



The Passing

Published in **Cemetery Sonata 2**

The funeral home gave us a beautiful ceremony. Large portraits, recaptured moments in time, and teddy bears festooned the chapel along with the discreetly sober bouquets of flowers. We all gathered to share our memories and loss, but none of it eased the painful pressure crushing my heart and numbing my mind.

My Cathy, my sweet, happy go lucky, little angel was gone. Sealed away in the tastefully elegant coffin my mother-in-law had insisted we choose, my baby had only her favorite teddy bears to keep her safe in her eternal sleep. The dress she'd worn was of her own choosing, but the long blonde ringlets artfully framing her face were bought and paid for because the disease and the medical treatments meant to combat it had long ago taken her beautiful locks and left her with a pale, bald scalp that showed the sickly veins crisscrossing just under the skin. I couldn't even bear to touch those curls when I bent down to kiss my little girl goodbye. I couldn't shed any tears. She finally looked so peaceful and I had already shed so many tears late at night while she slept fitfully and I watched over her, in sterile hospital hallways and waiting rooms, and at work when I had to be away from her for even a little while. It was just as well I didn't put on any emotional displays. Jerry, my husband, had long ago, near the beginning of our fight against the disease, lost patience with my moods and my weeping. Not overly comfortable dealing with abstract things like emotions and invisible monsters, he had pulled away from both Cathy and me, and had left us to fight this battle together. At first he didn't want to talk about it. He stopped making plans for the future that included us, and then he physically removed himself by working longer and longer hours, taking more out of town business trips, and keeping himself too busy to share a room with us, let alone our deadly mission. And in the end he shuffled me through the ceremony, playing the role of the great martyr and long suffering rock of support for all to see. He and his mother had planned the whole thing; I suspect even before the end had been in sight for Cathy. My only role was to stay quiet, not to embarrass him or his family with an emotional outburst, and to get through the ceremony with as much dignity as they expected of the grieving mother.

I didn't care. None of it mattered. My precious little girl was gone and all the stories recounted, watery condolences, and well meant casseroles in the world weren't going to bring my baby girl back to me. My whole world had ceased to matter the moment Cathy took her last breath and expelled it in a slow, hissing, soul-shattering whisper of a sound. She was gone.

The little girl, who had started as a dizzy spell and a confirming plus sign a month after our fifteenth wedding anniversary, had left me as a worn out prize fighter hanging on until the last possible round. Jerry didn't know it, but I buried the tickets to Disney World with Cathy. I slipped them into the pocket of her dress when I bent down to kiss her. The trip wouldn't mean anything without her, and Jerry would just insist that we turn them in and get our money back, especially since they were scheduled for two months from now. In a crazy fit of irrational thought, I told myself that maybe she'd go ahead and take the trip without me - she just needed the tickets.

In the end, she hadn't even smelled like my little girl. My mother-in-law had fussed over her casket and dress so much that they had all carried her heavy, expensive cologne. Only Cathy's teddy bear, Booboo, had carried Cathy's smell. Even the hospitals and the medicines and the disease couldn't take her sweet breath and warm cuddles from his worn fur. I almost snatched him from her in one last desperate attempt to hang onto her, but she'd need him to share her dreams with her and to keep away the nightmares while she slept. I could no longer be there for her.