

One Last Breath

by
Jack Allen

Based on the short story
"One Last Breath"
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INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen of a colonial-style house with an upstairs, modestly decorated, but filled with objects like a knife holder, pots hanging on the walls, a bottle of olive oil by the stove, a bowl of fruit, and a series of jars with lids, one smaller than the next. HENRY stands in the kitchen with his hands in his pockets. He hears muffled voices through the ceiling over his head and glances up.

The late afternoon sun shines in through the window by the refrigerator and he stands at the window to look out.

HENRY (v.o.)

The doctor is upstairs. It won't be long now. Dad is up there, too, and Jimmy, my brother.

Out the window, the view is of the sun setting over a large lilac bush at the back end of a long yard of lush grass with a pine tree on either side, a wooden swing tucked into one corner, and beds of flowers along each side.

Behind the lilac bush is another fenced in yard, and in that yard a young girl and boy are chasing a golden retriever puppy and laughing and screeching. The puppy barks and runs in circles between the two kids.

In the background we hear footsteps coming down the stairs. HENRY looks away from the window.

HENRY (V.O.)

It's over. Finally.

He lets out a long, slow breath. His arms and shoulders slacken like a great weight has been removed from his shoulders.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

HENRY is sitting on a chair next to the bed, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. His MOTHER is laying in the bed, covered with a blanket, her eyes closed. She is old and very frail and does not move. On the night stand beside the bed is a breathing monitor about the size of a toaster with gauges and red lights on the front that flash. HENRY is holding her hand, at the end of her thin, frail arm. She is breathing very slowly.

The NURSE sits in another chair in the corner of the room, flipping through pages of a People magazine.

HENRY (V.O.)

I sat for I don't know how long last night holding Mom's hand. I don't know if she could see me, or hear me, or even feel me holding her hand. She barely had the strength to clench her fingers around my hand. All of her strength was fighting for that next breath.

A tear runs down Henry's cheek and he wipes it away with his other hand.

HENRY (V.O.)

Was the woman I knew, the woman who raised me and taught me how to mix batter for pancakes, was she still in there? Did she feel pain? Did she know these were the last hours of her life, and did that frighten her? The doctors couldn't tell me that. I didn't need the doctors to tell me how much it frightened me.

The NURSE puts the magazine down and stands up, straightening her slacks.

NURSE

I'm sorry, Henry. You'll have to leave now. I have to give your mother another dose of morphine. It's just to hasten things along, you know.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

HENRY is standing in the middle of the kitchen with his hands in his pockets. In the background is the sound of more footsteps coming down the old, creaky stairs. HENRY takes his hand out of his pocket and quickly wipes away a tear from his cheek and snuffles. DR. VILKES and JIMMY enter the kitchen. They look at HENRY, and he looks back at each of them, but none of them speaks. VILKES goes to the counter and pours a cup of coffee.

VILKES

Have you made the arrangements?

JIMMY

Dad called the funeral home yesterday.

(MORE)

JIMMY (cont'd)
They'll come out in the morning to pick her up. I still have to call the flower shop to tell them where to deliver the flowers.

HENRY
No. You can't do that.

DR. VILKES and JIMMY look at each other with confused faces.

JIMMY
I can't tell them where to send the flowers?

HENRY
No. Not that. I mean the funeral home. I don't wanna take her to a funeral home.

JIMMY touches his forehead and shakes his head.

JIMMY
Henry, what are you talking about? The arrangements have been made. I paid the deposit at the funeral home.

HENRY
If you're worried about losing your money, Jimmy, I'll give you the money.

JIMMY
That's not what I meant.

HENRY
I know that's not what you meant.

JIMMY glares at HENRY, his lips pinched together in a thin line.

JIMMY
Ok then. I'll tell them to come and get her tonight.

HENRY
No. Don't do that.

JIMMY
Why not?

HENRY

Because Mom belongs here. This is her home, here, not some funeral parlor.

DR. VILKES, who is leaning against the counter with one foot crossed over the other, takes a sip of coffee and turns the cup in his hands, like he's trying to examine it's contents from all angles.

VILKES

Henry, son, I understand your concern, I do. I know where you're coming from. Believe me, it's much more convenient to let them take care of everything. You boys need this time to come to grips with your grief.

HENRY

Mom isn't an inconvenience.

VILKES

No, of course not. I didn't mean it like that.

HENRY

Mom belongs here, at home. All of her stuff is here, everything that she was all about, all of her flowers out there in the yard that she worked on all the time, all of her little sculptures and the ceramics she made. Everyone who knows Mom knows her in this house. I don't want to pack up a few of the things that define her and haul them to some cold funeral hall and put her life on display. Everything she was is here now. She belongs here.

When he finishes, DR. VILKES is nodding with his lower lip stuck out like a frown. Jimmy lets out a deep breath and appears to be relieved.

JIMMY

OK then.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

A truck is parked in the driveway in front of the house. The words "LANGSTON FUNERAL HOME" are painted on the side. Two men in black slacks and white shirts push a casket loaded on a trolley toward the house. JIMMY and HENRY are standing on the front porch, watching.

HENRY (V.O.)

We had the casket brought to the house. We put Mom in it and laid her out in the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The casket is set up in front of the fireplace, surrounded by flowers. The front half is open and MOM is laying in it with a peaceful, serene look on her face and her hands are folded over her middle. The living room is filled with people, all dressed in fine clothes, speaking with one another in hushed tones and passing by the casket to gaze at MOM.

HENRY stands off to the sides, by the French double doors that lead out to the back porch. The bright afternoon sun is shining in the back yard.

HENRY (V.O.)

All of our family and all of Mom's friends came to see her. Everyone was real quiet like no one wanted to disturb anything because all her stuff was there in the house, her little pieces of tacky-tack that I always thought were so ugly, only now they were more beautiful than I could ever imagine. I was seeing it all for the first time like it all just appeared on the tables and shelves as clues to the person who has gone missing, as if they were remnants of a life, carried into the house and placed in their various locations by little birds, the same birds that were molded from clay by her own hands and painted in such gaudy colors and glazed with a shine like polished crystal, even the yellow and green bird that hangs by a wire on the shelf under the lamp in the far corner with the broken wing.

(MORE)

HENRY (V.O.) (cont'd)
Its broken piece of wing lays on
the wooden base beneath it, but
somehow it too came to life and
carried itself into the house, not
in Mom's place, not as a reminder
of her passing, but as if it, too,
came to share in the sadness that
she left behind.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

JIMMY and HENRY and four other men carry the casket to the
hearse. A driver, wearing a black uniform, holds the back
door of the hearse open.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

HENRY re-enters the house through the open front door. He
stands in the living room with his arms hanging at his sides.
He looks around the room, takes in a deep breath and lets it
out slowly through his mouth.

End.