Excerpts from Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen

I’m parked in the hallway with my walker. I’ve come a long way since my hip fracture, and thank the Lord for that. For a while it looked like I wouldn’t walk again—that’s how I got talked into coming here in the first place—but every couple of hours I get up and walk a few steps, and with every day I get a little bit farther before feeling the need to turn around. There may be life in the old dog yet.

There are five of them now, white-headed old things huddled together and pointing crooked fingers at the glass. I wait a while to see if they wander off. They don’t.

I glance down, check that my brakes are on, and rise carefully, steadying myself on the wheelchair’s arm while making the perilous transfer to my walker. Once I’m squared away, I clutch the gray rubber pads on the arms and shove it forward until my elbows are extended, which turns out to be exactly one floor tile. I drag my left foot forward, make sure it’s steady, and then pull the other up beside it. Shove, drag, wait, drag. Shove, drag, wait, drag.

They part for me, these old ladies. These are the vital ones, the ones who can either move on their own steam or have friends to wheel them around. These old girls still have their marbles, and they’re good to me. I’m a rarity here—an old man among a sea of widows whose hearts still ache for their lost me…

My ticker lurches so hard I clutch a fist to my chest.

“Jacob! Oh, Jacob! Cries Hazel. “Oh dear! Oh Dear!” Her hands flutter in confusion, and she turns toward the hall. “Nurse! Nurse! Hurry! It’s Mr. Janowski!”

“I’m fine,” I say, coughing and pounding my chest. That’s the problem with these old ladies. They’re always afraid you’re about to keel over. “Hazel! I’m fine!”

But it’s too late. I hear the squeak-squeak-squeak of rubber soles and moments later I’m engulfed by nurses. I guess I won’t have to worry about getting back to my chair after all.

“So what’s on the menu tonight?” I grumble as I’m steered into the dining room. “Porridge? Mushy peas? Pablum? Oh, let me guess, it’s tapioca isn’t it? Is it tapioca? Or are we calling it rice pudding tonight?”

“Oh, Mr. Jankowski, you are a card,” the nurse says flatly. She doesn’t need to answer, and she knows it. This being Friday, we’re having the usual nutritious but uninteresting combination of meat loaf, creamed corn, reconstituted mashed potatoes, and gravy that may have been waved over a piece of beef at some point in its life. And they wonder why I lose weight.

I know some of us don’t have teeth, but I do, and I want pot roast. My wife’s, complete with leathery bay leaves. I want carrots. I want potatoes boiled in their skins. And I want a deep, rich cabernet sauvignon to wash it all down, not apple juice from a tin. But above all, I want corn on the cob…

[Rosemary, a nurse walks in]

“Now don’t tell anyone,” she says, bustling in and sliding my dinner over my lab. She sets down a paper napkin, plastic fork, and a bowl of fruit that actually looks appetizing, with strawberries, melon, and apple. “I packed it from my break. I’m on a diet. Do you like fruit, Mr. Janowski?”

I would answer except that my hand is over my mouth and it’s trembling. Apple, for God’s sake.

She pats my other hand and leaves the room, discreetly ignoring my tears.

I slip a piece of apple into my mouth, savoring its juices. The buzzing fluorescent fixture above me casts its harsh light on my crooked fingers as they pluck pieces of the fruit from the bowl. They look foreign to me. Surely they can’t be mine.

Age is a terrible thief (6-12).

How can you “SHOW” instead of just “TELLING?”

*Compare what you just read to the sample below:*

I took my walker down the hallway to get my dinner. I saw some old ladies in the hall as I made my way to the food and talked to them for a little bit. I then wondered what was on the menu and realized how much I missed my wife’s food. I sat down and nurse came up to talk to me. She gave me some fruit to eat. I ate the fruit and it tastes so good.

Notes: