

Proxy

By Gloria Heffernan

The social worker who specialized in grief,
kindly highlighted with a yellow marker
all the boxes I needed to initial in order to make it legal—
boxes followed by sentences that I didn't bother to read
because I knew what I was being asked to do
and the disclaimers and stipulations
wouldn't change a thing.

So I signed.
I agreed to make decisions for you
when you could no longer make them for yourself.
I would watch the finale from the best seat in the house
and be the one to decide when to stand for the ovation.
We both know where this is going, you said.
And I knew how you wanted to get there.

How many times had we talked about this moment?
While we sat outside the ICU waiting for your mother to die.
While we visited my mother in the hospice called Center for Hope.
While we listened to the machine that breathed for my sister.
Vigils had become commonplace by then.
Each a rehearsal.
But now we were faced with closing night.
One single light on the stage.
A light you trusted me to extinguish.

And so I did what best friends do.
I made the calls,
held the phone to your ear.
Witnessed.
And waited.

Waited until the weight of the decision
was lighter than the weight of your suffering.
Waited until it was no longer a decision,
but a completion.
Waited until the waiting was over.

Gloria Heffernan is the author of the poetry collection, *What the Gratitude List Said to the Bucket List* (New York Quarterly Books), and the e-book, *Exploring Poetry of Presence: A Companion Guide* (Back Porch Productions). She has written two chapbooks: *Hail to the Symptom* (Moonstone Press) and *Some of Our Parts* (Finishing Line Press). Her work has appeared in over seventy journals including *Chautauqua*, *Columbia Review*, *Magma* (UK), *Stone Canoe*, *The Healing Muse* and Yale University Medicine School's literary journal, *The Perch*. She teaches at Le Moyne College and the Syracuse YMCA's Downtown Writers Center.

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