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Writing 220

The Afterlife

Ed

It was 1 AM, and the rain was pouring down in sheets. Ed was pouring his guts out in the toilet. He was diagnosed two months ago.

“I’m sorry Mr. Searsen, the outlook isn’t good. The cancer has spread from your lungs to the lymph nodes. If we don’t act soon it will continue to spread into other areas of your body. This would probably start in the throat or your heart. After that, the cancer could spread anywhere. Right now I want to start you on chemotherapy, and in time we could see remission.”

Ed looked at the doctor and said,

“So, am I going to die?”

Dr. Morse had given this kind of news many times, and it never gets easier. He gave a confident smile and said,

“Maybe. To be honest Edward, there isn’t a lot I can tell you about how much time you have. It depends on how effective the chemotherapy is, and it also depends on how you respond to treatment yourself. I have seen patients with your illness that live two years, or five years, in some cases they fall fast and die within the year of diagnosis. It is completely possible that you could go through chemo and surgery to try and eradicate the cancer and come out on the other side and live a long time. However, as your doctor, given what we know about your current condition, you have about a 25% chance to be talking to me again in five years.”

As he watched the water spiral down the bottom of the toilet bowl, the smell of bile and disinfectant in his nose, Ed pushed himself up, brushed his teeth, and stumbled back to his bed. He hated chemo. He hated the fact that he felt terrible all the time. He could feel his strength depleting as the weeks wore on. He hated himself more than all that though. Even though he quit smoking cigarettes three years ago, the 36 years prior created the environment in his lungs for cancer to start.

At 53 years old, Edward Searsen found himself questioning everything he knew. He never had children, and his parents died when he was 47 in a car accident. He was alone. Ed had friends, sure, but they didn't see each other on a regular basis, and they had lives to tend to. Ed realized for the first time how alone he really was in this life. His only family that stayed in touch anymore was his sister, and she still didn't know about the cancer, Ed didn't want to burden her with that. He had thought about death from a distance before, but it never really registered. Now he was staring it in the face, and he was scared to blink. He thought about the first cigarette he ever smoked, the tool he used destroy his lungs.

It was 1977, Ed was 16 years old, and Samantha Walters's boobs were far too large for the shirt she was wearing. Ed was staring at her face though, freckled, with long red hair for a frame. She was wearing a Led Zeppelin shirt and a smile that said, *come and get me*. She was cool, unlike a lot of girls Ed knew, and she had an attraction that drew him in like a moth to flame. Ed had never met another girl quite like her, and that's why he lied to his mother about who he was with that night.

"Yeah mom, I'm going with Tom and John to see that new Star Wars movie."

"Are you sure?" his mother inquired.

"Yes mom. I'll be back by 10:30 or 11 o'clock."

And before she could say anything else, Ed was out the door and halfway up the street. It was about 6:30 on a summer evening in Ann Arbor, Michigan and Ed was on the bus to downtown. He was meeting Samantha at the Fleetwood Diner for a quick bite before the movie. Ed just hoped she would actually be there. A couple days ago Ed joined her for lunch at school.

“So Sammi, what are you doing Friday night? I was thinking maybe we could go out and see a movie?” Ed said as confidently as he could.

“That sounds fun. But only if the movie is good, don’t take me to a sleeper.” She said, a smile spreading across her face.

“How does Star Wars sound? *Lon, long, ago, in a galaxy far, far, away...Sammi said yes to me...*” Ed said in his best epic voice.

“Wow that was about lame enough to actually work. Meet me at the Fleetwood Diner at about 7 on Friday night, and we can head to the State for the show.” She said.

“Sounds good Sammi, I can’t wait!”

The door swung open and Ed crossed the threshold into the greasy shack that smelled like breakfast. His eyes darted to every corner of the room and then he saw her. She looked good. The smile she beamed his way was so cute that he practically ran to sit with her. They bought a coffee, and discussed their favorite band, Led Zeppelin. After going back and forth about which album was better, *Led Zeppelin II* or *IV*, they started walking towards the theater. After a couple minutes Sammi reached into her bra, and produced a pack of Marlboro Reds.

“You smoke!?” He said.

“Sometimes...Not like my parents though. I smoke a couple a day, my big brother bought me this pack...do you want one?” She asked.

