

How It Is

How is it

that in a room I've never lived in

I am assaulted by memories so vivid that I almost hear my father whistling down the hall?

Hear him calling my name?

Yet it's not quite two years since I sat in a hospital room, whispered my love to him, and
promised to take care of you as he took his last breath on earth.

How is it

that in a room with a color palette I'd never select

I find so much comfort?

I fool myself that any minute you too will come in with your tea and sit down and complete the
puzzle started three weeks ago that is waiting by the green chair.

Yet you are in a medical facility...alone.

How is it

that I am forbidden to go into that room, and hold your hand and whisper I love you,

and keep my promise?

How is it
that I will ever be able to deconstruct this room,
to take that first picture off a wall,
and lose a place that revives memories I didn't know I had?

Memories of your lives...

What are memories?
If they are really only electrical impulses in my brain,
how is it
that I feel them in my chest, my eyes, even my lips
as I purse them together so tightly they can't even be seen
in a useless attempt to keep the glorious memories from leaking out
and trickling down my face?

Immobilized by the enormity of it all I decide to straighten up a room,
that has very little out of place except the absent two designers.

I am startled to find something grossly untidy.

A green mug contains a coalesced, obsidian, bacterial slime of evaporated tea
resting on a twice folded paper towel protecting the coaster sitting underneath it.

You had placed it there, beside the piles of bills and junk mail,
the same morning you started that puzzle. Before you fell...

How is it

that a fall can change so much?

It was the beginning ember of weeks of health care wild fires and phone calls.

“Your mother has fallen and they took her to the hospital!

Do you know how she is doing?” “Do you know where she is?”

No! NO! I don’t know...how can I not know?

The phone calls kept coming,

detailing trench warfare advances on your health.

“Your mother has fallen again.”

“Your mother has AFIB... has a dangerous blood pressure spike...has been moved to avoid
getting COVID... moved back again because she tested positive for the virus...”

Moving, moving,

and several times they forget to tell me

and I call your room and get no answer and am scared.

How is it

that a year can change so much?

It's incomprehensible to me that you are going through this alone,

that I don't even always know where you are and can't be with you

to hold your hand and whisper I love you as you go through this unrelenting health journey.

I throw out the tea slime, and some junk mail, and sort bills.

The phone rings

and my stomach drops.

How is it

that my family has been granted a reprieve? That you are doing...well!?

You might,

possibly might,

eventually might...get to come back to this room I'm standing in,

sit in the green chair and finish that puzzle.

And I might be able to see you again, in life...

I could sit beside you, hold your hand and tell you in person that I love you.

How is it

that these last few hours in this sanctuary of memories will change me?

What questions will I be able to ask you now?

What old memories will we share, what new ones will we be able to make?

I ponder this as I double fold a new paper towel and put it on the coaster to wait for the next cup of tea. I'm thankful I didn't disturb anything but dirty cups, junk mail and bills.

I turn to leave, closing and locking the door,

grateful I can leave it just

how it is.