

## Fragmented

Jiming Lindal

Water is filled to the rim of the glass. Light travels through the water. Water reflects the light in many directions.

A pill is set aside by the glass.

A hand grabs the pill, shaking and another hand lifts the glass – almost loses the grip.

An old face -- that's his face.

He takes his pill, satisfied and sighs.

His memory is broken into bits and pieces. His son visits him. In his vague memory, he knows his name. He is not sure whether his son has graduated from college or not, so he asks. His son tells him that he graduated and has been working for more than ten years. He pauses for a moment and acknowledges it.

His son takes a seat beside him. To his son, he looks pale. That's his dad, he sees him slowly gone into another world, a fragmented world. His son is sad.

His son remembers his younger years, a scientist with ambition. He won gold medals from the government, for his achievement in aerospace science. He was a project lead for Voyager, a space program of NASA – he spent the entire career working on it. He was well respected in his field, but work was stressful and he had a temper.

I'm going to Pasadena, he says. He doesn't remember he is long retired.

Why are you here, he asks his son. His memory fades again.

I'm here to visit you, his son answers. His son doesn't want to lose his father this fast.

He wants to get up from the bed, but he is too frail. His wife helps him. She is old too. Wrinkles crawl all over her face. He is her husband for more than fifty years. It seems like yesterday that they celebrated their golden anniversary. She says not many people make it to the golden, and they are fortunate enough to make it. She says with a pride.

She takes off his diaper, cleans him, and puts him back to his bed. She does that a few times a day.

She looks around the house. There're many collections of artwork. One stands out to her is a wooden painting of a squirrel on the tree. The artist took natural wooden lines and painted on top of it. They were together in the farmer's market, and their eyes both set on

this. It brought them peace and was worth every penny. She wonders if, in his faint memory, he still has a space for the painting?

He lives like a shell. His mind is gone, most of it. The other day, he asked what her name was. He barely recognizes her. She still has hopes, hoping that he will come back to his senses.

She looks up on the wall. A photo hangs there. It's their wedding photo. She sat there, holding a bouquet of white flowers. She wore a veil, and the white gown fit her well. Her face glowed. He wore his thick, black-rimmed glasses, standing behind her. He was in a tuxedo with a bow tie. He was a Ph.D. graduate from Stanford. His eyes filled with tender love. That day, when she looked into his eyes, she made a promise to him: in sickness and in health, she will stick with him. She is now reciting it.

She sits down by the dining room table with his son – their son. The son says, mom, you need help. A few months ago, she would never admit it. Now, she draws a breath and nods. I will set it up for you, the son says. She nods again. She can get panic easily these days, not knowing what to do. She can't make decisions anymore.

The son stands up. I'll need to go. I'll come by tomorrow.

Yes, yes. She says.

His son walks by the bed and says, dad, I'll see you tomorrow. He doesn't respond.

The son leaves, and the apartment feels empty for the wife. She looks out of the window, and dark-blue sky envelopes her. She wants to say something, but she knows she can no longer hold a conversation with him. He will speak, at times, but all the pieces fall apart. She can't gather the pieces and make sense of it. She mourns for the loss of him.

He was once so brilliant. Talking to him made her laugh. She got his humor. He would dance with her, though his dancing skill became rusty over the years. Before he lost his memory, he still danced with her.

She imagines the ballroom where they first met. The song they both danced to was "moon river." He was her "huckleberry friend." When the tune of the song played in her head, the world became a beautiful place.

She sits down and starts to sew a patch on her pants. She rarely spends money on herself, least clothes. Now she knows if she hires someone to take care of him, it will eat up her savings. She sees difficult days ahead.

Recently she can't taste anything -- she doesn't have an appetite. Without him there, life loses color. She has lost weight, quite a lot, but she doesn't want to see the doctor.

At night, she feels the sky is void, but she refuses to give in to the darkness. I cannot die, she says, I need to live. She prays to God that she will have enough strength to handle it. That thought keeps her alive.

She is waiting, for the dawn to come...