

POEM

An epic note

Epic was mercifully short,
120 characters devoid of emotion,
to let me know that my patient suddenly died
on Sunday morning after Father's Day.

The email was waiting on Monday morning,
ensuring that I would open the secure
twenty word note
not on the day of dying,
but alone in my office,

taking away my choice to answer a page,
to pick up a phone,
to have a face to face conversation
with the colleague who fielded the call,

or to attend the funeral
that had occurred the previous day,
to witness ancient and sacred healing rituals,
or even to write the cause on the death certificate.

I wasn't there to wrap my arms around a grieving spouse
who certainly felt as scared as an abandoned baby bird
that does not understand why death came that day
or why time suddenly stopped.

Everything unraveled that previously seemed secure
only months, weeks, even seconds before a heart stopped,
like a jigsaw puzzle that was previously framed,
then crumbled into many jagged pieces.

Later that evening, I dropped by
to sit with the family,
believing that I was finally doing my job.

Who knew that the father was such a pillar
holding together not just one family,
but a community of immigrants
coming and going, welcoming and sending off?

Who knew that love of family
could overcome my inability to answer
why this great man died so swiftly?

Did he suffer?
Were there warning signs?
Did he say anything to each child,
to his wife, before he died?

Each testimony mixed tears with smiles,
sadness with laughter as they recounted
old jokes told many times,
ending with words that promised healing:
"Your father taught you all to stay together."

We offered each other hugs,
and I felt more secure
knowing that my job was also
to help myself heal,
for none of us are alone in sorrow,
no matter where we are
when death comes.

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