

## Where Did She Go?

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Linda was definitely gone from her body. I had kissed her cold forehead gently through my tears not thirty minutes earlier. She was not animating that five-foot four-inch frame anymore. But where had she gone? Did she go out like a light when her brain stopped, or did her awareness quietly withdraw, perhaps now hiding among the wafting late-summer grasses? I placed each foot carefully as I crossed the path and graves beneath us, determined not to stumble or falter in this final walk with my dearest friend and big sister.

We placed the casket on a frame set over the grave. Drifting down on to blue salvia, a bright orange and black monarch caught my eye. It rested briefly, then hopped up, bobbed gaily around the burial site and settled on a bit of yarrow, pulsing its tiny wings. I quickly looked to the eyes of my younger sister, Elizabeth. We raised our eyebrows: *Linda?*

Why did we look for her in a butterfly? Did we know, somewhere in the inarticulate darkness of our deepest selves, whispered secrets like, "She is here, somewhere." And, "She never left. Where would she go?"

Some of us believed she ended when her body stopped. Some of us believed her awareness continued, free of that body's limitations and constrictions. Some of us had open minds. But regardless of beliefs or explanations, we all felt her presence. She was there as a kind of loving,

warm, embrace; a sense of appreciation that permeated the whole gathering. In death, her life brushed against us like a gentle exhalation.

We had all been at her bedside less than a week ago. Complications from her stem cell transplant had left her lungs scarred and her immune system suppressed. She had known for a couple of years that a lung infection from a simple cold would take her life. Last week, as she drifted in and out of consciousness, her aura invited family and friends to laugh, tell stories, share memories and sing favorite songs. Her last moments were filled with the warm patter of her children, sisters, husband, grandchild, in-laws, nieces, friends moving around the house, eating food and comforting each other. She had wanted to die at home like this, laughing.

Now her body lay warming in the pine box which we would soon lower into the grave. We would cover her with earth and she would become food for new life. That part was actually clear and straightforward. What opened a world of questions was the equally clear intuition that she had not gone anywhere. The same angel-like substance that permeated her home around her bedside was with us at her gravesite.

We shoveled earth onto her casket of wood, all the dirt in the pile set out for us. We scattered flowers on top. The little monarch hovered among us. Then we sat in a circle to say our goodbyes.

Gently we read poems, sang, and wept as we told her how we would miss her. I could feel her right there, though she could no longer add her wit, her insight, her laughter. Could she still hear our voices? Did she share our grief, warmly wafting her light toward our lonely hearts?

Was she saying goodbye, even as she found a new home among other resting, rejuvenating friends?

A certainty grew in me as we walked away from the Eternal Meadow. Linda did not go out. She passed away.