

# Waiting

*Mark Edward Koltko*

The absence of a signal  
is itself information,  
a zero giving meaning to binary ones.  
The call that doesn't ring,  
the missing letter,  
both are messages of absence, perhaps  
indifference, or ruin.  
This is what you communicated to me  
when you lived,  
and how I communicate with you  
while you are dead.  
We keep each other waiting for the signal  
whose absence  
is itself information. Do you read me?

I have kept you waiting, father.  
Do you sit on a marble bench  
in some redone Grand Central of the soul?  
Or in some wooded place beside  
a stream, watching the bubbles of thought float by  
while you await your name to be called?  
Or is it behind bars, there as here?

Do the federal bars excuse  
your silence? I know better.  
I know the years you sat, and stood, and lay  
behind locked doors,  
waiting for the frigid moments in the exercise yard,  
the meal times, the visiting hours.

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Those years you spent locked in are few against  
the years I spent locked outside your heart,  
unknown and unknowing, waiting  
to know the whys and whats of your life,

waiting in vain, I knew at the graveside,  
stood up like some cheap cemetery date,  
never to know the answers  
buried in your ever-silent heart  
and newly surgered brain.

It is said that when one has unfinished business  
with someone dead, one may  
put a picture in his place in a chair  
and speak.

I could speak to the dead  
but not to a stranger.

And so it is that in my undone business  
I have kept you waiting.

I could go into water and set you free by proxy,  
through the signal of your promise to God, if not to me.  
I could. I should, some say.

But if I cannot speak with you,  
then let the absence of my signal  
speak at you: I retain my pain.

Unholy, yes, but it is mine,  
and all I had when you I could not have.