



Moved by the little things

Marisa Webster MD

The most important lesson that I have learned about poetry is that it isn't necessarily about "getting" the meaning of a poem. Rather, the lesson that poetry shares with us is the importance of paying attention—to ourselves, to others, and to everyday life. When we look and listen mindfully, the most mundane and ordinary things jump out at us in surprising ways.

"Longing" is a poem that depicts the nuances, idiosyncrasies, and annoyances that we share with someone we care deeply about. Sometimes, it is not until we risk losing them that we fully appreciate how important these small, everyday events are in defining our memories and relationship together.

Longing

When you sleep far from home,
I still listen for your visceral rumble,
imagine the feel of your skin,
damp scratch of your cotton
T-shirt against my back.
The stack of quarters on the dresser,
the desiccated tea bag that you
always promise to throw out
tomorrow.

I am told that you are an imbalance
of sugar and water and salt.
Like bread, you will not rise.
It is a medical student draped in an
oversized white coat that tells us
the news, gives my arm a half-hearted squeeze,
distracted by the phone in his pocket.
He is young, cocksure, unaware
of the many things that he does not know.
When he turns and walks away, he flicks
his coat, the bottom hem billows behind him,
a sad cape.

You wink at me from the gurney,
fractured smile, molten lips.
You squeeze my hand.

That night, in our home, I unpack
the gym clothes from your duffel bag.
Your baseball cap is a casually tossed
centrepiece on the kitchen table,
the nucleus around which everything revolves.

I bring you some of your belongings:

the Sunday crossword
your flannel pyjamas, worn at the knee
the book you love, whose cover is wrapped
in red paper because you are too embarrassed
to admit that you own it
songs from the summer
your favourite fleece jacket

In the pocket, the gum wrapper saved
from the night we got engaged.

I mourn that day when the snowflakes fell,
scarves wrapped around our necks,
cheeks pink from cold and confession.
We drove north, drank coffee out of paper cups,
skipped stones along the river. At night,
lit candles, watched the hills cradle the sleeping sky.

We walked each other home.

I sit next to you, long limbs tangled
in twisted sheets. Your belly heaves with ache.
Time moves through my body, tugs
like some deep gutted feeling, a beautiful music,
the sorrow of something found,
now lost.

Reeling
I place my hands on your chest
feel your breath
pace your heart.

Dr Webster is a second-year anesthesiology resident at the University of Calgary in Alberta and is a past winner of the Cynthia Davis Writing Prize and the Hunter Humanities Award.

Competing interests
None declared