FLASH NONFICTION

# The Last Flash

by Lorna Ye



"Greek Rose" by Maria Messias Mendes

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When Dad was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, he lost not only his health but also his sense of humor.

Dad was the funniest person I had ever known. He often surprised us with a joke or popped out a punchline like a professional comedian, triggering a burst of laughter from listeners. His quirky sense of humor gave us a flush of warmth and a reason to smile even during the toughest days.

The cancer took this gift away. The disease was a monster that slowly scraped off the glow on his face and sucked the energy out of his already thin body.

With stage four cancer, Dad had to stay in a hospital for complex chemotherapy, which we hoped would extend his life and reduce his pain. Most of the time, he leaned against a thick pillow, eyes closed, as if immersed in a solitary meditation, while liquid dripped from an IV bag into the vein of his upper chest through a thin tube. I sat in a chair next to his bed, gazing at his sallow face. Now and then I held his hand in mine as a reminder that I was there with him. Occasionally, he asked short questions — whether I had eaten lunch, where Mom was. Nothing more.

Cancer hospitals breed a gloomy atmosphere. It was not the medicinal smell or the groaning and moaning from the patients that made my heart tremble. It was the desolation in the eyes of those cancer patients. As their hope waned, their fear and despair increased.

I saw the same desolation in Dad's eyes, although he never talked about his feelings.

One chilly morning, when the nurses checked in on Dad as usual, Mom appeared at the door, a bag of apples in one hand and a big bundle of scallions tucked in the curve of the other arm. The scent of onion was sweet and fresh, overpowering the pungent disinfectant.

Alerted by the smell wafting in, Dad straightened his back and turned to Mom. His glassy eyes rested on the bunch of scallions in her arm. He flashed a smile and exclaimed in a whimsical tone, "Oh, you brought me flowers!"

Laughter filled the room like sunbeams. For a brief moment, the Dad I had known so well was back. I laughed along while blinking hard to hold back tears springing to my eyes, wishing time could stand still.

Dad passed away three months later. He hadn't told another joke.

On some sleepless nights, I gaze into the deep sky and think of Dad and his last days, memories fading in and out.

The other night, I saw a shooting star strike a sudden flash in the inky sky. It reminded me of his smile when he told his last joke in that somber hospital room. A transient, bright moment



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as a reminder of who he was.



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