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## Doesn't Work Like It Used To

*Casey Aimer*

find bottle. measure dose. give pills. massage girlfriend's shoulder blades then vertebrae with tennis ball. press down on metal backbone. listen for cracking. spine doesn't work like it used to. pick up then carry her to car. fold wheelchair into back seat. legs don't work like they used to. repeat steps as rehearsed: jacket—on; bag—packed; seatbelt—clicked; screams—ringing. kiss in-between tremors for good luck. arrive at er hoisting her as my only beloved flag. be handed another clipboard, another form, paper to use for gagging. shuffle into sterile lab then lay on top of possible deathbed. imprecisely explain to surgeon nature's afflictions or human recession. cry another night practicing pain scales in key of torment. doctor wants scans that can't be done. metal is her frame's buttress, she would explode. protests barely escape. mouth doesn't work like it used to. doctor sighs, prescribes finest pain meds, scribbles appointment for another day. time becomes our primary practitioner. we slink back into home bed. she is partly dead, partly dying, partly clinging to my neck. arms don't work like they used to. vance joy's riptide, her favorite, plays on repeat as dark current to our thoughts. i make maple sugar oatmeal inside tiny keurig, grab blankets, lie beside her. we hold hands lying to ourselves that we can handle this. witness sleep fill in as death's temp. cry wastelands without tears. eyes don't work like they used to. at daybreak wake and rise up. find bottle. measure dose. sell pills. pain and morals are secondary to surviving. muscular dystrophy pays in cash, robs in time. destroyed months we count on our walls as eons. only five to ten more years left to live. heart doesn't work like it used to.

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