

CLOUD HOUSE



A MEMIOR FOR CASSEY CHOU
TAKEN FROM HOSPICE UPDATE EMAILS
LEE GUNDERSHEIMER

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BY LEE GUNDERSHEIMER

Seven Weeks, November 10 - December 23, 2004

*For Cassey Chou
and her family and friends
who meant the world to her and were there with me*

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Compiled November 10 - December 23, 2004
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WEEK ONE - NOVEMBER 10-13

From Lee Gundersheimer <lg50@nyu.edu>
Date Wed, 10 Nov 2004 19:23:37 -0500
Subject Unlike any other women

Attached is an article in Oct.'s Glamour that featured none other than stunning Cassey Chou. How beautiful that the night we are flying back home, she got to see herself in print and told she was unlike any other. DUH! We've known that for years. I promise to keep you all updated often. We are leaving soon for the airport and Cassey is blowing kisses to you all.

Lee and Cassey

Note: All remaining dates/times are US Eastern Standard Time and are therefore 13 hours earlier than the Taiwan time they actually occurred.



Date **Fri, 12 Nov 2004 19:42:42 +0800**
Subject **Up up and away**

We made it to Taipei. Which believe me makes last week's episode of Lost look easy. Honestly, team Cassey on the NY end made it so easy- thanks to all of you- now we know how royalty feels. We could work the pits of any NASCAR event now...The Asia team was no slouch either. Whisked away to home with the latest small purse size liquid O2 container for the stylish inhalation only challenged girl on the go. The only major hitch in the ride was landing in Anchorage at four in the morning and being told that we might not have enough O2 to make it to Taiwan (the containers were being use too fast) and would be forced to deplane. The police, EMS, (actually the same guy- police/EMS/ probably CIA- this is Anchorage at four in the morning after all) and several suits from the airline were called in and conferred and calls were made to Remi, and after fierce negotiations and some last minute refills at some O2 all night stand for new age Eskimos or somewhere, we were able to continue. The Alaskan Erik Estrada circa paunchy Ponch was very kind and fashioned a much more comfortable breathing tube for Cassey who had endured 8 hours of breathing through something that looked like an ancient version of the apparatus from Blue Velvet.

Cassey slept most of the way after watching Will Smith save the world from ADD syndromed robots

and Will Farrell playing Chuck Scarborough. The crew was all so kind and diligently changed her tanks that seemed to have been made in about 1950. But she ate like a pig- well a pig with the manners to eat small meals- and except for the woman across from us who seemed lonely and inflated with too much air, who kept asking the most inappropriate questions and then recommended an oncologist in a small farm town in central Taiwan that she heard was very good, the flight felt like so many other trips home to see the family. Actually I am sure that same doughy woman has always been on flights with us as well.

We are seeing an oncologist nearer to us than Nebraska-hospital five minutes from the family apartment- on Monday to begin the plan here. And even if it is to begin hospice, we need to see him first to get clearance. Cassey's leg is better, she is walking fairly well, and except for shortness of breath, she is somewhat mobile. Of course Ma had six courses of food waiting. And Cassey is relaxing in bed watching the endless channels of too brightly colored Asian entertainment.

I will update as often as I can, but our in house network is not being hooked up until next Friday, so I have to ride on the back of a scooter to our brothers house to email there. I am terrified of scooters and only today rode for the first time, so once a day if we are lucky. Forgive me if this is too long and I missed any "d"s. Our brother's computer's "d" key oes not work well.

Thank you all for your many, many, many blessings and prayers and small and large favors. Honestly it is such a wonderful yet sad thing that we have to go through crisis to become our best, but we are grateful to those who care enough to go there with us. Cassey turned to me in flight and said how amazing her friends and families are, she always "knew" but now she knows.

Lee

Sent **Saturday, November 13, 2004 5:14 am**
Subject **Saturday in Taipei**

Today's update will be brief because I am using a computer in a gym while my family is waiting. We are deciding if we should all join so we can burn off a little steam, but there are no spin classes and so I am blue...

Cassey is tired but holding her own. I bought her a little DVD player today so the TV in her room can play movies whenever she wants. I brought over all her favorites, so its Warren Beatty and Daniel Day Lewis till the cows come home.

Jerry, Katherine, and the nieces and nephews, brothers and sisters came by today, and so she got a great big "blood" transfusion, and hopefully that will buoy her spirits for a few days. Seeing the doc on Monday. Concetta and Laura thanks so much for waiting for the pickups Thursday. Sorry you didn't

imbibe. All for now. Thanks again team Cassey and remember no replies are needed. We know how much you care.

Sent Sunday, November 14, 2004 5:39 am
Subject Climb Every Mountain

Sunday, here in the capital city. We got up early to take Cassey outside for some fresh air in her new spiffy wheelchair that would make Rear Windowed Jimmy Stewart envious. Reclines, aluminum lightweight, except for tacky logos on the seat and back, pretty damn slick. Oh, and wheelchairs in Taiwan have bicycle wheels so look out Tour De France...

So pack up the car and we drive up the mother mountain, Ya Min San, winding our way up with Cassey attached to her spiffy new portable O2. And we are getting higher and higher, up we go, and out we go to climb the last bit on foot, and me pushing her up a nicely wheelchair friendly path but surrounded by trees. This is a path about a 1/2 mile or maybe a mile and we stop to eat the six courses that Ma has always ready- at all times- or she has failed being Ma- and it is beautiful out, couldn't be better. Air is crisp and we are all relaxing. And as Cassey is nibbling on some bread stuffed with pumpkin or squash or something orange- she says rather calmly "I think I don't have any air..." Sure enough the cute portable that read it was full when we left and should last about seven hours- is now, after about two- empty. So much for

nifty and reliable. You lift the thing by a cord and it dangles showing you how much is left with a green arrow thing. So if the cord is pulled, it seems fuller than it really is- did anyone in Taiwan ever here of digital meters? Archimedes had more accurate measures. Anyway we are a mile up the mountain in a wheelchair and out of "gas" and cell phones on a mountain- fugettaboutit... Now I am kicking myself, because as we were about three blocks from home, I thought maybe we should go back and get the backup tank we brought from NYC, but then I thought don't ruin this, Cassey will get all worried and we are trying to have such a good time- the thing is good for seven hours...Number one change to come if we get out of this- always and I mean always have a backup for her.

So we go tooting downhill saying excuse us, sorry, almost clipping a few old folks and small dogs coming up on the one lane wheelchair ramp as we head down. Get to the parking lot in about fifteen, twenty minutes (took an hour to get up) gives you some idea of the off road capability of the new chair- and hope where the campground wheelchair concession is there might be some old fashioned canisters of O2. No such luck. They can't even call for help because there is no help high up on the mountain, only further below. Now mind you Cassey is conserving energy and seems to be doing her best not to panic while Ma, Ba, and I look like Sandy Dennis and Jack Lemmon two reels into The Out of Towners. (For those of you under thirty think Scream 1,2 and 3.) We get out of the

parking lot jammed with cars, and Ba driving like Steve McQueen in Bullett. (those under thirty think any Bruckheimer film.) We finally get Chein-te, Cassey's brother, on the phone to get our backup tank from the house and meet us on the road- but he doesn't have keys to the parent's house, and I find out later that no one else but the folks in the car do-thing two that will change from now on if we get out of this.

We head down the road and finally get enough steady cell service to call emergency- remember I can't speak the language and can't understand any of the conversations because Cassey cannot translate- she is trying to conserve energy- I tried to get her to update me, and she just looked at me like- either you get me to tell you and die, or you just sit back and enjoy the ride- and Ba says in broken English-"okay okay"- and Cassey says softly- "They told him to go to a place and will meet us." Now I am praying that They is the EMS and not some Taiwanese Corleone family, and we pull into a parking lot, and sure enough there is an ambulance right out of the English Patient or circa WWII. The two EMS workers look at me carrying Cassey to them and seem befuddled, and I scream "she needs air, air dammit, she can't breathe," and I think the tone of my voice seemed sufficiently urgent enough that they finally opened the back and began to try to help.

The inside of the ambulance was so rinky-dink it was laughable. A small medicine cabinet and a

stretcher that looked more like a child's toy doctor set stretcher, but in the corner, and I kid you not- held up by a makeshift wire clothes hanger- was an oxygen tank that look like it was right out of Seahunt or early Jacques Cousteau. But as soon as it was pumping it was the most beautiful tank we'd ever seen. Cassey stabilized rather quickly-one does tend to feel better once they can breathe- and Ma, Cassey, and I were whisked down the remainder of mount Yo Min San with a siren that sounded a little out of breathe itself. And we were clinging to the railing of the stretcher as it seemed to almost overturn down each bend of the road.

Ba went home to get the backup, and we were headed to a hospital near the house- she had to be admitted to an ER if the EMS was going to help. The ER was even more low tech than the ambulance- really it looked like a kind of ER if it was on public access cable instead of network, but the attendants and doctors were very nice and let us go home after a short time to make sure Cassey was breathing fine with the oxygen.

So much for taking Cassey out and getting some fresh air...

She's fine and at home and I am here updating her files so there are many more of you reading this update and will be from now on. Glad to have all we love aboard and tomorrow we see the doctor- at another hospital, hopefully more high budget. And we will be with both the portable and the

backup O2 and keys distributed to the family. And now let's see what tonight will be like. It's only dinnertime...

WEEK TWO - NOVEMBER 15-21

Sent Tuesday, November 16, 2004 2:48 am
Subject Five Families

Sorry to have not updated yesterday. Cassey's brother had to leave with the computer early in the evening to work in the South, so no scooter ride for me.

But what a roller coaster day, and I never cease to be amazed at the bravery and emotional fortitude of my wife. The day started out with a rather prolonged visit to the largest, most renowned (and new and nice actually) cancer center in Taiwan, that just happens to be five minutes from the house. With both O2's intact we headed out for our 10:30 appointment with Ling Long, Cassey's middle sister waiting for us there in line. Yes, line. Even with an appointment because the health care system is so socialized, there are very long waits for everything. Affordable health care comes with a cost...

We waited about a half hour to do the blood pressure weight thing, and then we were sent to another waiting area to do the preliminary questions about family history and prior treatment with a nurse. Then another hour and a half, and another waiting area to wait for the doctor. We opted to leave and come back, and we sat in a rather sweet coffee and tea café in the hospital.

Our oxygen rep came by to see us having been told of the previous days adventures, and we refilled at the hospital tank just to be sure. Ironically their mother tank was almost empty, she was slightly embarrassed, but it had enough for us to boost what we had, and we went down to see the doctor. We sat with him for about twenty minutes while he asked us questions. I only got bits and pieces-the language barrier is extremely frustrating for us directors- but the gist of it was why did we come back to Taipei for treatment when we had much better quality in NY. They don't even have Alimta, the last drug we were trying. I did ask if there was any new trial of any kind, any treatment more eastern style, anything that we should be pursuing. And he smiled and said no, not here in Taiwan. He was about our age and very nice, but as Cassey said later, she wondered if he could even read the lab reports that we had bound and brought over. The book of complex English must have been daunting to him. He did help point us to Hospice programs, the few there are. Hospice is new and not popular in Taiwan- ironic for such a Zen like way of helping- and we left with Cassey feeling like she had wasted so much time and energy for so little gain. But after reassuring her, I watched as something beautiful came out of that sad visit.

First, Ma and Ba, who had been in the room with the doctor with us, became more aware of what we were up against. Of course this made them very sad and then even more determined to try

other things. Ba has a supplement regimen that he has heard has worked wonders; won't we try it? I told him all the things we had tried, the hundreds of supplements Cassey tried hoping they might be the one, but Cassey asked me to discuss it, and she talked with him and agreed to try them if only to help him ease his pain and helplessness. She is such a good daughter and is more worried at times of hurting her family than of dying. I am doing the best I can to help her sort those emotions out, to remember her place in all this, and to that end, I began talking to Ling Long, who was basically in a state of shock that we were at Hospice stage. Poor Remi, our younger sister who was just over, who didn't want to alarm everyone so far away, and probably was holding out hope herself, had not told them Cassey had decided this final step in NY. So after much crying and a little blaming of her, I decided we needed to have the entire adult family together to get them all on the same page and to let the air be cleared- no unfortunate pun intended- before we went through this next most important and difficult stage for Cassey.

As we began the research on each of the six hospice options, I told Ling Long my idea of getting everyone together and calls were made. Of course it was going to be difficult on such short notice, and Ling Long said "what about Sunday? Or maybe Wed night." There were some scheduling difficulties. I thought about what Cassey needed, and how by Sunday who knows how much pain she may or may not be in, and I told

Ling Long we have to make everyone understand this needs to be tonight. Get help with their five families and make it happen. Even for just a few minutes. This is not something that can wait. So after poor Ling Long made more calls letting Jia, older sister (Shirley) and Chien-te (brother) know, and as soon as they realized what was at stake, it was settled on six o'clock. I let Cassey know what was going to happen, and she understood and agreed knowing how difficult this would be-again her strength. She took a nice long nap, and I sat there with her. Chien-te came right over furious that he hadn't been told, and I tried to reassure him through Ling-Long that everyone had done what they thought was best and that anger was not helpful now-but he was so hurt, and his love for Cassey was so strong, he was not going to be able to hear, and he ignored my attempts and focused his emotions on poor Ling-Long. I was very hurt at him ignoring me, realizing later on this was just his way, but at the time, it made me feel such an outsider and uninvited in this most intimate and important of times. I went back to Cassey, and we waited for six, and I, too, tried to nap.

The five families had arrived- and I use that Godfather mafia analogy not to be funny but because it occurred to me as we "gathered" that in one extended "family" there exists these separate worlds that orbit each other and come together so rarely, each with their own problems lives and needs, their own families. Sure at weddings and holidays but there is always food

and celebration to buffer. There would be none of those safety nets tonight. We all were seated around Cassey's bed, and she sat up and we talked, and the love and emotions that flew around that room were so intense and so beautiful. I was so relieved it did not back fire. I am not sure the family- even Ma who wanted to stay in the kitchen safer behind her skillet but who reluctantly joined when I said: "please, Ma, please"-had ever just sat and talked like that, but as uncomfortable as they might have been, as we all were in such uncharted waters, so much good came out of us "going to the mattress." Speaking for Cassey, I thanked all for their love and support, I reassured them that the last thing Cassey wanted to do was "give up," how brave and what a fighter she was and is, and how much we had done already. Remi was translating, and I said that no one should blame anyone in the family, everyone did what they felt was best for Cassey always, and there is no more place for blame and anger and fighting. There is only room now for support and love and communication. We must all talk with Cassey now and say whatever we need to tell her, have always wanted to tell her, just realized we wanted to tell her. Cassey had agreed to try Ba's supplements and she would hear any other ideas for a course of treatment, but we needed to understand what we were up against, truly understand, and begin to help Cassey find peace in this part of her journey and support her wishes above all. It is no longer about our fear and our grief and our worry, but it is about her. Chien-te was still so angry and afraid

and hurt, but even he began to come around. Ba held back tears and said he would not try other things just this one- he promised. Everyone began the difficult process of understanding the unfathomable. I was so proud to be a part of such a wonderful family. It was agreed we would meet every Sunday to talk like this as long as it was comfortable for Cassey, so there would be no more miscommunication. And then we went -all of us- to the dining room and had the most beautiful of dinners. Everyone was still reeling but all sharing in what it means to be a family, warts and all, but a real family. It was a great ending to a long and complicated day. I left to get some groceries with Remi, and when I got back Cassey was watching Sex and the City and smiling at the familiar restaurants and locations so far away. God bless that show, it has been such a balm to her, and if I ever meet Sarah Jessica, I will probably weep and she'll have no idea why...

Sent Tuesday, November 16, 2004 2:52 am
Subject Room with a view

That was yesterday, I am now sitting in a McDonalds using a 1.50 wireless card that the manager had to help me setup because it was in Chinese. So one McFLurry and some fries later here is today's update:

Today we went to Ma Kong hospital to begin the registration for hospice care. It is not as close as the cancer center but not far about fifteen minutes

and it is much older and as Ling Long said this is a typical Taiwanese hospital. Put it this way the patient examining table in the doctor's office was made of wood and the leg extensions looked like pirates peg legs. The medicine cabinets look like Dr. Jekyll donated them. We are talking last century at best. The waiting area had a digital readout like at the DMV calling out your number to be seen. It must have been a slow morning because the nurse came out and called for us no deli counting needed. However when ushered in the last patient was still conferring with the doctor. This obviously would never happen in the states, patient confidentiality was hardly the issue. There we were waiting in the office with this family as they were finishing and getting some kind of crème. I mean fifteen minutes we were in their way, or they were in ours, hard to tell there were eight of us in his office. But when he began to focus on us and they were leaving, he showed great care this doctor. Probably in his fifties and with two aides scurrying around him. He asked if I spoke Mandarin and then said he would spend time explaining all to me if we began working with him, and apologized for not having the time to translate all that would be said. He did mention he had worked in Sloan Kettering and then in a large cancer center in Cleveland before returning to Taiwan. It was agony not being able to understand this most important consultation and I am furious with myself for not learning Chinese all these years. Ma looked very upset and Ling Long was being so brave and Cassey just kept gazing at him and taking in this

most difficult information with such dignity. I felt like I was trapped in a surreal foreign film with no subtitles and it was so upsetting, but Cassey turned and I asked if she liked him and she shook her head yes, so I allowed myself to detach and just be.

We finished discussing with the doctor who promised to spend more time with us if we began working with him, but he had a line of patients outside which he did. He gave us the information about the hospice room for us to go see, and as we were wheeling there, Cassey turned and said "it's in another building, thank God," and she was right, much nicer and last half of the twentieth century at least. Everyone seemed very nice and they showed us a room with two hospital beds one for the patient and one for a family member and a nice little Japanese style family sitting area. This was the largest room and coincidentally the only one available at the time. There is a nice garden courtyard and a large sitting area even, with some reclining massage lounge chairs. It does seem somewhat peaceful, as peaceful as a hospital atmosphere can get. The hospice would require some initial intake testing, and Cassey would have to be in hospital for three days while they monitored and scheduled home care. She would then return if and when she needed to. We are talking it over this afternoon and will most likely begin tomorrow. I will say more after we talk.

Okay, after fierce negotiations, we got an even better room- less space- no faux Japanese family room, but right off the courtyard with much nicer light for Cassey. And since it is smaller it is less money. We jumped ahead of a waiting list because Ling Long was adamant and it worked. But we are going late this afternoon. Cassey says she is ready, let's do it. Have I said in the last five minutes how much in awe I am with her? There is a network in hospital so hopefully I can say more later. We missed the DSL appointment this morning they showed up unannounced to hook up the house while we were in the hospital. Friday they will come back. But not to worry, for now it's a long mid week weekend vacation in our new room with a view.

Sent **Wed., November 17, 2004 0:44 am**
Subject **You can go home again**

Apparently we have overstayed our welcome and they are booting us outta here. We sat in the courtyard for an hour or so, and then got word that after talking with the home care nurse, we could go back home. So now I am packing up the DVD player and all the comforts I insisted on over packing, and it s back to casa Chou.

Cassey was thrilled with that news, but I wanted to dash this off because I am not sure when I can get to the McDonalds to send another missive. Be happy when DSL is installed at home so I can update the updates.

The nurse is here so I need to smile and nod and hope I get updated myself later. So frustrating to not be a real part of the decisions as they are going down. But I am learning detachment even if it kills me... See you from casa Chou. Madame is thinking of you all, and I am ready to play the quiet American.

Lee

Sent **Friday, November 19, 2004 6:09 am**
Subject **Cold Mountain**

Okay it is Friday night and Cassey has just spent three hours on the phone with the wireless cable modem man and we now can send you updates from Casa Chou!!!

The original Mac girl has struck again. She's a little tuckered out, hell she's plumb tuckered out, and probably motored through double the oxygen, but it was amazing to watch her rally her strength as she and the Taiwanese techie held geek love for most of the afternoon until all the protracted protocols and wi-fi numbers aligned to send signals to the right modems. And lo and behold its updates from now on at all hours of the day and night. Look out in-boxes...

Earlier today, six am earlier to be exact, Ma and Ba packed us up to do the Yang Ming San mountain

thing one more time. Sort of like going back into the water after you almost drowned I guess was the thinkin, but you can be dern sure I double and triple pack the ol O2. So we tooted up the hill again, me humming ain't no mountain high enough, and we got there to breathe the early morning spring air, but it was very, very windy up on that there slope and dang near cold as a witches-well you get the idear- and poor Cassey got out- we set up the mountain bike/wheel chair and she sat down and said no go- too damn cold. So we packed up and drove up to the top and let her stay in the car and look down from inside. Stunning view- honestly. Then we headed down to a garden area, and we sat there for a bit before heading back. But the score if one had to keep one is - mountain 2, relaxation 0, no, okay 1/2. We did get some R and R in but ol Yo Ming Mountain does seem to be a daring us...

We spent most of yesterday watching movies- they seem to play a lot of James Dean and of course B-action flicks- but there was one weird Jude Law movie with Jennifer Tilley playing a blind girl and Gretchen Moll...whatever happened to her, she lasted about as long as flowers bought at a deli...we never did get the name of it.

I got to go for a run at the Arts University nearby and will try to do that as often as possible. The track has a beautiful mountain view, so surreal to be in such beauty for a bit and release.

Cassey is determined to send out her own updates as much as possible so I will sign off, but also wanted to say that all her friends may now chat away with her at casseychou@yahoo.com- she can check regularly. But don't stop writing me as well. Always nice to hear even if it seems like petty stuff. Oh, also wanted to give out my Taiwanese cell phone for emergency purposes
011-886-955-308-450 from US. 0955308450 from Taipei.

That's all from Cold Mountain- we lookahear-lookaforward to hearin frum ya- real soon.
YAHOOO!!!

Lee

Sent **Friday, November 19, 2004 5:30 pm**
Subject **Wee Hours**

Thought in the wee hours I would take some time to talk about things I don't want to send out to the entire support staff. And I will try to forgo the double-edged joy and struggle in attempting wit and the trappings of "informative yet entertaining" reportage.

Watching Cassey deal with the tech support for the wireless was such a cruel exercise in how present she still is and how much will be gone soon. And even as I write that, I feel the need to qualify because we are still needing to believe (according to the family, the hospice's philosophy, and Cassey

herself) that there is a hope. And I who want more than-or as much as- but tried to live with letting go of that- now must take hold of it again. It is the razor sharp dance between allowing one's despair that is in so many ways unrepairable to be bandaged by accepting then letting go of the grief, and then to be asked to not fathom a life without a Cassey, to not let go- that is the hardest part of all that I go through. When does that peace come for her and for me? I thought we were there last week but her spirit has reawakened (which in itself separated from all else gives me joy) but it is not a full force effort and can't be. The slight shift came because her family does not want to have her "give up". Now I know that that "giving up" is not what accepting one's death is, and Cassey and I have discussed that, and I know it is only right to never want to lose hope especially if one is family, and loves, believe me I know- and especially if it is you the one struggling- rage, rage against the dying of the light (I sure would be), but it is so hard to sit on this too thin fence between worlds. Especially for one with so little patience and peacefulness himself. But I am trying and we are talking and she is helping me to see her new outlook, and that is part of it, accepting that her outlook could and should change minute-by-minute and second by second, her new outlook of living in both realities is not only possible but plausible. "Can't both be true?" she said. Can't I be dying understand that, come to terms with that, and still try and want to live for them and a bit for myself? Do they have to be in conflict? I am so in

awe of her wisdom and beauty and will go that new dual path with her, like parallel bars that will one day join or split off. For as long as she wants to walk them. And allow myself to stumble off one or the other if I don't have the same skill. Or when she chooses to walk one rather than both.

Back to the phone call and the presence of Cassey, even diminished that is, that is still with me. I know that I must and do cherish those moments while I still have them, and it is even unfair of me to tell you who have been robbed of them (and by updating I am trying to give you those gifts, share them with you and those who care-I feel like they are too valuable too golden to hoard alone) but even as I live them with her, I cannot separate the feeling that there will be no more soon (or maybe not-there goes the needed addendum)-Okay for the sake of this thought needing to be expressed I raise the leg from the one bar of hope and walk the bar of death for a bit alone. I understand that Cassey's spirit lives in each of us, and that we will experience gifts of Cassey thought and opinion and insights and her Casseyness forever, but it is those moments of listening to her joke and get frustrated with that techie, flirt in geek language, to see her satisfaction on completion of the job well done, that though exhausted she could still make her mark on the world, that she was still alive, it is the finiteness of those moments that is often unbearable. And I know that to be given even one more is precious and that I might have missed them or undervalued them if we weren't at this

moment of crisis, that life is most optical when it is cracked and the light is passing through.

I so hope I can accept the Cassey that can not, and that has been numbed to ease her suffering, and I worry that when we get to the point of even more pain that I can bear not being able to do as she wished, that she begged, to help her to not feel any pain. How does one help enough without crawling into her skin and holding her from within or putting pillow to head? How is holding her hand and talking to her, rubbing her feet because they don't hurt yet, and helping her bathe enough? Of course it is and it isn't. Those are the days I dread even as I know they must come and by dragging you through this as I write, hopefully will find the strength. I know that by being there for her and me you are a big help in that struggle. I promise I will read every email to her from you even when she can't read and I know that she often smiles thinking of you and those she cannot be with.

Time to rest a bit more and then begin the day. As we drove up the mountain road, that winds so beautifully, don't you love mountain roads? They make no sense, seem so random, and yet still manage to get you to the top and then back down again. I thought of how we had just traveled this road, but now it was different, calmer, less danger, but still possible to disappoint, to be unforgiving, and I thought of how each day now is full of what the previous brought us to, but where it will lead will always be different, some

dramatically, some just a bit, but always heading toward where we must and need to go, heading toward a kind of view.

Lee

Sent **Saturday, November 20, 2004 6:59 am**
Subject **Mr. Doughnut rules**

Today was not the best of days for Cassey. She seemed to have a sour stomach most of the day and when she is uncomfortable the day goes slowly. This is one of the side effects of her medication we are monitoring and hopefully tomorrow will be a bit better. Spent most of the day resting and watching some more bad movies. But Jerry just dropped by with every Absolutely Fabulous ever made and French and Saunders too, so we will be in for some nice laughs soon.

I did get out for my second run around the college track and will be doing that as much as weather and my legs allow.

Sunday, tomorrow, we are expecting the family to gather again so that is a nice thing to look forward to. Outside the garbage truck is playing the same song that the Mr. Softy trucks play in US- odd-wonder which came first- who stole it from who- or is it a standard option on all trucks. Dum dee dum da dum da dee...Also there is an election coming for the senate or parliament or congress, whatever isn't the presidential election here, and every half

hour or so a truck will drive by with loudspeakers blaring the virtues of some candidate very loudly. We are on the eight floor and we can hear it loud and clear. It sounds like some WWII propaganda film...

One last Taiwanese tid-bit that Jerry and I discussed- they opened the first Mr. Doughnut here a few weeks ago and it was a very big deal. There were 3 hour waits in line to buy Mister's doughnuts. Now understand there are fabulous bakeries every few blocks here, really nice quality, but the downtown Mr. Doughnut, advertised as Japan's number one doughnut maker, is packing them in from all over. The same logo the baker with the hat arched to one side... I promise to try one for all of you and compare them to our Mr. didn't they go out of business Doughnut.

More soon. Cassey sends her love and is busy watching Harrison Ford save his family and the country from terrorists on a plane. Gee and we wonder why the world is the way it is...

Lee

WEEK THREE - NOVEMBER 21-27

Sent Sunday, November 21, 2004 1:56 am
Subject The original cast

It occurred to me that for future updates and to keep score at home if you are playing along it would be a good idea to run down the Taipei team:

The family names- are in order of age and therefore respect:

Ma and Ba

Jia- the name of respect one calls one's older sister thought her name is Shirley. She is married to Jia-Fu (husband of eldest sister) and they have two boys Jonathan and Jeremy

Chien-te -Cassey's elder brother married to Wen-neng and two sons Bryan and Woody. He does industrial design for store installations, mostly athletic companies.

Cassey (Ling - Ling)

Ling-Long- Cassey's younger sister who has successfully battled colon cancer, just had a checkup with a cancer free result, married to Lee-yen and daughter Asia or Ya-she

Remi (Ling-Ping) youngest sister who lived with us while attending SVA and now runs a very successful digital effects company here in Taipei. Ling-Long is her office manager.

And then there are the numerous aunts and uncles nieces and nephews and friends. I will let you know how this second visit goes today. Tests and pop quizzes to follow.

Lee

Sent Sunday, November 21, 2004 10:20 am
Subject Luck be a lady

Much better day for Cassey today. The emotional rollercoaster could best be summed up by a ten-minute stretch mid-afternoon. I had already eaten one of my five dishes I do eat and Cassey was waiting a bit to make sure her stomach was settled after a pill, she can eat only tiny portions and then waits, then if possible a bit more and then waits and so on. So we were sitting apart from the very crowded table, me in my child's bright red plastic Fisher Price kid's chair and Cassey upright and thrilled to be not lying down as the family was around the table eating like there was no tomorrow. Just really enjoying their meal and all of a sudden Cassey got a wave of sadness overwhelming her and she said to me I wish I could just eat, I want to eat...And then began to weep. Of course this sent all of the sisters to feeling sad and we all had a bit of a cry and then not ten

minutes later there was this wonderful patch of deep laughter as two of the sisters started teasing each other over a chant they were practicing to try and heal Cassey (learned from a Chi Gong master.) I couldn't get the exact joke but watching all get caught up in the laughter after having been so teary earlier, it was a wonderful lesson in how full life can be. Then Cassey added a joke with her impeccable timing and the whole room cracked up and even she got a belly laugh. What a moment. No need for translation.

Earlier in the day Cassey got a visit from Katherine and Francis two friends from high school. Katherine is grad of NYU performance studies and a professor of Theatre, and has her own theatre company in Taipei. She took a copy of my hastily typed resume to see if some of the local theatre groups want to have a guest artist or lecturer while I am here. Would be nice to get to do a bit of work.

I went to 101 (a huge mall and the tallest building in Taiwan) after dinner to get a street map in English. And I got a lesson from Ling-Long in how to take and find the subway stop alone. Only about ten minutes from home and very easy to figure out. Should make getting around pretty easy.

I forgot to tell you the funniest moment from a few days ago. An all time funny hospice moment. We were wheeling Cassey in to get an X-ray from the hospice building over to the hospital and as we entered the front lobby I kid you not there were

about forty folding chairs set up and some microphones and lo and behold there were people doing Karaoke in the hospital. There was some middle-aged lady singing off-key but with some nice feeling and later as we left there was an equally badly sung and with much less stage presence duet happening. Never enough chances to croon in the capitol city. I left my heart...

