

The Value of a Bed (Rated R for Profanity)

written by Holly

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By Holly Lisle

My e-mail was interesting this morning, in the same fashion that waking up to find that overnight, someone left roses on your coffee table and simultaneously took a huge, steaming dump on your carpet would be interesting.

I'll bypass the "thank you for posting the killing Grandma rant" e-mails. I'll bypass the frothing at the mouth "you're wrong and you're evil" e-mails.

I'd like to focus on one that was just left of the middle. Written by a woman who thinks she's very reasonable. Very sensible. Because I found her e-mail the most chilling of all. The basic content was that I was wrong in my assessment of the situation – that cases like this have been around for ages, that Schiavo is getting standard treatment, and since she's not getting better, she needs to die. Her parents should just move on, because the hospice needs the bed.

Here's an unedited quote.

"Food and water for a person who is cognizant and aware of people and surroundings isn't an extraordinary measure. A feeding tube for someone who IS NOT aware of or capable of interacting with their environment and/or other is an extraordinary measure. and also kind of a waste. Once your brain function is gone (and I would love to see something to substantiate that hers wasn't- I don't like the black and white nature this whole thing has taken on) you're not really a person anymore. You're a houseplant, and as you well know as a nurse, the hospices and hospitals need the bed."

First of, I just love having people tell me what I well know as a nurse. It would be like having some pacifist walk up to a soldier and say, "As you well know as a soldier, war is evil and a waste of time."

If you haven't done the job, if you haven't ever been up to your elbows in somebody else's blood with your shoes slipping on a blood-soaked floor while you try to start the IV that might or might not save this pile of meat that just minutes ago was somebody's kid, you don't know what the fuck I know.

So let's talk about the value of that **bed**, honey.

I'm a mother, and as a mother, I know the value of a daughter or a son. I am a human being, and I know the value and joy of drawing breath. But most of all, then, now, and forever, I am still a nurse. I fought my battles right on the front fucking lines, in ERs and ICUs and Med-Surg wards. I saw all the shit and piss and vomit you'd ever want to see, wore other people's blood on my skin, celebrated when we won someone back from oblivion, held the hands of the dying and hugged the bereaved who'd lost their dead. I fought. Fought. Life and death, and pain and suffering and grief and hope, and my own anguish when I couldn't do anything for the young mother dying of cancer, when I couldn't save the two young children crushed in a dirt cave-in, when I couldn't save the son killed in the car accident. I pumped stomachs and did IVs and jugular sticks and intubated and did CPR. I know life and death intimately: a staff RN is the equivalent of enlisted, a staff sergeant, the person who goes in and gets filthy and does what has to be done because the job matters. I was a working woman – don't salute me.

And you're going to lecture me on the value of the **bed**? A mother and a father are losing the daughter they would have **paid** to save, and you're going to stand with the bean-counters and the corporate cocksuckers who have turned medicine from a calling that men and women pursued because life mattered,

because **people** mattered, into another watch-the-bottom-line, turn-a-profit-for-the-shareholders industry ... and you're going to tell me the **bed** is the important part of this equation?

"... Once your brain function is gone (and I would love to see something to substantiate that hers wasn't—I don't like the black and white nature this whole thing has taken on) ..."

The writer of that e-mail would love to see something that would substantiate that Terry Schiavo's brain function *wasn't* gone. Never mind that the medical standard is and always has been that *you're alive until proven dead*. Because to people like this writer, you're dead unless you can prove you're alive. You're guilty unless you can prove you're innocent. You're dead unless you can stand up and fight for yourself. The weak, the helpless, the mute, have no room in her heart, because they're all costing someone money. And the hospice needs the bed.

You know what, sweetie? Fuck you. Fuck you, and fuck anyone who thinks the bed is more important than the human being in it. I am a nurse. I will always be a nurse. And THIS is what I learned from nursing, you callous piece of shit. The human being in the bed is what matters, because they'll always make more beds. But nobody can replace a son or a daughter.

And EVERYBODY is somebody's son or daughter.

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