

Muddled Emotions of a Demented Man

Jennifer Lang

Apathy: day in and day out, you're content to sit on your couch or lounge on your bed, supposedly reading or re-reading *The New York Times* or *The San Francisco Chronicle*. One caregiver pushes you to get up, go to Pilates at the gym, walk around the Berkeley Marina, see a movie; the other behaves like a fraternity brother, slothful, lazing alongside you, drinking a beer. You lose your yen—to play basketball and tennis and golf, to dress your best, to see and be seen, to relish a side of crispy bacon with perfectly-poached eggs.

Loneliness: an inevitable response as time passes and friends stop calling probably because you can no longer carry on a meaningful conversation, repeating the same questions: when's the last time we saw each other? What do you think about Trump's latest gaffe? What day of the week is it? Those who spend time with you must have infinite patience. Your wife does not. After fifty plus years of marriage, she couldn't take it anymore. Your doing, not your diagnosis.

Zoetic: of or relating to life, living, vital. Once your state of being, now your nemesis.

H: a host of them. Helplessness one day. Hostility another. Humiliation imminent when you will no longer be able to clean your private parts and feed yourself.

Enmity: towards your wife because she dragged you to the neurologist who reported your disease to the DMV who revoked your license, because she criticizes you for forgetting your wallet/camera/coat, because she spends money you insist belongs to you, because at age seventy-eight, she decides to sell the house and finds two apartments—one for you with a full-time aide, one for her—even though you're still legally married.

Irritation: on an indeterminate scale. If a restaurant is too loud, you complain and leave. If your pants are too tight, you refuse to wear them. If you feel left out of the conversation, you head to the bathroom. If the movie/theater/party or any other place you are is too hot or too cold, too much or too little, too this or too that, you grumble and go.

Mad: if anyone attempts to hurry you out the door or help you with your seatbelt or order for you when eating out, you verbally lash out, calling mean names like asshole or bitch, like a bully on the playground. What is the source of your rage? Simply old age, or is it the hard, insoluble plaques between your brain neurons preventing you from processing information?

Envy: of your wife, who over the past year experienced brief, inexplicable blackouts causing her first to swipe a nearby car then fall and gash a finger then lose her ability to sign a check, landing her in the hospital for emergency brain surgery to repair a bleed and who will fully recover, says her team of physical, occupational, and speech therapists. You, however, will not.

Remorse: Missing In Action. Not now, when you no longer remember the name of the street you grew up on or your birthday, but then, ten years ago, when you confessed your quarter-century long betrayal to your wife, your son, your daughter. After relaying the facts, one of your greatest strengths from decades of practicing law, you asked if anyone had any questions. But never did the words regret, compunction, or contrition cross your lips. Never.

Saudade: a difficult-to-translate word from Portuguese folk culture, meaning a deep emotional state of melancholic longing for a person or thing that is absent. Do you feel saudade that you are slowly disappearing and unable to understand what is happening to you and the world around you and why those who once revered you no longer do—or is it just me?

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American born, French by marriage, Israeli by choice, Jennifer Lang writes about her divided self. Her essays have appeared in *Under the Sun*, *Ascent*, *The Coachella Review*, *Hippocampus Magazine*, and *Full Grown People*. Honors include Pushcart Prize and Best American Essays nominations and finalist in 2017 Crab Orchard Review's Literary Nonfiction Contest. Find her at <http://israelwritersalon.com> and follow her [@JenLangWrites](#).

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