

STUFF CHANGES

by Jon Jory

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SYNOPSIS: A mother's stroke has left her voiceless. An emotional story told from the perspective of her child, who watches as the family dynamic deteriorates while their mother finds solace in an unexpected friend, the morning newspaper man. A layered dramatic look into trauma, acceptance, and the language that binds us together.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 either)

NARRATOR (m/f)

NARRATOR: You came. Thank you. I didn't think you would, I didn't think you would come. You were very important to her. You probably don't think so. I don't think we really believe in our personal importance. I didn't, but now I see. Mom watched for you out the window. At first she watched to see when you came. She got up at five to find out. It was cold so she would bundle up and I would hear her footsteps in the hall and I wondered where she was going, so finally I followed her. She didn't turn on the lights and it was too dark to see much but I could just make out her silhouette. So we would both go down the stairs and I would stop and listen and I would hear the front door close and I would go down the stairs into the TV room that has a window that looks out on the front yard. And there she was in the driveway and after a while I could see the lights from your car slowing down in front of our house and I could see her silhouette and she was waving.

She had a stroke on October 17th and she got slowly better, but she didn't speak anymore. She would smile at Dad and me but she never said a word. And sometimes when she smiled there would be tears running down her face and Dad would hold her. And he would sing to her. He would sing her Beatles songs and after a while she stopped crying. Sometimes when I would go in her room to get something, she would be sitting in the green armchair and she was kind of staring straight in front of her and her lips would be moving, but there was no sound. I asked Dad what she was doing and he said she was singing. He said she knew the words to every Beatles song. He said there were a hundred and thirty-four of them.

She didn't leave the house anymore except to wave at you in the dawn light. She had a little chalkboard that she carried around the house and she would have conversations with us writing on the board. Sometimes it would be feelings or a grocery list or a question like, "Where are my slippers?" But a lot of times it would be—well, I didn't know at first—it would be lines from poems. Yesterday she wrote, "Of what use is language? A beast of the field moans a few times when death takes its young. And we are voiceless in the presence of realities—we cannot speak." I said, "Mom, who wrote that?" And she just shook her head and smiled.

For some reason she didn't like the television—maybe because... I really don't know why. One night Dad and I were watching, *Gangs of New York*, which is one of his favorites and mom walked in with this beef tenderizer thing and then threw it through the screen and there was this kind of muffled explosion and then glass shattered everywhere and then no image and mom wrote, "serves them right" and then went to her room and closed the door. She and Dad didn't sleep in the same room anymore. Poor Dad. He tried everything to keep it going. The marriage I mean. It just slipped away. I tried to talk to her. I said Dad still loved her and she wrote, "What's to love?" and then she kissed me on the cheek and left the room. Eventually she hardly ever came out of the room. Only to go to the bathroom or to go into the kitchen to make herself fabulous meals, or to go out in the morning to wave at you. Dad called her, "the ghost of my love." When he would come home from working at Amazon he would say to me, "Well, how's the ghost of my love?" I hated that. I told him how I hated that.

Pretty soon after that he left. The car was gone and some of his stuff was gone and he was gone. What weirded me out was that I wasn't surprised. He'd been more or less gone for quite a while. Mom didn't even seem to notice much. When I told her she just nodded and smiled. She wrote on the board, "I liked him," and she never referred to it again. The first time he called after that he told me he "wanted to keep in touch." That's a tough one to figure out, huh? So anyway, life goes on, huh? Which is kind of weird.

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