

Movement

by Kathy Conde

If I had known the guy had a gun, I wouldn't have grabbed his balls.

He shoots me in the middle of the body. It takes about one minute to die. I wish I could undo the whole thing.

Retold. I've just been shot in the gut and I accept everything this logically entails. All I want is a little more time. Just a few minutes to sit down with my son.

"Sweetie, Mommy's got to go. See this blood? It means Mommy's going where people go when they die."

He looks at my face and nods. He's being strong for me.

"I just want to be sure you know that mommy loves you. And I'll keep loving you even though you won't see me. Do you know I love you?"

Retold. I call 911. Everyone is botching everything, even the rescue team. They can't get to me. I am surrounded by people who don't know a fatal wound when they see one. I am so determined to live that I become bossy.

"Give me a towel. Put some pressure on this hole here. Wait. Get out of my way. I'm walking to the hospital."

At the hospital they give me a stack of paperwork to fill out and point me to the waiting area equipped with three TVs to keep me calm. I insist until I find someone who understands I have a gunshot wound that needs attention.

No, that's not right. I'm not the one dying.

The trick is in discovering the rupture. Or uncovering. Or recovering. Or covering.

The surgeon gathers us into a waiting room, tells us that finding the rupture was difficult. We are the patient's family, and we are grateful for the understatement. The truth is his pelvis was an ocean of blood they had to dive through to try and find the tear in the artery. The one they made.

He has a fifty-fifty chance of getting through the night.

Language of death: catheter, respirator, heart pump, off switch.

In the morning the doctor, obviously trained in bringing this kind of news, tells us recovery is impossible now. The life support machines have to be turned off.

We stand by the bed. We wait for death, vigilant as hell, but we still can't tell when it comes. He hasn't opened his eyes since yesterday when the anesthesia went in. His breathing sounds more regular than ever.

"He's gone," the nurse says. "It's just the respirator moving his chest up and down."

Everyone files out. I stay. There is a crime happening here, and it's more than malpractice. We've just staged a death and we've done it badly. I thought I was ready for death, but I'm not. Not this one. I would kill for a second chance.

The chest continues to rise and fall with a swooshing sound from the machine.

I go to the door, yes, ready to kill now, find the doctor outside, hiss, "Turn that fucking machine off."

I get my few minutes alone with my beloved, whisper, "Don't be afraid."

Then there are people unplugging machines, wiping things down, talking.

"You going out for lunch?"

"No. I brought a sandwich."

"Oh, good. So did I. Disconnect that IV tube and hand it over."

I cannot bear to leave him here. This is the deepest rupture. I have to leave myself in order to leave him here this way. I drift downstairs, no longer tethered. The arms of my soul are trying to reach me back upstairs. The people touching his body don't love him. I'd give anything, *anything*, if I could prepare him for his journey myself, sit with him for the time needed.

The family would have to exhume the body for an autopsy in order to file for malpractice. None of us want him dug up, although all of us want to establish blame. This is what we get for burying things before they are understood, a habit of ours. After his death, the

doctors offered to do an autopsy, but we refused. It seemed like another violation. And now, months later, it's dreadful to imagine. No, we won't do it. We can't. We crave dignity even more than blame.

Corpses knock at our doors all night. We don't open them.

Paralysis comes so easily. It starts in the throat. Then the pelvis gets involved. The lack of movement dries the body up like jerky. At this point love and fear become frivolous. Solid objects just don't care.

I remember movement. The constant loving and running away wore me out. But paralysis is worse. How I'd love to love now. How I'd love to run. Any direction at all.

I visit my beloved's grave. I've been grinding my teeth lately at night. It's said the grinding could go on for eternity, but here in the graveyard I don't hear a thing. Tombstones insist, *At Rest*.

