

Death Calls Often

By Sylvia Sensiper

Death calls me mid-morning and tells me
she didn't sleep well last night and is just now
getting her breakfast.
she calls me later in the day because
she's forgotten someone's name
or needs help with a bill —
did you pay my rent this month?
she asks.

When Death calls, we talk, a recent change
over the last few years
in contrast to the fierce mother daughter
thing we had going on, so bad
that in my adolescence I shrunk to
anorexic near nothingness.
Now she says *thank you* when I bring over the minestrone soup or
take her bed sheets home to wash
making sure to soak in bleach
the bloody spots, expected
when your skin is papery and thin.

Sometimes I'm busy when Death calls
and impatient really,
she struggles on, searching for words
like a new student in an ESL class.
although English is her first language.
That's when I push the speaker button on my phone
and tap quietly on my computer while I listen.

Death lives nearby,
a short walk up the street
just past the open park and the
clustered grove of trees
the koi pond blooming with
lotus flowers, pink and pale yellow
an orangey dragonfly or two.

I go there often, hoping
to be of help but sometimes
mom is just confused.
I don't know whether I'm coming or going
she often says, or asks
what day is today?
I need to keep busy, I know
I know all that, but I think
I've just lived too long.

I nod my head and agree
because after ninety-seven years
on planet earth
that's a fair thing to say.
Yet then I feel a funny tightening
in my throat, a heaviness
a quickening of my breath.
I know I really dread the day
when I pick up the phone to call and
the line is dead.

Sylvia Sensiper is a writer and photographic artist. Her photographs have been shown in a solo show at the Else Gallery at Sacramento State University in California and included in many group exhibitions. She has published in the academic journals *The Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice* and *Children and Youth Services Review*. Sensiper is affiliated with UC Davis and teaches meditation and yoga classes at the university.

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