Ed didn't know what to say. His parents smoked, but he never really thought about it himself. So, he said,

“Why not? I can try something new.” He said as she handed him the cigarette.

Ed put the filter in his mouth, and Sammi reached over to light it. He breathed in hard, and even though he was trying to impress her, he coughed like an old man in his deathbed.

Sammi giggled at him and lit her own,

“Something new indeed! Try not to hit it so hard, a little puff will do the trick just fine.” She told him.

Those words echoed in his ears now, as he lay awake in bed, the pain too much to even fall asleep. Sammi lasted a few years, but by the time they were in college they had been set on very different paths. He always had fond memories of her though, a sweet girl, and cool. *A little puff will do*, he thought to himself, *do the trick of killing me maybe*. It was times like these, in the midst of pain and depression with his cancer that Ed thought about his old habit. If only he never smoked that cigarette with Sammi, maybe he would have said no forever; maybe not have cancer right now. If only he had listened to people telling him to quit sooner. *If only cigarettes didn't fucking kill you*, he thought. Eventually, sleep soothed his pain for the night.

Ed received a leave of absence from the radio station when he was diagnosed. His skills from working communications with the Navy gave him a good background and landed him a job operating a board for the local rock radio station. Ed got out of the Navy in 1991

after ten years in, right before the whole business with Desert Storm. He opted to go the military route instead of college, and never regretted it. But these days were different. Ed tried to exercise and keep busy, but without his job, he just didn't have much to do. Today he had an appointment with the doctor, a meeting he never liked too much anymore.

“Well Edward, how are you feeling? How's the chemo?” he asked.

“Like shit, doc. I'm throwing up so much, and I can't sleep very much, I feel weak. I've been depressed, man. I'm lonely, I don't really have a family, and life is pretty dull when you aren't working.” He retorted.

“I wish the chemo didn't do that, but it's the most effective option for you. Have you heard of medicinal marijuana? If the pain meds I have you on right now aren't sufficient, you may want to look into it, a lot of people with cancer use it.”

“I haven't smoked weed in 20 years doc, but if you think it would help, I might be interested.” Ed said.

“I'll have the nurse give you an information packet, and here,” Dr. Morse wrote something on a piece of paper, “It's a recommendation for the marijuana, if you decide you want it. Also, I'm going to give you some info about cancer support groups. Maybe you'll be able to meet some people who you can relate with, maybe you'll meet some friends.”

Frank

“Hello!? I need an ambulance, my husband just collapsed; I think he had a heart attack, or a stroke. He isn't talking but I can feel a pulse, and he's breathing. We are at 683 Humphrey Road. Please get here quick!”

About 8 minutes later the ambulance pulled up to the house, horns blaring and lights flashing. The EMT's rushed into the house with the stretcher and loaded Frank on, and moments later they were back in the ambulance and racing towards the hospital.

Frank had a stroke, but thanks to the quick response by his wife and the EMT's, his life was saved. The hospital found something else though.

"You have liver cancer Frank; we noticed it in your full body MRI. That stroke may have actually saved your life. I know this is hard to hear just after this stroke, but we need to get you on treatment for this soon." Dr. Morse said.

"Are you sure? How can this be? Wouldn't I have noticed it?" Frank replied.

"Well Frank, the cancer isn't very large from what I could tell on the MRI, but that's why we need to start doing more tests and scans specific to the liver. We don't exactly know what we are dealing with yet, but I've seen cancer hundreds of times, and unless these eyes are playing tricks on me, you have it." Dr. Morse said.

"Am I going to be okay doctor? I mean, it can't be good to have a stroke and cancer. I just need to know. I have a wife, kids, I can't die. Not yet."

"Frank, we're just going to have to move forward with your stroke treatments and begin cancer treatments. For now, just hang in there. I know this is tough, but trust me, soon enough we will know a lot more about your condition, and we will know a lot more about your outlook. I'm sorry I can't say anything more right now."

"Alright doctor, when can we start?" said Frank.

"For the next few days you are going to rest up, and we are going to take some more scans, both for your cancer, and to check on the status of your brain and body in response to your stroke, which was relatively small. Luckily, you made it here in time for us to treat you

effectively for stroke. You will have to make some changes in your life, but the cancer will be the main focus soon enough.” The doctor said, and after goodbye’s, walked out.

