

## Michael McInnis

### **This is what you say to a person who is dying**

Not:

You've lived a full life.  
You have a caring soul,  
you'll get into Heaven somehow  
you'll soon be with ...  
Mama,  
Papa,  
an older sibling,  
a tragically killed sibling  
who died too young,  
a favorite Aunt,  
your old angry creepy  
Uncle who hated  
Blacks and Jews and Catholics  
your first dog –  
mine was named Sparky –

Not:

Did you know I carry a  
razor blade in my wallet?  
I stole from you once.  
I kissed your wife,  
your husband,  
your daughter,  
your son,  
your grandmother.  
I wrote that note about you,  
lying that you were a liar  
and a thief when,  
it reality it was me.  
I bet you didn't know I lie and steal?

Not:

Did I ever tell you  
I heard a black-capped chickadee  
thunk against a window, went outside  
and found it on the ground.

I picked the bird up and held it  
in my palm until the bird  
woke up, looked at me,  
looked around, and  
sat there, on my hand,  
for several minutes,  
collecting its thoughts,  
trying to remember  
what happened.  
Then the black-capped chickadee  
flew off and i felt like i  
finally did something good  
in the world.  
Do you know if birds get concussions?  
I put the rat poison  
in your dog's food.  
Wasn't his name Sparky,  
I can't remember.

Not:

They faked the conspiracy  
about the fake moon landing.  
Did you know they have a cure  
for what's killing you, but your  
doctor and the insurance companies  
won't make any money and  
don't care whether you live or die?  
do you think climate change  
is causing all the raining  
and burning  
and flooding?  
You won't be around  
when the asteroid they  
just landed a probe on  
hits the earth.  
Did you know they think  
life came riding in on  
an asteroid?  
I wonder if it looked like  
Slim Pickens riding that  
nuclear bomb.

Not:

I bet those cavemen  
named the first domesticated dog  
Sparky.  
You knew my dad was a  
firefighter, right.  
He named everything  
Sparky.  
He called my brother and me  
Sparky 1 and Sparky 2.  
My dad never numbered my sisters.  
they were both Sparkettas.  
I suppose he thought it was funny.  
When I was a kid my friends  
and I used to light fires  
just so I could see my dad.  
He was always working overtime.  
My mother slept on the couch  
listening to the  
static saturated frequencies  
of the scanner.

This is what you tell a person who is dying:

Silence  
Is like a snowflake  
melting on a widow  
as if a ghost kisses you  
goodnight and then  
you're gone.

**Michael McInnis** lives in Boston and served in the Navy chasing white whales and Soviet submarines. His poetry and short fiction has appeared in *Chiron Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Naugatuck Review*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Unlikely Stories* and *Yellow Chair Review* to name a few. His third book, *Secret Histories*, is forthcoming from Cervana Barva Press.