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## A Whispered Story

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She started off differently than I expected.

With a story.

(And yet, why should that surprise me, lover of stories? Maybe because somehow I forgot that stories lie here in this topic of ethics.)

She started with a story.

A story that called us in.

And there was this quietness that permeated the room, the night. Almost a reverence that I recall in church as a young child, a call, not an expectation (I once asked my dad, a minister, why we had to whisper in church and he said, "We don't").

Yet . . . somehow, despite permission to do otherwise, there was a call to speak softly, reverently, respectfully . . . because . . . why?

Because something was important, was to be honored. Something was worthy of respect.

Ethics.

Did you notice our voices became quiet and we had to "speak up" to be heard?

In my moments of most reverent and sacred conversations, I notice that kind of quietness,

softening, stilling. It is palpable;  
embodied, Merleau-Ponty might suggest.

And in our class—that quietness as our voices simultaneously and curiously softened—  
something remarkable happened . . .

More voices emerged, voices that had not been heard before, and there  
in the middle of all that, another layer was added.

A pause.

An asking of a question; a waiting for response . . .  
And in that deliberately and exquisitely crafted pause lay everything.  
Ethics, moments, memories, reflections, questions, breathlessness,  
reverence.

I waited, perhaps somewhat anxiously, for the pause to end, guessing and  
second-guessing what  
everyone else thought, feeling responsible for this class that I bear the  
obligation toward.

Ethics. Mine.

And in that waiting, ethics landed—its huge berth filling, talking over,  
consuming . . .

Yet calling, as Caputo suggests the young child on the beach, lost, calls for  
something and we are obligated to answer.

Calling . . .

Calling Amie to talk about a last heartbeat in such a way that her descrip-  
tion took my breath away; Christine to question hope and her love of it, in  
such a way that made *me* almost even love hope more; Karen to think of  
moments of community and decision and obligation with such passion  
and experience and expertise and artistry; Blaine to ponder *Dasein* and

Being and money and larger and smaller commitments in a witty articulation that almost belies the softness of his heart; Rich to enter into intentionality, politics, drives, and yet, fundamentally, losses; Violet to move into her question of learning and knowing; Lorraine to move back and forth between living and dying and *that* moment and to find herself as a young woman compassionately and passionately drawn to *that* moment; Lisa, in her thoughtful, kind-ful, and mind-ful manner to speak of piecing and peace-ing; Stacey to quietly smile, nod, bring it in, respectfully making space for these new ideas; Tanya to passionately bring it all consistently back to practicing living moments of birth, and choice, and decisions, and questions; Julian to remind us that it matters and that it is never that simple—as he takes the taken-for-granted and infuses it with heart and rhythm and mindfulness; Ruth to bring it to children and to lean into the questions with the passion and perseverance I have come to understand infuse her practice and life; Eileen to offer the gracious wide-eyed wonder and intelligence that seeps from her very presence . . .

Calling us all to . . . what?

To an *Ethics* of obligations of everyday practices, of bearers of names, and filler of pauses.

Ethics cannot be empty words—ethics is a pause to wonder, to question, to step back, to notice.

And this teacher, Dr. Paton; this nurse, B. Paton, RN, PhD; this woman, Brenda, my colleague, my friend, my sister in many ways, did that through her being open to the angst that the silence brought, through a willingness to let it sit, through a knowingness that ethics are Always, and necessarily, inhabited by silence.

This is what I saw.

This is my participant observation.