Poetry and Compassion

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Sometimes fate puts people together to help each other.

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Poetry and Compassion

Jan was 18 years old and was in her senior year at Glendale High School. She was a pretty girl with long brown hair and green eyes. She did volunteer work at Mercy Hospital as a candy striper to fulfill the mandatory community service requirement imposed by her high school. Jan was aspiring to go to college and the hospital service work would look good on her application.

As a candy striper Jan worked all over the hospital. She worked at the reception, gift shop, and transporting small items like flowers, medical records, and lab specimens when needed. Today she was asked to bring a report to Doctor Fergus while he was making his rounds on the sixth floor. She rounded the corner near the sixth floor nurseâ s station just in time to see the doctor enter a room. Jan walked down the hall and entered the room.

â Doctor Fergus, I have a delivery for you.â Jan handed him the folder with a polite smile.

â Thank you, miss,â the doctor replied taking the folder.

Jan waited while the doctor opened the folder in case he needed her to do anything. There were two beds in the room but only one was occupied. A young blond haired man was in the bed with a sternal occipital mandibular immobilizer (SOMI) brace on. Jan had seen them before on patients with spinal cord injuries. She saw the boy look at her and she averted her eyes because she didnâ t want to make him uncomfortable because of her looking. The boy made a loud distorted noise causing both Jan and the doctor to look at him. He was moving two fingers on his left hand while making the noise again. The doctor saw the boy was looking at Jan. When the doctor walked over to the side of the bed he was blocking the boyâ s view from the young candy striper and the boy looked disturbed. The doctor moved to the side so the boy could see the girl again and his eyes lit up and a hint of a smile could be seen in the drooping and contorted muscles of his face.

â Come here a minute please,â the doctor said looking at Jan.

Jan walked to doctor Fergusâ s side and stood there but she was looking at the eyes of the boy on the bed as he looked longingly back at her.

â We will be right back Brian, donâ t go away.â The doctor said jokingly with a wide grin. Then he touched Janâ s arm signaling for her to follow him out into the hall. When they had walked a few steps down toward the nurseâ s station the doctor stopped.

â Brian was hurt in an automobile accident. He lives out of state and his father comes when he can but he is involved in an important business deal and can only visit twice a week. He has no other visitors. Brian has an incomplete spinal injury. He has the ability to contract his anal sphincter voluntarily and can feel a pinprick in that area, that is a good sign that the damage may not be permanent. He has no feeling in his arms or legs and his face is partially paralyzed affecting his speech much like a stroke victim. He has been very depressed and on the verge of giving up. That is, he was until he saw you today.â

The doctor glanced at Janâ s I.D. clipped to her blouse.

â Jan, I am going to make arrangements with your supervisor to allow you to come and visit Brian a couple of times a day. You can talk, read, or even just sit by his bed. Ten or fifteen minutes will be long enough. I think it will help give him a reason to not give up; to fight and want to get better. Do you mind?â

â If I can help him by stopping by, I would be glad to do it.â

â Letâ s go back in and tell him,â the doctor said turning back toward the room.

Jan followed the doctor back into the room. Brian watched her intently as she stood next to the bed with the doctor.

â Brian, I would you to meet Jan. She is volunteering here at the hospital and asked me if she could visit you once in a while.â

Brian nodded his head ever so slightly and blinked with smiling eyes while making a grunting sound like he was trying to talk.

Jan looked into Brianâ s eyes and it made her feel good inside knowing she could help. She smiled and Brian grunted again and the muscles around his eyes seemed to smile even bigger.

That night at home Jan was thinking about reading to Brian and browsed her bookshelf near her bed. She decided that the novels would be too hard for him to follow and her eyes settled on a book of poetry. She picked up the poetry book and thumbed through it. It contained a variety of poems from little known poets. They were mostly uplifting poems about nature, love, and life. She had not read them in a long time and they were not too lengthy so she put the book in her purse.

The following day she stopped by Brianâ s room and pulled the chair over by his bed.

â Hi Brian, I brought a book of poems today, I thought I would read you a couple.â

Brian was attentive and Jan read a poem about winter and a poem about spring. Jan read the poems with feeling and made facial expressions like you might to a child when reading them a story. She could see Brian really liked this. He tried to speak but muffled grunting was all he could get out. However, his eyes confirmed that he really enjoyed this.

A few days later Doctor Fergus ran into Jan in the hospital corridors and stopped to talk with her.

â I noticed a huge improvement in Brianâ s attitude already. Your visits are making a big difference. Youâ re doing a great job.â

Jan thanked the doctor and walked away feeling very happy and proud of herself that she could help.

A few days later when Jan was reading to Brian she saw his left hand twitch. She looked at Brian and his eyes darted between Jan and his hand. Jan reached out and put her hand in his and he squeezed it and grunted but the grunting sounded more like muffled words. When Jan left the room she reported what had happened at the nurseâ s station and they asked her to write a note for the doctor and they would see that he got it.

The following day when Jan went to Brianâ s room the doctor just happened to be there.

â I got your note. Brian is making phenomenal progress. His father has arranged for Brian to be transported to a care facility near his hometown so he and Brianâ s friends will be able to visit him more often. He will be leaving this afternoon. Your company turned his whole attitude around and made a difference, good job and a personal thank you from me.â

After the doctor left the room Jan sat down with Brian.

â I heard the good news, you will be going home. I have enjoyed coming to read to you. Sharing these poems with you has been special to me. I have developed a renewed love for poetry and my heart is more open to sharing. It looks like we helped each other. I will never forget you Brian, and I wish you all the best luck in your recovery and the rest of your life.â

Jan took Brianâ s hand.

â I will miss you Brian, you take care.â

Brian squeezed her hand and tried to speak but the words were muffled as they had been the last few days. His eyes were filled with emotion and then tears appeared. Jan got a tissue from the bed stand and blotted the moisture from his cheeks.

â I know. You will miss me too. You try so hard to speak. I understand.â Jan said wiping her weepy eyes also before leaving the room.

About six months had passed since Brian left the hospital. Jan no longer worked there, she stopped to concentrate on her finals and prepare for college. A letter from the hospital came in the mail addressed to her from Doctor Fergus. Jan read the letter right away.

This was intended for you but was sent in care of me at the hospital. I got your address so I could forward it. The envelope was still sealed and was addressed: To Jan in care of Doctor Fergus. Jan found a typewritten letter and poem enclosed.

Dear Jan,

It is me Brian. I have regained use of my arms and my speech has pretty much returned to normal. I want you to know that I think of you as a beautiful angel sent to me in my hour of need. I love you in a special way, not like a boyfriend but more like a mother, a sister and a savior all rolled into one. I wrote you a poem. I too have discovered poetry as a way of expressing my feelings. I hope you like it.

I will never forget you, ever!

Brian

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There was a typewritten poem:

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Darkness was swallowing my every thought

My pleas were heard, a little angel brought

She dared to look into the chaos in my mind

With lovely caring eyes, a look sublimely kind

.

I replayed your words all throughout the day

I knew you had another life and couldnâ t stay

Your promise to return again, gave me hope

Your smile and kind word, allowed me to cope

.

I created many fantasies involving you and me

I knew they werenâ t real, but they helped you see

Making me want to live, so I could write a poem

So my feelings and unspoken thoughts be known

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Jan was moved to tears over the words. They were tears of joy and tears of love. Not boyfriend love but love of all mankind and the human spirit. Brian and his poem would hold a special place in Janâ s heart for the rest of her life.

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