do but palliate her pain? Honor her wish to die peacefully? What life does she have left? None, it seems, but the evanescent memories in the hallways of this soon to be forgotten home. The wooden door groans a sigh of relief knowing it will not be disturbed for yet another week.