Today was a big improvement over yesterday but obviously it is going to be that way from now on. Good days and bad, take what we get. The family was very supportive and there was a real sense of joy in being together. The kids all playing together, the guys watching X-men glued to the screen like it had secrets, and the sisters talking around the table about nothing and everything. It could have been any holiday or celebration. Odd now remembering why.

Returning late tonight from running my errand, I got home and there was Cassey, except for her silly black hat with the pointy ears covering her bald head, she was my wife, right where I left her, right where she should be, watching another bad movie and she looked up knowing why I had gone out and said any luck? And I thought oh yes, yes, yes and oh no, nowhere near enough- both thoughts, at exactly the same time.

And that's Sunday here in the city that never sleeps.
Lee

Sent Monday, November 22, 2004 5:06 am
Subject Send off Pics

Wanted Team Cassey to see those that were able to be there for the send off home. We know you were all there in spirit. Is it too soon to be nostalgic for the event?

Lee



Sent Monday, November 22, 2004 9:01 am
Subject Wonder of wonder

Not the greatest of days for Madame Chou. Felt real poorly most of the day. She has brightened up a bit here in the evening. Dizziness, sour stomach, just plain achiness, you name it she was feeling it. Too bad she had many folks stopping by today to wish her well. Doris, her high school friend even flew in for the day from central Taiwan. Of course everyone understood when she couldn't spend much time with them but it makes the day so melancholy, and it is tougher on Cassey who does not wish to cause family and friends worry.

We did have a few moments late afternoon where there was a clearing in the storm. Tai Lee a friend from high school visiting, Jerry and Crystal remembering college classes with Cassey and how they all used to work on productions of plays. Come Back to the Five and Dime Jimmy Dean, now that I would have liked to see and again in the category of you can't make this stuff up- Fiddler on the Roof. Such a sweet and endearing thought to think that college coeds in Taiwan were donning yarmulkes and singing Sunrise, Sunset...Jerry played Motel the Taylor whose big solo is Wonder of Wonder, Miracle of Miracles and as he was re-singing a few bars of it, you could cut the irony with a knife.

Cassey said to me later on there was moment in the day when her head throbbed and her heart

was racing and she thought this is it. And as I held her hand and we sat there, relieved the moment had not been, I kept thinking of the group of friends in college and at Sacred Heart High School for Girls and the laughter and the worry over exams, and the classes skipped mischievously, and the struggle to read Joyce and Virginia Woolf in English and putting on make up for opening nights, the boys fawned over- As giggling girls with so much promise ahead, did they ever think they'd be sitting around a bed twenty years later hoping to find a word here or there to fend off the awkward silences.

Doris said it best, we used to get together and listen to Cassey entertain us, tell us all about what was going on in the world. Now we have to try and tell her and it isn't at all easy.

After all were gone there was one last touching moment to relate, again no pun intended. Ba came in and began a ritual that Remi and Ling-Long have taught him- a chi-gong prayer where he traces her upper back, writing something, making some formal pattern in her skin as he gently touches her and recites a chant over and over that he hasn't quite memorized yet so he carries it with him on a plain yellow pad. A possible direct path to the spirit world, to the life force jotted down on a legal pad...and I thought of him earlier in the day gently rubbing her back as she tried to expel the contents of her stomach to relieve it, gently rubbing her back as a mother or father does to a

tiny babe, and I could see this man in his late twenties, already with two other children nursed and two more to come, as how he must have held his little girl when she was feeling feverish, as Le-yen did yesterday on the subway with our niece Asia who caught a cold and was sleeping in his arms, lips resting just touching his neck, and I thought of how wonderfully awkward and yet so right fathers are when they get down to the business of parenting. And there Ba was forty years later tracing his love for his daughter, writing for all time his wish, his yearning, his want for her to forever be safe and well.

Sunrise. Sunset. Quickly... or is it gently... flow the years.

Lee

Sent Tuesday, November 23, 2004 8:37 am
Subject Go ask Alice...

A long and complicated day. Started with the first home visit by the nurse and social worker from the Hospice. They both looked to be about thirty if that. Very cordial and efficient. The social worker is a tall thin man, who seems very sincere but there were a few things he said that were alarming to me and later on Cassey said, "I don't like him. He is very preachy..." I said that we had a fairly good conversation trying to not dismiss him. But Cassey's initial instincts are rarely wrong.

The nurse spoke very little English but he seemed to speak fairly well. But he talked with Cassey a long time in Mandarin and I know he asked her about trying a palliative from of radiation and other treatment options and she said no, she didn't feel that would be possible. After further consults, he asked to meet with Ba and I while the nurse finished her examination.

I must pause here to say that as I type this Cassey is meeting with a Chinese doctor to seek other methods of help and he is leaning over her and Ba is watching and Ma is over his shoulder and Chien-te is behind them and it looks like a master painting the positioning, the concentration on each face, the lighting just enough to work but the fading light outside and very little in the room casting shadows. It all seems like those pictures of the ancient medical examination or the prophet consoling supporters while in bed...