Frank was scared; he had never had serious health problems. Now he had two. He couldn’t believe that now, at 55 he was faced with the prospect of liver cancer. He didn’t even drink that much. Sure, college involved its parties, and the few years after tended to be heavier on the drink, but for the last thirty years or so only a couple times a week at most. His wife didn’t like to drink very often, and Frank had to be in a special mood to get drunk. As he sat there thinking about this, his wife walked into the room. Red-eyed, with a puffy face, it looked like she must have talked to the doctor already.

Jackie walked up to her husband, with tubes running from his arms, and the machines around him beeping, and gently picked up his hand. She stared into his eyes for what seemed like an hour, squeezed his hand with a loving firmness that said *you will get through this, we will get through this, and it’s going to be okay*. She sat herself down next to her husband, and slipped her arms around his neck, kissed Frank on the cheek, and laid her head on his chest.

“I love you Frankie, I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t say that! You saved my life today Jackie. The doctor said if I didn’t get here when I did, the stroke might have been worse. I love you too.”

The following week, Frank had another appointment with Dr. Morse.

“Well Frank, this is going to be hard to take in, but we were mistaken last week.”

Frank’s heart fluttered, could it be better than he thought? Had the scans shown no cancer?

He dared not hope yet though.

“You have brain cancer Frank. The tumor in your head started bleeding, and that caused your stroke. What I saw in your liver is cancer; it’s a smaller tumor like I said, but that just means that it recently made its way through your blood and lodged in your liver. We will try and cut these tumors out though surgery, but you need to go through chemo as well, to try and kill all of the cancerous cells in your body. Your condition is far worse than I originally thought. When we looked at your brain, we missed the tumor because of all the hemorrhaging. Now we know what’s going on though. We will put you on the best track we can.”

“What!? How doctor? This just can’t be. How can I go to being this sick, after feeling fine a week ago?”

“Cancer doesn’t just pick sick people Frank. It can happen to anyone. All I can do is provide you with the best treatment plan I can to give you as much of a chance to beat this as possible. Fight, Frank. There is always hope, don’t let the situation take you down.”

“Thanks doctor. I guess the next step is getting the cancer treatments in motion, I think I need to be alone for a while right now though. I need to sleep.” Frank said.

“I understand Frank. When you wake up call for your nurse, and you she will fill you in on the ensuing process.”

Frank turned over and slept for the next ten hours.

Over the next couple weeks Frank spiraled into depression. He was at a loss for what to do next; how he could move forward. Most times he stewed in his mind, mulling over all of his sins, trying to reason a way that maybe he was reaping what he sowed in his past. But there was nothing. Frank felt like Job must have when God took his protection away, and Satan tore his life apart. Yet, he was unlike Job, and that bothered him the most. Frank was not on

his knees praying, and thanking God for the blessings he had before. Frank was angry and questioning of God's hand in his life. For so many years, Frank had thought of God as his father, as his guide through this life. Now, he thought of him as a cruel child with a colony of ants. Burn this one, drown those, and pull that one's legs off. All to see what makes us tick. What kind of test is it to put a death stamp on someone? To see how they react when they figure out that everything they have ever known will leave them behind in due time. To watch them torment themselves with thoughts about whether their kids will be okay, and what will become of their family. And Frank, only 55 years old, figured he would have at least another ten or twenty years before he met his maker. Now he was wondering if that God even existed.

Noticing his depression, Frank's family and doctors all started pulling for him to go to a cancer support group meeting, just to meet some other people in a similar situation. Frank really didn't want to go, but he decided to give it a shot if it would shut everyone up. So the following Wednesday, he went to a group that met in the Arboretum, near the University of Michigan hospital. The group met in a small circle, about ten people, underneath a large shady tree in the middle of a nice green clearing. After some small talk the group leader stood up and asked if anyone would volunteer to go first.

"I'll go."

Came words from a rough voice accompanied by a smoker's cough.

"My name is Ed, and I have stage 2 lung cancer."

"Hi, Ed." The group responded in unison.

