

*Dear Ones,*

*I feel compelled to explain my disappearance and my relative absence for the last year. It seems that it was only moments ago that I related the huge tragedy of my beautiful sister's death. I have suffered such sadness and such disorder in my own life, as I have tried to be there for family and friends. And, I realized when I returned home ten days ago, after losing my father and my uncle in December, that I have been gone for an entire year, "visiting" home only long enough to gather my wits (such as they are), take care of the bare necessities and go again. I have been torn limb-for-limb in my vain attempt to straddle many worlds. So, please forgive me for once again letting so much time elapse without holding you near – even in a letter or a phone call. Please know that you are in my heart and that I will be back soon. It has been an enervating journey to be sure, without the recovery time to re-energize, re-connect and reconsider.*

*I have been on the move for an entire year and I find re-entering "normal" life to be disconcerting and confusing. Now, it seems that I am rendered helpless and childlike. I seem to have been thrust into adulthood against my will, not at all sure that I am prepared to be a grown up. I want my father to explain all this with wisdom and humor or my sister to assure me that "we're in this together." (Liar, Liar, pants on fire!) As much as we travel the road in tandem, the magnitude of our solitary existence has been revealed to me in all its ghastly and glorious detail. It is at once empowering and crippling.*

*I have reflected, too, on my father's illness, which was really quite merciful as far as Alzheimer's goes. Nonetheless, it is a cruel end to see someone you love so deeply disappear from sight. We mourned his loss again and again. Occasionally, there was a glimmer of his former brilliance, but, as soon as one tried to grasp it, it would slip away again like the gossamer seeds of a dandelion in the breeze.*

*Faith and I had often spoken of the death of our dearest father, and, as we held tight to each other's hands, we believed that, having lost so much of him to this dreadful disease, the actual end would somehow be less painful. This was, unfortunately, a false assumption. The sheer permanence of his passing tore at my heart and made me wish to turn back the clock – not from regret – but with the vain hope of recapturing the happy, happy times and perhaps to be better prepared for the final curtain. "Wait just a minute, please. I'm not ready for you to go..." It is difficult to tell when losing two so dear, so close together, where the mourning separates. Certainly, Dad's death opened a wound in my heart that had barely begun to heal. It kicked my unsteady legs from beneath me once again. So, I am stumbling a bit at the moment, not having had the luxury of grieving, of enveloping myself in the sheer sadness of loss in order to properly cleanse my soul.*

*My spirit is weak; my body, heart and mind are tired. I am living in the past, I suppose – recalling the wonderful life I was so blessed to share with these two extraordinary people and trying my best to fill the desperately lonely space with these cherished memories. As anyone who*

*has traveled this path will tell you, there are good days and bad days. On the bad days, when grief steps from the shadows like a veiled predator, stops me in my tracks and flays the wounds, leaving me open and bleeding, I can only succumb and hope that tomorrow is a good day. So it goes...*

*I cannot close without letting you know a little bit about my father's final passage, and borrowing some of my own words from the eulogy I felt compelled to write for him. (Begging pardon from those who have heard them before.) As is often the case with Alzheimer's, Dad's personality completely changed. In the summer of 2009, I wrote that "Prewitt Semmes had left the building." I harbored no small measure of guilt for having been occasionally callous, for attempting to divorce myself from the stranger he had become. But, in the last days of his life, he came back to us – the gentle soul that we all adored. Even his face, though thin and drawn in coma, grew peaceful and relaxed – no more frustration, no harsh edges or grimace. What a gift! It erased all the years of hurt and hardship. And, how blessed I am to have witnessed such devotion as my parents shared and to be in the presence of such icons of integrity. My children saw first-hand how to negotiate life's toughest transition with grace and pure love. This was the greatest gift of all – to be touched by their love and to bask in its glow – even for a moment.*

*For, there is no one that Prewitt Semmes loved as he did my mother. He was her Prince Charming and she was his lady. Who would have thought that Ginny Scripps, the "little shrimp" from Detroit dancing school would have attained such stature?*

*Less than a month ago, when Mom was looking for Dad's insurance card in his wallet, she discovered a black-and-white photo of herself, taken just after they were married at the Mocambo, a chic Hollywood nightclub. She was so glamorous and so gorgeous. And, I know that for 55 years, every time he looked at her, he still saw the same beautiful girl – his girl. Theirs was a love that endured quite literally until his last breath. Mom asked the nurses to make room on "her side" of the hospital bed, and she hugged him tight, just as she always had. They are a shining example of true love – in sickness and in health, and I am so very grateful to have witnessed such a beautiful and abiding union.*

*Now, I am trying to regain my balance and I find that I cannot even feel my feet; yet, it is my nature to persevere, and so I shall. There is wisdom and there is allegory and the lessons abound. I am putting one foot in front of the other and hoping for more good days. I love you all so much and you'll know when the balance fully returns.*

*Ginny*