

Saturday, February 10th 1968

As I write, 44 years later to the day, superstition still unsettles me. I will not buy tickets for the Wigmore Hall. Is it foolish to be so fearful? Time can only do so much. Her mother never forgot, not for a day. Decade after decade her grief shadowed her.

We were..., well, what were we, Laura and I? We were very proper, that's for certain. It took a month before we held hands. Her hands were small and gentle and holding them seemed to me like holding heaven. We never kissed, although we would have done. What we did was be together. She put a leaf in my suede hat and we sat in the park while I flew my kites: bird kites or rollers or deltas. I would tease the children with the long tail of the hexagon as they squealed and jumped and ran from side to side trying to catch it.

Or, we went to the Arts Lab in Drury Lane, and pretended we were part of the counterculture, in our Afghan coats. There, we drank coffee and watched films or sat in silence as David Bowie ignited Tibet with his mime. A photographer took pictures of us, the last time we went.

Or, we listened to Leonard Cohen in her family sitting room, staring at the coals, shy to be too close. She sewed a delta kite for me there, with her mother looking on. When her mother wrote, she said that Laura had not sewed anything for anyone before. I hemmed that kite with Barbour's twine, and trimmed it, and balanced the bridle, and it flew so perfectly. I didn't lock it away and keep it safe. What would have been the point of that?

What indeed was the point anyway? What was the point of the jazz tickets and the restaurant reservation, and all the rest of it, to be told that Monday morning, on the telephone, that she was dead? As God is my witness, for weeks afterwards, when the telephone rang in our house, I would think it was someone ringing to tell me she was alive, such was the awfulness of it.

There were no photographs. How could a young girl reach 18 without there being any photographs? Searching for the Arts Lab photographer just brought me apologetic looks. Her friends gathered two, or was it three, for her family, processed and printed and framed, a visual memory for the bookcase, or the piano or wherever those who lose a child hold their memories.

I held mine in my delta kite, for that kite contained her love and her hands. I flew it often, on my own, with five thousand feet of line or one hundred feet of line, in breezes, or winds but never gales, never too close to breaking point

Maybe she took pity on me that September afternoon on the Cornish cliffs, the wind blowing out to sea, the kite high above the waves. Maybe she felt there was too much loneliness, too much remembering. Maybe it was her love and goodness that brought the sudden squall that snapped the line. That was it; now there was nothing. I watched my kite, her kite, fall from a thousand feet. It fell much as you would expect, clumsily, turning this way and that without its anchor, without me. And just before it would have hit the water, it steadied and rose and flew. I saw then that the water had the line, providing just enough drag for flight. I stood for twenty minutes and watched as my memory flew westwards, becoming smaller and smaller until the horizon held it, with nothing but a drop in wind, or a ship, or the American landmass to interrupt its graceful journey.