

January 20, 2011
How Do You Talk to a Dying One

Tonight I spoke with my friend Laura
who is dying.
Who has been dying gradually gracefully
courageously
these past seven years.

With peaks and valleys of good sometimes better
days and nights
learning to know a body wracked by the devastation
of chemical cocktails brewed with the best intentions
by trusted physicians with license to dispense
patches, which cause
wholesale cellular slaughter and pain,
which forestalls, which forestalled for Laura,
the inevitable.

Hospice has been called in
those guardians of the dying
those brave souls who are not afraid
to attend and witness.

Tonight I told her the depth of my love for her.
I told her "I'm not sure this is OK for me to tell you,
but I want to tell you
I want you to know
before you become totally incapable of comprehension,
before the encephalopathy worsens,
I want you to know how terribly I will miss you."

And I asked if she had forgiven herself,
of everything, of nothing, of the specific thing,
of the little and big things
that we all regret and don't let go
sometimes till it's too late.

The act of forgiveness makes necessary
acknowledgement
and heartfelt repentance
for some too human wrong
we failed to see at the time.

If needed, could she do this for her daughter,
and she said she yes, of course she could
forgive her daughter for anything
continue to love her....always.

Then can she also forgive herself?

And I asked if she had forgiven the others,
of everything, of the specific thing,
of the little and big things
the too human thing,
the most inhuman things
that were done to her.

I could not settle asking about the weather,
what she ate, the particulars of how her body feels
the specifics of her day.

I had to ask the thing I would want asked of me
as I ready my soul for dying
as I grapple with my soul for living.

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