

A Poignant Reflection on Mortality
by Elmer Kozich

Once upon a time, the world was bright and gay – filled with love and laughter. But that was long ago, and once upon a time, never comes again. Once upon a time, an angel walked among us – her name was Olivia, and this is our love story.

The time was spring, April to be exact. The alluring scent of jasmine and romance floated in the air and invaded your every breath. Cupid lurked in the shadows, her love bow cocked, ready to impale her next most fortunate lover. And thus, into this morass of intrigue and untold romantic possibilities, strode our hero – me.

I had just returned home from a six month tour of duty with the Civilian Conservation Corps at Yellowstone National Park where I had been involved in reforestation projects. Now, safely back home, it was time to pay the necessary and somewhat obligatory visits to a myriad of relatives; some of whom I secretly suspected never even knew I had been gone. On the list was Aunt Julia and Uncle Tom. I dutifully approached their home and knocked on the door. It was opened by such a vision of loveliness that my heart skipped some very necessary beats and forced my pulse into overdrive. I could only stammer, “Hi – I’m Aunt Julia’s nephew and I’m here to visit them.” The vision responded with a beautiful smile and said, “Come on in. I’ll go tell her you’re here.” I was then greeted by my dotting relatives and ushered into their living room where, after perfunctory greetings and small talk, I launched into a discourse of my varied experiences at Yellowstone. This evolved into a rather abbreviated version, however, as my Aunt interrupted with, “Wait just a minute. There’s someone I want you to meet.” She summoned the vision (who had disappeared into the kitchen) “Olivia, come on in here. I want you to meet my nephew. He’s a nice boy.” And thus the introductions were accomplished and I had formally met my

dream girl. The stage was set!

Olivia was a stunning 5'2" beauty with a personality that had the audacity to bubble like a glass of champagne. She accepted my offer of a movie and, with that, began a period of my life I call "the days of wine and roses." Our romance blossomed into perfection and we were ideally happy – two bodies welded into a single entity. Time went by and we married, had a family, and lived the American dream. But, sadly, there is a saying, "If it's too good to be true, then it probably isn't." Our idyllic life was about to be fragmented by health issues. Olivia manifested persistent memory lapses which prompted diagnosis by a neurologist.

We initially cared for my darling at home with the assistance of a group called "Visiting Angels," but as her condition deteriorated, the doctor recommended a nursing home so that she could receive 24 hour medical supervision. By this time, they had arrived at a definite diagnosis, and it couldn't have been worse – Alzheimer's disease! This was an ailment unconditionally terminal and it twisted a knife in my heart.

The transition to a nursing home, while functionally adequate, could not alter the progression of the illness and its resolution, ever-present, began to manifest. Her breathing once rhythmic now became shallow and gasping. I bent over her and begged "Darling, open those beautiful blue eyes for me, please, please." And you know what? Slowly, ever so slowly, they opened a little and then slowly closed again. With her last ounce of strength, my sweetheart had responded to me! And that was the last human interchange between us, in this world.

The grim reaper had made his unwanted appearance into the room and exacted the terminal conclusion he so demanded. My darling's beleaguered breathing mercifully ceased and her tired little heart finally went to rest.

I bent over, kissed the silent lips and murmured, “God bless you, sweetheart.” My little angel had, soul in hand, left me for her pre-ordained journey to Heaven – leaving behind a non-functioning body for which she had no further earthly use. Well meaning friends attempted to console me with “She’s gone, but remember, you still have your memories.” And that was the essence of the problem – my heart, ever young, reveled in the joy of those memories while my mind, ever starkly aware of reality, wallowed in grief. And now I was left with the remaining horror of watching my beloved being lowered into the grave, suffering brutal shocks to my emotions.

And thus, it is starkly apparent that mortality, in itself, exists only in the context of reality. Something that is completely unpredictable and, too often, cruel and unforgiving. Against this challenge, we strive to survive, realizing that our life itself, is but a reflection of mortality.

I pray that somewhere, someplace, somehow, I will be reunited with my beloved. I call out to her, “Darling, let’s make a deal. Promise that you’ll wait for me up there, and I promise to get there just as soon as I can. Thank you for having made my life a Heaven on Earth. Till we meet again, I love you!”

Your loving husband

Disclaimer

Please note that the foregoing submission is actually a condensation of my published novel, "A Crack in the Mirror." If this factor negates eligibility of the entry, please return it to me. Thank you.