

## Always and Forever:

When a friend passes, when someone special comes to the end of her life, there is a time when the sense of it is purely physical. For me it presents as a vague stomach ache, sore face from tears shed and the uneasiness that sometimes accompanies the end of a sleep. You know, the momentary feeling that you don't know where you are. That you were dropped in a time or place that you didn't anticipate and from which there is no proceeding. I suppose it has to do with a missing, a hole in the fabric, the fabric that we pretend is continuous and endless. She was only fifty-seven.

Her death is not unexpected. The poor dear stood up through years of pain and fear. She endured one serious malady after another, the kind of suffering that makes Greek tragedy seem like the ordinary life. Her abiding physical discomfort was overmatched by concern for the future of her two girls. They will be fine. They are strong women. But when you are getting ready to leave this planet you need to feel sure. You need to tell yourself over and over that you have done everything, that you have prepared them, and that they don't need you anymore. Then can you let it go, peacefully.

I believe that she got to that point, the point of going peacefully. I don't know for sure, of course, but I believe she did. She said she was ready for the end and for her that meant two things. The first was an end to the pain. There is a limit, you know. There is only so much of the minute by minute torment that a body can take. The pain of irreversible cancer, spreading everywhere, will bring you to a point where there is no point to going on. When the morphine on top of morphine is losing its magic, when you can't summon a smile for the people who are gathered to care for you, when you are so tired of saying how much it hurts, it's time.

But beyond the pain you want to know that you have done the right things for your children and that the people you have enlisted for their well being will carry on as you would want them to. It's as if you're not really leaving. It's as if you won't be missed. It's something you can't know. It's something you need to believe. She said she was ready, that everything was in place and I believe her.

I step back and realize that my heart is breaking. Another wave rolls over me. It really has happened. She really is gone. There really are family and friends in the beautiful medieval city of Tours, France preparing for and carrying out her farewell. We know so many of them and we have seen them laugh and cry, each and every one. Laugh and cry they will, although she would have forbidden the crying. There will be wine and there will be stories and the stories will be well told. She was extraordinarily witty. She was brilliant.

Sleep well, my friend. Remember to let me know, in your way, what it's like on the other side. I'll give you time to get a sense of the place and then I will hold you to our agreement; the first one across lets the other in on the secret.

I have thought of you often. I have remembered you well and beautiful. I hope the rest that you so needed is holding you now. The pain has stopped. You have closed your eyes to see that place; your place to settle for a while and more.

Sleep well, my friend. I love you always and forever.