

The Thief

A poem by Lori Ruhlman

Well intentioned people say
"May your memories sustain you."
But they don't know loss by dementia.
They don't know that there is a thief that sometimes comes before death:
A thief that takes someone inch-by-inch, month-by-month, year-by-long-year.

And while this thief steals greedily from the person with FTD,
it slips in and steals from those around him too,
taking their memories away one-by-one.
It reaches in and takes the finest details of what they held dear:
The feel of a touch or the sound of a laugh. And more.
It takes memories for which there is no vocabulary, feelings too profound for labels
until all that remains are images like the flat one-dimensional memories found in a picture
book.

So this first holiday season without him
we won't look longingly at his empty chair at the dinner table
or feel that acute but beautiful pain of his closeness
as though he just left the room.
He is much, much too far away.

When well-intentioned people say "May your memories sustain you,"
they unknowingly shine a light on my biggest failure, my biggest loss, because they don't know
how long and hard I tried
to hold onto the memories,
even as the thief came into the room.