

## Love, dormant, old by Linda Zoe Podbros

My father remained silent his last year of life. Just laid in bed, eyes closed—you didn't know if he was awake or asleep. My mother cared for him, as she had for over 50 years, but no longer yelling or nagging.

I remember the tension in our home, mom headstrong and angry; when dad had had enough, he would frown, say something unkind, and retreat to his office. But that last year he barely spoke, for that would take energy or interest. He no longer looked at her as she brought him food and pulled up his blankets. He rarely opened his eyes or acknowledged her. She tended to him, despite never a thank you, in words, expression or gesture. She too, now, remained silent.

I believe there was a time when they weren't mad at each other, a time they embraced and smiled. I sense this from their many early letters to each other, before marriage, letters kept and found in her drawer. I see this from their early pictures with friends, in bathing suits, holding hands. Pictures before children and worries. Pictures of hope and promise.

They knew he would soon die, the end to trips, and visits to the grandchildren. The end to family occasions as had been. The love, in those early years, tired, long expired, and gone. In this last year, one now saw my mother tirelessly caring for him, protecting him, comforting him, enduring his silence. One saw him no longer able to fight, to fight her, or to fight for himself, knowing that he was at the end of his life, gone from any quality of life, any reason to smile.

He had done what he needed to. He had sat up to speak to his children, gaining energy from the oxygen, and conveyed to them the decisions made and their inheritance. Now done, he laid in bed, and ignored his wife who silently grieved for a shred of kindness from the man to whom she had committed her life. He had no energy. She had no hope.

His last days were in the hospital. I sat with him the night before he died, sat beside his bed as he lay with closed eyes, not knowing if he was asleep. I talked quietly to fill the time. I stayed for a while, and then went home.

My phone rang the next morning. It was my mother, with a voice I almost did not recognize, a voice that appeared to sing, an excited bubbling voice. She told me that dad had just called and said he loved her and thanked her. He sounded to her as he had as a young man to a woman he would marry, to a woman with whom for both there was anticipation of future, children, a home, a shared life.

My mother succumbed to her dementia not long after his death. But before her memory was totally gone, she often smiled from the memory of this call and would say he called to tell her he loved her.