

LAST CALL: A Memoir

by Laura C. Alonso

We see only the results which a man's choices make out of his raw material . . . when his body dies all that will fall off him, and the real central man, the thing that chose, that made the best or the worst out of this material, will stand naked. All sorts of things which we thought our own, but which were really due to a good digestion, will fall off some of us; all sorts of nasty things which were due to complexes or bad health will fall off others. We shall then, for the first time, see every one as he really was. There will be surprises.
~ C. S. Lewis

I called before coming that evening, asked if you needed something, anything you might have wanted. "How about fruit?" you asked. "Yeah, I'd really love some fruit."

I drove over to White Hen, best fruit I've ever seen: golden bananas and enormous apples as smooth and red as blood. Three times the supermarket's price, but I wanted to bring you the best. It had always been hard, you know? This was the least I could do.

My eyes sprouted warm wrinkles when recalling another phone call, earlier that morning: "I thought the nurse said you had the seizure this morning, not last night."

You were losing your patience fast. "Laura, I don't know," you sighed, adding, "I'm *incoherent*."

If anyone was incoherent and knew enough to say so, it would certainly be you! I parked in the nearest space. Still smiling, I jingled my keys.

As I walked toward the hospital's entrance — stomach heavy, dizzy with anxiety, plastic bag swinging at my side — I surprised myself by whispering: *Bet he'll never eat the damn fruit.*

The visit was short. You were tired, still a bit confused . . . said you needed rest. I saw some dried blood in the corner of your mouth but knew you'd fallen earlier; it simply didn't register.

Driving home in silence, I thought about the fruit: my offering to you.

An hour later I called again — just to check, you know? . . . see how you were doing.

“Will ya please quit *callin'* me?” Your voice was high, annoyed. “How the hell d'ya expect me to rest if you're gonna keep callin' me?”

Well, the thought encouraged me, *he's still his same old self*. I went to bed, uneasy, and said a prayer for you. When the phone rang at four a.m., I knew before I answered.

* * *

I never wanted regrets. That corner of your mouth kept haunting me. What if I could've done something? Called the nurse, the doctor? You know how that goes: so many could-haves, should-haves. Oh, the ways I might have saved you!

But it wasn't just that night — I had a lifetime to sort out (it was easier without you here, you know, *annoying me*). I've walked back through your life, sort of lived it from your shoes. And without you here to mess it up, I think I've seen your soul.

I wish I could have known then
what I've learned
about the core of you.
I wish that in your presence
I'd have learned what absence
taught me in the four years
since you died alone,
and I, alone,
have wept for you:
the ache you felt, the drive,
you had to prove
that you were somebody.
When drowned in drink and numb,
your lone-li-ness denied,
you drove me from our home
and never let me love

you, robbed me, Dad,
of knowing you. No, not
the man who bled to death,
but I was robbed.
To know your soul,
to know you then,
I *ache*. Regret
will always haunt me,
Dad, because
that night I did not
reach or touch
or hug or say
a word of love.

But love was not a word we knew.

I know love now
and wish I could have
felt it then;
I wish I could have
found your core,
your soul.
Instead, I said
"Good night,"
and walked away,
from your *last call*,
alone.

The phone rang at four in the morning. My gesture, lost, with you

. . .

. . . and that damn fruit was still so fresh.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

© *Laura C. Alonso*

