



This week brought hints of seasonal change: the sun obtained its apogee and shadows lengthen, squadrons of pelicans form up and vector southward, spider fishers net the vines and shrubbery near my door, red alder leaves scuffle and rattle gravel lanes, heavy dew skins car windows on cool mornings, long green swells hump toward shore and scour the ruck of summer tourism from our beaches.

Today I smell fall in the ocean's fishy breath. A fine gauze of summer dust swathes the familiar objects in my tiny library. Many of my oldest friends gather here. They've missed me during the hurly-burly clamour of summer. I long for reunion and re-acquaintance.

Ernest Hemingway abides. He once told me for whom the bell tolls. I am indebted. William Faulkner sits off in a corner with a motley of his characters from Yoknapatawpha County. The tribulations of his redneck farmers taught me lessons about a larger world. Conrad and Melville smile down from shelves overhead. Each imbued me with a lust for things maritime and oceanic. In the library's north corner, quiet and apart, sit my friends of internal fire, the poets. How will I ever repay them for their ministrations to my constant need? Theodore Roethke, Pablo Neruda, William Blake, Marianne Moore, Mary Oliver, Randall Jarrell, William Stafford, Nikos Kazantzakis... what sad shell would I be without you?

A handful of new acquaintances have gathered here in my library over the summer months too, and I'm anxious to converse. Tim Winton brings tales of West Australia: Cloudstreet and Shallows. The dark imaginings of Cormac McCarthy, Suttree, Blood Meridian, and The Child of God promise a difficult relationship between us.

Soon the long rains of November will bring us all together in early darkness. I feel a tingling of expectation, first steps on new journeys. They bid me welcome home.

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**Lauren Cornwall's Vigil...**

Lauren -- Do you know they held a vigil for you last night? Do you know what a vigil is? "A watch kept during normal sleeping hours." A watch. I know it was attended by many of your friends who couldn't grasp how you could be gone. It was attended by parents who held their children close to them. Parents who allowed their children to be treated by the man who killed you. Parents wondering how to tuck their children in bed and help them know safety. They were filled with vague and disquieting thoughts. And they held their children tighter and didn't try to wipe away the tears that fell.

Oh, Lauren. It's a wild world. There are all kinds of predators out there. Sometimes we just don't recognize them as a predator because they look like our Dad --or sister --or store clerk.

I would have been at the vigil, Lauren, if I weren't half a world away. I would have remembered the cold day last November when I wrapped you in my green sweater. You tiny thing, I wrapped you twice and tied the sleeves like ribbons. Lauren --a little gift. You sat, shivering in the courtyard, waiting for your dad to come. How late was he? You were always waiting for someone, weren't you, sweetheart?

I told you, you never have to be cold as long as my studio was open. I told you never to wait in the cold, shivering. You are welcome. Always welcome. I crossed a line I'd wanted to cross for a long time. I told you someone was always willing to listen to you in my studio. If something, anything, was troubling you, or if you wanted to cry, or needed anything, my studio was a safe place. Do you understand? A safe place. See how often your good friend Kathryn goes there? She knows it's a safe place. I'm her godmother and Marilee is her good friend. I touched your shoulders with my hands, You leaned into me. Looked up at me with those sad eyes. Did you know? Fear? Sense? I knew there was a bigger sadness there than just having to wait for somebody.

Lauren, that's what I would have thought of because it was a vigil, with lacy edges of something holy, I might have tried to set my anger at the edge of the sea and let the tide carry it away. I would have attempted to set down my useless judgments and questions (hows and whys and shouldn't you have said something more?)

Little Lauren, for the void which your fathers hand has inked in: I cry. For the children whose children may have romped this world: I mourn. For the children of our community who feel unsettled as they lie in their own beds: I tremble. For my god daughter, Kathryn, who will not throw you another ball: I know her loss. Kathryn who, as an adult, will sometime lose a friend and will sit to write: "When I was a little girl I lost a friend to a senseless, brutal act of murderous insanity..."

Perhaps in that writing Kathryn will, those many years later, uncover some sense. Come to see that madness has many appearances. Come to grasp that deep frustration and powerlessness are greater criminals than greed or hunger. Come to see that, in all, as children and adults, the moment ticking on the clock is the one we've got .. and if we would love, or speak, or discover ... if we would -- we'd better. Because not every bedtime story is a sweet one and sometimes little girls don't wake up after a happy ending.

Lauren -- I will light a candle for your sisters. And you. I will light a candle for your mother. What that means is -- soon I will intentionally set my hand and spirit to an act of remembering.

And for your father I will drink a lot of wine. I will run, pounding my anger into the ground. I will lift weights and push my muscles until they ache. I will take the hate I have toward that man whose semen contributed to your breath and work until I sweat past all the whys? and some compassion drips from me.

Then I can say, "Oh, David. I'm sorry you carried the weight of such a demon that drove you to such an abhorrent act."

Maybe someday there'll be more: right now the compassion doesn't spread far. Now the "sorry" pushes into, "I'm sorry not to have spoken. I'm sorry I ignored you: sorry I didn't scream, you bastard, good for your wife to hide your children from you. Good for her!"

The sorry I say is actually for myself. Sorry that I stilled the scream -- that I contained my instinct.

Lauren -- you little murdered sweet waif -- I dedicate my scream to you. It will not be quiet next time it longs to be heard.

That is my vigil.

July 18, 1997  
Mary Anne Radmacher-Hershey

What's done to children, they will do to society.

-Karl Menninger

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