

# Reflections: Two Cups: The healing power of tea

A bald, emaciated man lay in the bed, his pale and motionless figure disappearing into the white sheets. His chart informed me that his name was Ted Jensen and that he had undergone a bone marrow transplantation for relapsed leukemia. He was too weak to leave his bed and seemed barely alive. His eyes were closed, shutting out the world beyond his illness. Because another scheduled transplantation had been postponed, the hospital was overstaffed. For the week, all I had to do was to look after Mr. Jensen.



FIGURE. No caption available.

I tiptoed towards him and leaned forward to check his breathing. His eyes opened suddenly and I jumped back, surprised by this sign of life. His lips formed a tired smile.

"Hello, Mr. Jensen. I'm Hanne," I said. "I'm the evening nurse this week."

He nodded and closed his eyes. I checked his vital signs and his infusion. Everything was fine.

"Would you like some soup for dinner?" I asked. He shook his head. "Something else perhaps?"

"I don't need anything, I just want to sleep."

I returned to his room later with his antinausea medication. Grimacing, he swallowed the medicine and sank back against the pillow with a sigh. I offered to get him the afternoon paper or to turn on his television, but he wasn't interested. "I'm too tired," he said. Closing his eyes, he turned his head away from me.

Feeling defeated, I retreated to the kitchen for a cup of tea.

When I was about to pour the boiling water into my cup, I paused, reached up, and took down a large teapot from the shelf. I filled it with the water and tea leaves. Then I arranged the teapot, toast, and two cups on a tray. I set off toward his room.

When I placed the tray on his table, he looked at me, surprised.

"Would I be disturbing you if I have my tea in your room?" I asked. "If it wouldn't bother you, I would very much like to watch the news."

"Not at all," he replied. But he was obviously taken aback by the unexpected intrusion; he closed his eyes and resumed his silence.

I turned on the television at a low volume and poured myself a cup of tea. While I drank, I noticed Mr. Jensen watching the news. I poured myself a second cup and said, "I brought an extra cup, in case you might like some."

"Maybe I'll have half a cup." I helped him sit up and arrange himself comfortably, and poured him a cup of tea.

"How about a slice of toast?" I tried.

"No, thank you," he replied. I backed off.

We watched television silently for an hour, until I noticed he was nodding off. I turned off the television and helped him brush his teeth. As I was leaving

the room, he asked, "Hanne, are you on evening duty tomorrow?"

I turned to him and smiled. "I am, and I'll have tea with you again if you'd like."

"I'd like that," he said.

The following night Mr. Jensen had two cups of tea and an entire piece of toast—it was the first solid food he'd eaten in a month. We watched television and chatted about the news, books, and movies.

The third night he told me about his wife, his two young children, and his job as a manager of a small supermarket. He came from a small town far from the hospital, and his family hadn't been able to visit. His town was close to where my parents lived, where I grew up. He was all smiles when he heard that.

On the fourth night, a Friday, Mr. Jensen got out of bed and sat in a chair. We watched a comedy on television and laughed a lot. We each had plenty of tea and toast.

On Monday, when I returned to work, Mr. Jensen's bed was empty. He had

recovered enough to spend the rest of his recuperation closer to his family. I was sad and pleased.

Four months later I went to visit my parents. I was shopping on a bright and sunny summer morning when I heard a booming voice.

"Hanne, it's so good to see you!!"

I turned and almost didn't recognize Mr. Jensen. He had put on weight and his hair had grown back. He gave me a big hug.

"This is Hanne," he said, introducing me to his wife, "the nurse I told you about, the one who saved my life with a cup of tea."