"Well, I was diagnosed a year ago today. For quite a while after my diagnosis, I was pretty down. I didn't feel good about much in life. In some regards though, I think that was

how I felt before the cancer too. I secluded myself, and drowned in the memories of younger years, past loves and mistakes and great moments. But then I came to the group. I met a great community of fighters and believers. I discovered that, *yeah*, I could get depressed, and down and just hate my situation. But I also discovered that other side of the spectrum. It feels better to fight. When you fight, when you try, even in the face of defeat, you can smile. And in the victory, that smile sweetens up even more. I have seen a couple faces leave our group, into the great unknown. But they fought hard, they lived full, and they won.”

“Thanks, Ed.” The group leader said, and then the next person said their piece.

Frank was intrigued. This guy on the other side of the loose circle seemed to come from the place Frank was in now. Frank was determined to talk with him more. Everyone around the circle said something about themselves or how they were doing. When it was Frank’s turn, he told the story of his diagnosis, and said

“Right now, I honestly hate most things.”

And with that the last person went, and after some more pleasantries, everyone started going their separate ways. But Frank caught up with Ed first.

“Hey man, could we talk sometime? It sounded like maybe you found yourself out of a dark place, and I was wondering how.” said Frank.

“Anytime, brother. Say, do you like football?” Ed shot back.

“I love football!” Frank said with a smile.

Beth

She walked through the doors of the cancer unit and into her new job. Beth is a 27 year old nurse, who just started working under Dr. Morse. As she walked down the hall, the doctor turned a corner, and noticed her.

“Hi Beth! How are you doing today? Have you taken the tour yet?” Dr. Morse said as he walked up with hand outstretched. Beth took it, and gave a firm shake, saying,

“Actually no, this is the first time I’ve been here. And I’m doing fine, thanks! I’m very excited to start working.”

“Well, I’ll have one of the other nurses show you around in depth, but there are a couple people that I would like you to meet. These two guys will be a couple of your main patients from now on. Their names are Edward and Frank.”

Beth and Dr. Morse walked down the hall and turned into one of the rooms. Inside were two men who looked like shells of their former selves. Yet, they were laughing and joking together, with big smiles on their faces.

“How’s it going guys? This is Beth, she is a new nurse here, and she’ll be helping you when you come to the hospital. Now this is her first day, so be nice! I have some rounds to do, so get to know each other a bit, and I’ll be back to check on you guys soon enough.”

As the doctor walked out, Beth pulled a chair up, and sat with the two patients.

“So, Dr. Morse told me your names, but who’s who?” she asked.

The one on the left spoke first,

“I’m Ed. I’m here because I smoked cigarettes for 36 years. Stage 2 lung cancer and I come here for my chemo treatments.” said a tall man with a Michigan hat, and light stubble on his chin. He wore a Led Zeppelin shirt and khaki shorts. Then the other one piped in,

“My name is Frank, and I’m here because I have brain cancer. I had a stroke, and they found cancer in my liver. After further testing though, we found out that I had brain cancer the whole time, and that in fact it had started spreading to my liver. I also come here

for chemo, and Dr. Morse is a nice enough man to let me do it with my buddy Ed over here.” said a shorter man, who wore a Michigan football shirt and blue jeans. He was thinner, and looked noticeably worse than Ed.

“Well, my name is Beth and I’m here to help take care of you guys when you’re here. I am available to talk, or if you need anything, just let me know. It’s nice to meet you guys, I’m looking forward to getting to know you both, and fight this disease together! So, I’m guessing you guys like Michigan football?”

“Ha, what gave it away?” said Frank,

“Yeah, actually we just went to a game a couple weeks ago. A win, thankfully.” said Ed.

“Sorry to say, but you’re looking at a Spartan girl!” Beth said with a sly smile.

“What!? I think we might need a new nurse then, what do you think Frank?”

“I think you might be right Ed, Spartans aren’t welcome in these parts. But maybe we should give her a chance? We might be able to convince her of the error in her ways. Besides we got the victory on ‘em this year. Hell, and even OSU, we’re Big Ten Champs Ed.” Frank responded with a smile.

Around then, Dr. Morse walked back in and told the men that they could leave whenever they wanted to. He and Beth left them and went back to his office.

