**ABSTRACT:** This poem contains no lies. The speaker, a bioethicist, recounts their experience with their father's decline due to a degenerative neurological disease and related dementia, and family medical decision-making on his behalf. None of us are getting out of here alive, but some of us will outlive each other. What are the limits of what people who love someone can do for, or to, each other? And whose suffering should be taken into account?

**KEYWORDS: end of life; surrogate decision-making; advance directives; hospice; death and dying**

**No one who loves anyone**

When my father was dying

he wasn’t

and he was

more than we always already are

but less than you think when someone says

“when my father was dying”

A tremor in the hands became

t-shirt and sweatpants

A shuffle became

dirty laundry

A fall became

never being alone

A conversation became

call

response

He forgot his life’s work

but remembered four years of college on the lake, by turns sun-swept and ice-locked

He forgot my mother

but remembered his wife, met at a conference long after I was grown, talking politics at dawn

He forgot sentences

but remembered words, yes, fine, hello, stop, thank you, thirsty, democracy, no

He forgot how to chew and swallow

but remembered he loved to eat, cakes, pickled herring, liverwurst, meatloaf

And then he choked on cookies and milk in the middle of the night

Falling to my step-mother’s kitchen floor

too long

laying

until she found him

A fish

No water

Breathing food

No air

Bronchial sacs are not fond of chocolate chips

Alveoli are no lovers of milk

And my father was no lover of the vent

He clocked out

No language

Then no eye contact

Blank wall focus

Hand squeezes disappear

He fails

every trial of vent withdrawal

and so he continues to fail

Do we know, my stepmother and I, what he would have wanted?

Yes

He had said, of his mother’s death

in hospice

as cancer ate her belly and grew it at the same time

He said, yes,

pain relief and a quicker end

and he said

No one

who loves anyone

should make them die longer

should make them live like that

We decided to let him go

And yet

the day came to pull the vent

he breathed

remained a shell

two minutes maybe three minutes

out of each whole day’s one thousand four hundred and forty minutes

he surfaced for eye contact

and the most basic of call-and-response

“Hello”

“Hi”

all the rest was vacant

I reminded her

We knew what he wanted

Not this

She could not stop feeding him

Food is love

But no one

who loves anyone

should make them die longer

should make them live like that

I said, all my years of bioethics behind my speech: without hospice, his end will be

harder

longer

worse in every way

But she could not stop feeding him

Food is love

A month later, a call, from her, at the long-term care facility

“It’s over”

She is quiet

“It got very bad”

It sounds like regret

like an apology

without the words

Who are these decisions for

when the dying person is barely there?

If she had sent him to hospice, then what?

As he failed

from lack of food

*how* could she have lived with herself?

How much would it hurt her?

How long?

*Could* she have lived with herself?

Only she and I were going to live

Perhaps

no one

who loves anyone

should make them live like that