



Candle

A M Carley

The biggest problem is – you can't talk to the person who is now dead. And you don't really want to – *talk*. You want to sob, and cajole, and comfort, and scheme, and solve all the problems, and make the person continue to be alive. You can do none of that because your friend is – still – dead.

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Nine years ago, when your old friend Fred took his life, you were stunned. In fact, you still are. Now it's nine years later, he is still dead, and you still can't talk to him.

Something was taken away. He took himself away. He was going to walk you down the aisle at your wedding. He left his wife behind – his life companion. His helpmeet, his other half.

When she phoned that morning to tell you what had happened, you said you'd be over right away. You called work to say you'd be out. You needed to sit with her. You brought her snacks. You brought her juice. You brought her whiskey.

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Just the other day, you are in the parking lot outside the Charlottesville Post Office, checking emails on your phone. Your new friend Betsy writes from out of town, "My old friend Nancy's gone. She took her life. Can you light a candle? I need to know I have friends back home." Betsy can't talk to Nancy, who is now dead.

What can you do for Betsy while she is far from home? What will you say? Have you learned anything useful in the nine years since Fred called it quits? What will you do for Betsy now?

Later on, you can say you hope Nancy is in a better place, as you continue to hope Fred is. Later on, you can urge Betsy to bear witness to Nancy's life, as you continue to honor Fred's.

Soon, you can offer to sit with her, bring her snacks, and juice, and whiskey.

Soon, you can pester her to make plans to get together and talk about how she can't talk to Nancy anymore, about how Nancy is – still – dead.

Right Now, when your new friend Betsy emails and asks you to light a candle in Charlottesville, you can do that.

You don't need to know details. You don't need to know how her dear friend Nancy did it, or who else Nancy has left behind. That can come later.

Now, you can go home, and light a candle for your new friend Betsy, for your old friend Fred, for Nancy, for all of us.

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My audio recording of this radio essay was broadcast by the Charlottesville, VA NPR affiliate in 2012.

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