“Now Beth, I want you to know that the two men I introduced you to are your two primary patients. Right now they are outpatients, but soon enough I believe they will be moved to the hospital. When that happens you will be much more involved with them. However, until then I just want you to be an open door for them. Help them with anything they need when they are here, they need to be comfortable with you.”

“I understand doctor. I guess my only question is what is the prognosis of these men? From the sound of it, they are both terminal. How long do they have left? And do you have any thoughts on when they would move to the hospital?”

“Frank is worse off. I don’t think he’ll be here a year from now. He has extensive brain cancer that has already started to move around his body. Ed has a bit better of an outlook. While I think his condition is bad enough that he likely won’t recover, he has a shot. Yet, I think Ed has accepted that he will die. His cancer has moved from his lungs to the lymph nodes and chest cavity, so it is possible for it to continue to move. But, by the end of his chemo, it could be in remission. As far as moving into the hospital, that is more up to the patients than anyone else. We won’t force them to move into the hospital, only inform them that being in the hospital will improve their chances of survival. We also don’t want to take them in before they need to. I would guess that at some point within the next 6 or 7 months, at least one of them will be here full time.”

“Alright doctor. Well I’m excited to be working with you, and with these patients.”

After that, Beth was told she could go home for the night. She left the hospital and picked up a pizza on the way home. *I can’t believe my first two patients here are going to die*, she thought to herself. *At least they seem to be in good spirits given the situation. I hope I can be a comfort to them.*

The Game

As Ed walked up to the door, he felt a butterfly in his stomach. Sure, he had made friends through the group before, but this guy approached him. Frank was his name. The door opened and a squat woman with shorter curly hair answered the door.

“Hi there! You must be Ed; Frank has said a lot about you. Please, come in, would you like some coffee?”

“Sure, that sounds great, thanks.”

Frank walked into the quaint little house, and joined Frank at the dining table.

“How’s it going Frank? You ready to go watch The Game?”

“It’s going well Ed. I feel better since the group meeting the other day. And I’m definitely ready for this game. Go Blue! The Buckeyes are in for a beating today, I can feel it.”

“Well, the team is going to have to play a good game, but I feel confident too.”

The 2015 season for the Wolverines has gone well, going into the Ohio State game undefeated. With a huge win against Michigan State in October, the Wolverines made a statement that they were legitimate contenders. With the season finale at home against Ohio State, the team controls its own destiny, and could land themselves in the college football playoff for the national title.

Ed and Frank finished their coffee, and headed out to the game. As the taxi pulled up towards the stadium, Frank paid the man, and the friends left the car. Ed pulled out two tickets and they walked towards the gate.

“I had to kill a man for these tickets”, Ed said with a serious look. “We are on the fifty yard line, right behind the Michigan team, in the third row.”

“Do you need help hiding the body?” Frank chuckled back.

“Not anymore! It’s long gone at this point.”

Ed had used his vacation money to buy the tickets. Given his condition, he figured he wouldn’t be going on any more vacations, and wanted to share this experience with his

newest friend. As they took their seats they saw the marching band spread across the field in the shape of the block M.

“So Ed, forgive me if I’m forward, but how did you work yourself out of the hole?”

Seeing as there was still time before the game started, Ed gave in.

“Well Frank, I won’t lie, it was hard. I was in a dark place, with not much family left, and my secluded lifestyle, I was lonely and depressed with no hope. I’m by no means a religious man; never have been really. But at my first group meeting, I met a woman named Sarah. She talked about how her faith helped her deal with her prognosis. She said that she could feel the relationship with God and his hand in her life. Instead of getting down, or losing faith, she grew spiritually. So I got in touch with my spirituality. I started thinking about life as more than just the living. It is the connection you have with other people and your environment. I didn’t think there was life after death before, but now, I feel like the spirit, who we really are, lives on. I don’t know the conditions of this, and I don’t really care, but the hope of something else after this pushes me on.”

“Wow.” *I’m totally opposite! When faced with my prognosis I started giving up on God, and at this point I’m almost convinced he can’t be real, at least not how the church see it.* Frank thought to himself. “You know, that’s interesting Ed. I’ve been a Christian since I was in grade school. I never thought that would change, but after I was diagnosed, I couldn’t deal with the fact that my God would forsake me. I moved away from my spirituality, my religion. At this point, I’m not sure if he even actually exists. I’ve been putting on an act for my family, to give them hope, and to keep their faith. But in my head, I can’t accept it anymore.”

