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In the poem “The Race” by Mary Oliver, a woman races to catch a new flight after hers is cancelled. She is frantic because her father is dying, and she is trying to be with him during his final moments. She makes her flight. It seems like a simple narrative because we can all relate to how she feels. She is not going to give up even though the odds are against her. At first, the title embodies the idea of running toward something. It might even mean getting to a finish line. But when the speaker finally reaches the plane, the story is not really over, at least not until the last four lines. The race to get to her father is the whole point, but we know that reaching the finish line will be anti-climatic. Her father will die, and she knows it. But at least that night she “watched him breathe.”

In this poem, I noted three sections. The first section sets the stage for the problem: this woman has a plane ticket to go home because her father is dying. She finds out the flight has been cancelled, so now she is in a dilemma. The second section is the longest and describes her “race” to another airline and probably another terminal - no easy task. The language is in fragments and describes her thinking as she runs “up the moving stairs,” forgetting about her body, her comfort, and her fatigue. She just makes it in time. The final section is when she walks into the plane. This is my favorite part because it’s like she walked through the gates of heaven. The speaker sees the passengers smiling, their “hair was shining, and the plane was filled “with a / mist of gold endorphin line.” She cried with relief.

I loved this poem, especially the fast pacing of the words. Very little punctuation was used, so I could whip through the lines in a race for time just like the speaker. At the end I had a

sense of relief: she made it, and I was happy for her. She was able to see her father one more time.

“The Race” by Mary Oliver

Meaning of the title

3 sections: finding out plane cancelled, running for new flight, getting on the plane

What I liked about the poem (tone and pacing, when she gets on the plane, understandable)