

No Part Left Out

For two days we held watch with her as the winter light streamed in through her bedroom window. We knew my mom's death was nearing. We were all there, holding her as she took her last breaths.

After she died, we tended to her body lovingly. We bathed her with warm washcloths. Lila picked out an outfit for her. I brushed her hair softly and even applied a little bit of lipstick to her cheeks, rubbing it in as she had so often done. Then we covered her with a blanket, lit candles, and surrounded her with flowers.

We kept my mother's body at home for three days—sitting with her, laughing and crying, playing music and telling stories. We held her hands and kissed her face, feeling her presence even as we grieved her loss.

By the fourth day, when the funeral workers came, it was clear that the body was no longer her. It was a crisp winter morning and it felt as though her spirit were in the light, the air, and the trees. There was something almost exhilarating about it. As we took a walk up a nearby hill, I felt a profound sense of my own aliveness. The gray branches of the leafless trees cut a strong contrast against the clear blue sky. Everything seemed so vivid and full, and I felt a deep longing to remain open to the bittersweet beauty of this embodied life.

When I light the candle on the old chest of drawers that once belonged to her, the altar is animated with her presence. I feel as though I'm making physical contact with her as I stroke the polished wood surface. I feel how my hands are her hands: the same fingers, the same skin, beginning to wrinkle a little.

Suzanne L'Heureux
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Be aware of the Great Matter of Birth and Death
Life passes swiftly.
Wake up. Wake up!
Do not waste this life.