“Really? I mean, no offense Frank I know I’m not a Bible thumper, but why? If god sent his son to die for everyone, what makes you so special that you can’t get cancer? You’ve also got about 20 years on Jesus when he died. And I’ve heard of Job too, he had everything taken from him, family, lands, health, money, and still he praised god. Why do you feel the way you do?”

Frank felt bad now. “I guess I just think that I have lived well enough. I have a Christian home; I take the whole family to church every week. I’m not a druggie. I’ve never really done a whole lot wrong, no more than most people learning the way of the world at least. And I’m only 55. My kids aren’t grown yet, and their father is going to die. How could a benevolent God let that happen?”

Ed looked over, shrugged his shoulders a little and let out a sigh,

“Well Frank, I wish I had an answer. I can see why you feel the way you do, but don’t shut the door on your faith. It could come to comfort you. At the same time, maybe you just need to look at it through a different lens, like me. What I can say, is I don’t think god looked down on you and said “Brain cancer for this one”. It is a terrible disease that can get anyone...”

Just then the players were running out onto the field, all of the Michigan men hitting the giant banner that they bring out every home game. As Ed and Frank watched, the Michigan team tore into their bitter rivals, coming into halftime up 21-10.

“Whoa Frank! We’re looking real good today! This might be a historic day for Michigan football!”

“You’re right Ed! GO BLUE!” he shouted.

As the band marched back out onto the field for the halftime show, Ed pulled something out of his pocket.

“You ever seen one of these Frank?” he asked as he produced the object, a vapor pen. “I know you aren’t a druggie, and trust me, I’m not really one either. After I was diagnosed, Doc Morse gave me a recommendation for medical marijuana. At first I was hesitant, but eventually I got my card, and it has helped the chemo process greatly.”

“Never. What is it? And Dr. Morse gave me a recommendation too, but I pretty much ignored it.”

“Well, if you want to try something new, feel free. It’s a vapor pen, and it vaporizes weed so there is no smoke, which is the primary negative side effect. All you have to do is press this button and breathe in the vapor.” said Ed.

“I don’t know Ed. Isn’t that illegal? And also, will I be okay? I’ve never done weed before.

“If you want to do it, here it is. We can say it’s an e-cig, and no one will say anything more. And even if they did, it’s mine and I have a card, and they aren’t going to throw out a couple cancer patients for toking a few hits. You will be just fine. You’ll probably feel a bit goofy and giggly, but you’ll be okay.”

“I guess I’ll try it...”

The two friends shared the vaporizer, and got high together. They watched the rest of the game laughing at the player antics, and the cheering even louder at the big plays. With smiles on their faces, they walked out of the stadium victors in a 31-17 rout of their hated rival.

The Hospital

It had been 8 months since The Game. Both Frank and Ed were deteriorating and Frank was permanently moved to the hospital. The cancer in his liver had come back since they cut it out a year and a half ago. This time though, the cancer was in his heart too. Everyone knew that Frank was going to die.

Beth walked into the room to see Jackie and Ed sitting next to Frank. Frank was in terrible shape, he had shriveled in the past month or so. Before his cancer Frank was about 200 pounds, mostly muscle. Now, he was at 130, and very weak.

“How are you feeling Frank?” Beth asked.

“Like Hell. How are you?”

“I’m doing okay Frank, is there anything I can get you?”

“If you could get me some more water that would be great.” He said with a scratchy voice.

“I’ll be back in a moment, do you need anything Ed?”

“Just get Frank his water, I’ll be fine, thanks Beth.”

As she walked out of the room, Beth’s heart sank. This man had gone downhill so fast from the time she met him. It was pretty much as Dr. Morse said. Frank was dying, and he could literally go any day now. *At least Frank has gotten better in other ways. From what the doctor said, Frank was battling a dark depression before he met Ed. Ed gave him hope again. Frank even talked to me about god the other night, about how he works in mysterious ways. Frank said that his death should be a testament of faith, and not of desertion. A stark change from the way he felt when I first met him.*

“Here you go Frank” Beth said as she brought the straw to Frank’s mouth to let him drink the water.

When he had his fill, she set it on the table next to him, and took a seat. There was silence in the room that roared like an ocean. It seemed as if everyone wanted to say something, but no one could. And then he said it,

“I’m going to die soon. I can feel it.” Frank croaked out.

Tears started rolling down Jackie’s face at this remark, and Ed just looked down.

“Don’t sa-” Beth started, but Frank cut her off with a hand.

“I’m going to die Beth, you know this too. I have made my peace. I need you three to keep fighting after I’m gone. Beth, don’t let Ed give up, he could make it! I know that I’m a lot worse than he is, always have been. Ed, never stop fighting brother. You helped me stand in my faith again, even as an atheist yourself. You have a fight in you that can keep going, like a Viking who is bleeding out on the battlefield. In the face of danger he fights, because he knows that if he dies a warrior, Valhalla awaits him. Now if you two would excuse us, I would like to spend the rest of the night with my wife and children when they get here.”

All Beth could say was,

“I will see you in a while Frank, to check on you.” And then she shuffled out the door and down the hall.

“Ed, stay just a minute longer.” Frank said as he reached out his hand. Ed took it, and Frank said “You are one of the best people I have ever met Ed. You helped me out of the darkest place I’ve ever been, and never expected anything in return. The world needs more

people like you. If I don't see you again in this life, look me up in the next. Thank you so much for being my friend. Like I said, don't stop fighting!"

"Frank, *sigh*, man. I don't know what to say. You are my best friend, and I'm glad that we were able to make each other's lives better in the time we've known each other. We will see each other again. I love you buddy." Ed said as he gave Frank a firm squeeze. Then he left Frank with his wife.

Later that night, after Frank saw his kids for the last time, he gave up the ghost.

The Afterlife

After Frank died Ed's condition got worse. Within a month he was in the hospital himself. It was something akin to the phenomena where a husband or wife dies soon after their significant other. It was like the will to live disappeared when Frank expired. Ed died three months after his best friend. The only people that came to his funeral were Jackie, Beth, his sister Anne, and some people from the support group.

Beth decided she had to speak at his funeral though.

"I met Ed about a year ago. When we met he was smiling and joking with his best friend Frank. I was their nurse in the cancer ward at the hospital. Ed was a fighter, and he pulled the fighter out of Frank too. Together these two men could have done anything, if only they met with more time. I know this isn't about Frank, or myself, but I can't say much about Ed without Frank. And I can't talk about them without thinking of me. Ed told me about the fact that he never really believed in god. He told me that maybe that was a mistake. He told me about the newfound spirituality that he acquired. He had a hope for something after this life. Ed didn't credit any god or mythos for his afterlife, but he believed in something. It really came down to the spirit, and that the spirit lives on after our body

dies. It excited him to think that there could be something more. This had a profound effect on me, and helped to develop my own spirituality. And Frank, he was important too. To know Ed at the end of his life was to know Frank as well. The two were largely inseparable until Frank died. I saw Frank coming out of his depression with the help of Ed. He taught me to never give up on what is important to you. Frank had a hard time with his god after his diagnosis. For a time, he even turned his back on god. Yet, Ed helped Frank see that god wasn't punishing him, but maybe using him for a greater purpose. Maybe that purpose was to open my eyes. At the end, Frank was calm. He accepted his fate with dignity, and he was at peace. I believe he died a happy man, to have known our friend Ed. I am just happy that I was able to know these men before they passed.”

Beth had tears rolling down her cheeks before she finished. As she stepped down from the podium, she took a seat and thought about her two missing friends. *What actually happens when we die then? If the world is just those two are sitting somewhere, talking about football, or whatever the current news is.* She could see it.

In a café she saw Frank sitting with a newspaper, a coffee in front of him. Not the Frank she knew, but one bigger and stronger. As he was reading the paper, another man approached the table; he had an overcoat and hat that made him look like he had travelled for days. As he took off the hat and coat, she noticed it was Ed. Frank looked up and gave him a hug, and then they both sat down. Beth moved in closer to hear what they were saying.

“How long have you been waiting?” Ed said.

“Oh, not long, not long at all brother. I actually thought you might be longer.”

“Yeah well, I'm here now Frank. It's nice to see you.”

