

Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Article 8

2019

The Grief of Comfort

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Recommended Citation

Foutch, Brian K. (2019) "The Grief of Comfort," *Survive & Thrive: A Journal for Medical Humanities and Narrative as Medicine*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/survive_thrive/vol4/iss1/8

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The Grief of Comfort

Cover Page Footnote

None

You were supposed to provide relief, but you were too cold.
Your blankets were old.
Cold and old like your hull.
Like your sheets white washed, hiding pain of the scared, the used.
All too soon all your white, it turned.
It turned to grey.
Stained from miles of brown shores stained with boots and tears.
Sheets stained with blood of the relieved, of the consoled.
Pillows stained with tears of the missed, the lonely, the tired.

You were supposed to console.
How, while the fuel that drove you
and the wings from your platforms which sat higher than warships;
it mixed with the sea's spray of salt,
that constant reminder of the miles from home?
Of the months from kindergarteners who missed us and our voices.
Oh birds, where was the ease?
Perfect you soared but loud!
You chopped and flew and bled that stink.

Even so, at first we listened proud. Until you brought more work.
Why could the shore not stay the shore?
So distant as you!
You, the sympathizer, distant and inaccessible to the weary.
Then the birds brought the hearts from shore.
They came, one by one;
With stories. With desires. With pain. With work. With hope.

We hoped for little.
For a morning met by the sun not stars.
Oh cheer, did you take that, too?
My love of the dark and early.
The great alleviator.
I would say to myself, "I can."
Five more I can.
You would say ten.
You were my ride, so I would agree.
Ten would pass, yet you had not freed me from the restraint.
Another set of windows, sick with years.
Not to be undone by me.
You, the restorer, you hid.
As my fatigue and sadness grew.
You hid. Far from me.

Far from me was your comfort,
As you flaunted white with flags, full of dignified lights.
Luminaries that captured your attention from the shore.
Could you see me? My need? Where was your band then?
When ten thousand eyes met mine.
Hoping I'd borrowed your name.
I did not. I wished I had. I still cared, so I tried but could not.

Why did I not look away?
Your stars' compliments, they rained!
I dodged their words as they fell on me like glass; clear but sharp.
If I listened, I would wander. I would sit.
I would stop and wonder.
I would long for pinning of gold waves and blades on my chest.
Of pride, of final salutes, of hands shaken, of the words "well done."
I could not allow dreams of familiar horizons between steel and sun.
So I buried them in the magnified scenes of the shaken and old.
The thirty score of day one became centuries of broken and dazed.
They became a game of soulless numbers, a whirl of mist and hurt.

We won, proved by prized hardware and nameless electronic cells.
More cheap steel and plastic lenses delivered from distant Eastern shores.
More tears that wash from bottles for opaquely scratched windows.
More faces—now glares—that invaded my dreams, refusing to fade.
How many are worn and tired, sitting in darkness for my failures?
Ask those who love me, they will say "You would not allow one."
My smiles in their memories masked the worn edge of my jaw,
and those stills could not capture my judging stares and my glares.
Ask the counters, distracted by their computers' blue green glows.
"Why does it matter? Why do you care?" Meaning, "Who knows?"

I would ask you, you were there, but I see you are distracted again.
More are hurt, roofless with roads torn.
How your windows wander!
I have finally spilled my gut and my guilt.
I am ready to wish you well.
Godspeed as they end your rest.
No more poised to console, but ease is what you bring.
For the voiceless I speak and the mild I sing.
"Thanks for the comfort!"
From me, I praise "Thanks for the ride!"
If it is worth these words written to the unsettled, awed and stunned,
Thanks for the kinship and smiles. Please know, this guild, we tried.