

Flash Fiction By Cari Scribner

## HOW TO SAY GOODBYE

Ignore the pain. Feel it grow. Try to have the conversation. Avoid it for weeks.

Actually write a pro and con list. List that he is depressed and doesn't get off the couch. List that you have nothing to say to one another anymore. List that he's the first person you go to when you need something. List that you love him.

Call your mother. Feel worse afterwards. Feel your heart split down the middle like a broken zipper.

Have the conversation. Try to be calm and logical so it all makes sense, ties up in a neat little bow. Cry when it doesn't.

Tell him you believe you are saving his life. Tell him to go south, where the winters he hates so much don't exist. Cry when he leans his head on your shoulder and you smell the laundry detergent you use on his t-shirts.

Decide to tell the kids. Tell the oldest first. Watch her face become stoic. Tell the youngest. Watch his face crumble into confusion. Try to find reasons to show them it's not working. Come up empty. Remind yourself they're your kids, not his, so they will understand some day. Hold them when they cry anyway.

Offer him one of the little dogs to take south. Offer the one that barks at night. Laugh when he says that's like a booby prize.

Agree to try and make things seem normal, even for a little while. Go to the home goods store and buy black and white bath towels. Buy a rose scented candle for your desk. Realize the smell of flowers will make you sad for the rest of the summer.

Get a pedicure. Cry when she asks if the water's too warm.

Get a haircut. Cry when you see the too-short results.

Cry at the market when they don't have unsalted rice cakes.

Remember the wonderful summers with him. Remind yourself of the long winters when everything collapsed in despair. Force yourself to believe you weren't the cause of his sadness.

Feel your zippered heart burst wider when he says the house and everything in it – the glass top coffee table, the painting of a bowl of apples, the angel Christmas tree ornaments – belong with the house and should stay with you. Think briefly about a garage sale. Feel your stomach lurch at the thought.

Sit on the front porch in the white wicker chair with the quiet dog and the one that barks.

Don't talk about when and how he will go.

Cry when he pumps up the tires of the bike he never used, then rides it down the sidewalk because he wants to use it once before he leaves. Smile when he puts on the tight Superman bike shirt he never wore. Remember how sad you are. Question how you could smile, even for a moment.

Watch him ride away.

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