Back to Western care, eastern style. Ba and I and the social worker that never offered his name talking in the living room. He asked why Cassey wanted to leave the Hospice so soon. Why she asked to be checked out. This was news to me, I was under the impression that the doctor checked us out because further testing would not be helpful or needed. Now the social worker was saying that further testing might be very helpful and that if Cassey would only agree this might be an important step to take. I asked why the miscommunication and what further testing and

treatment was for, to help monitor and diminish pain, or because we were actively seeking to treat or cure. Ba then asked if the Social Worker, let's just call him Stan for lack of name, would convince me to help convince Cassey to not give up and try treatments. Here we go again, I thought, once more into the breach. I took a deep breathe and then explained what a strong woman Cassey is, what a fighter, how "giving up" is not in her vocabulary but that faced with all of the treatment options left, she had come to reasonable stalemate. Stan said there was a cultural difference at play here and I thought Duh, and explained to him that we had been though this already, I was aware that the Chinese 1) are obligated to respect their elders and families wishes and 2) are stubborn in the face of factual evidence and only worry about their own fear- no I didn't say that- I didn't even think it then, I only need to rant it now- what I did say is 2) Cassey understands this need to honor her family but feels that she will draw the line at her own suffering and pain. I asked him to relay to Ba that I am not taking sides and will not intervene (even now when I want to) I respect Cassey to make the right decisions and to overcome her own fears. She needs no coaxing to try things; on the contrary she was always game for any type of treatment, even full brain radiation. What I will do is talk over the options with her again and let her decide. But I asked Stan to translate to Ba that if I kept punching Ba in the arm and it hurt very badly and it was doing no good but allowing me to inflict pain, and I wanted to keep punching him in the

arm, would he want me to keep punching, and would he want others to convince him to let me keep punching him in the arm? Hopefully Stan conveyed this to Ba I have no way of knowing, but Stan did say that Ba understood that Cassey would not be seeking chemo or radiation.

Are you all still with me? I hope the minutiae of the mini-struggles is worth your slogging though to live them second hand. So- I then asked Stan what would he like to see Cassey do? I said I am sure that she would return to Hospice for any testing that might be truly helpful but she would have to understand what kind of plan or why the testing was happening. What would be helpful? He said he wasn't sure. And couldn't be sure, that if she kept refusing treatment that there was any way to make a plan. I reminded him that the only treatment she was refusing was treatment she already had undergone and had proved to be unsuccessful and that could not be guaranteed wasn't harming her more than helping. He said he was not aware of how much treatment she had already had. I politely said that he and the doctors should take a better look at her records, and why not have the doctor meet with Cassey and Ba and if everyone was in the same room, a more accurate course of agreeable treatment might be reached. He thought this might be a doable solution and later on talking with Cassey in Chinese it was agreed next week either the doctor would come with them or we would go to the doctor. I wondered why we had to wait the week but didn't

find out that point till after they left. Again so difficult not being able to get all the information when it is going down.

So after a about an hour and a half we had some more morphine, a pill to open the bronchial airways, and little else. Well, we did get the hope that better communication was on the way.

We had wanted to return to, yes folks, the mountain, since it was later in the day, less windy and a little hotter but we had to wait for the exchange of a new mother tank of oxygen so we were trapped the better part of the afternoon and no trip to the mountain was possible. The delivery didn't happen until almost 4. And it gets dark by 5:30. That damn mountain is stubborn. And there is rain coming for the next four days. Oh well.

The middle of the afternoon and Cassey took one of the pills to open her airways. Big mistake it made her heart race and her anxiety level was very high. She was shaking. We decided to take half a anxiety pill and that helped. She slept for a few hours and became more stable. The pill for the pill that helped the pill to help her worked. Here we go again down the rabbit hole...

So now it 6:00 and it is the Renaissance and the Chinese doctor who comes recommended by a classmate of Cassey's who will be traveling to India to meditate for a month next week, is leaning over the bed in the limelight and the others are

positioned, at the ready and Cassey is “not giving up” once again as she describes for about the fortieth time her every symptom and treatment history and this man, who one of Ma’s friends said on the phone might be the savior- there is no shortage of hope in the house that’s for sure- the savior is making recommendations for a mixture of herbs that will help balance Cassey’s immune system and at least help her pain. And as he feels her chi by holding her wrist, I am reminded of the caterpillar and his hookah... And as he leaves she turns to me and I ask if she liked him and she smiled and said – not bad, he seems pleasant enough. Maybe he’ll help.

And as everyone walks him to the door she turns and tells me how tired she is, and I say I know, lets rest a bit, and take it all in. And I know that Ma has prepared Cassey’s favorite meal –Shabu Shabu or hot pot- a kind of make your own stew of vegetables- that simmer while you wait over the table- and I know that Ba has bought a new electric hot plate just for this meal this evening- and I know that Cassey’s probably going to say she’s too tired to leave the bed, so I sit with her a bit and then we talk about taking small steps, do what we can and appreciating the things that still taste good, or smell good, some Hagen Daz, a little bit of music, and I thought of the new U2 cd that came out today and how much she loves them and so I bought it for her while she was sleeping earlier, downloaded it from Apple I-tunes and how magical that is really- some artists can make some

music it can be transferred to digital 0's and 1's and beamed wirelessly over the ocean to wherever and played on this little magical pod whenever one wanted to hear it, the alchemy involved in all that- and we can't stop her bad cells from making more- they multiply even though not wanted and we have no way of stopping that- but we can get Bono anywhere in the world...

So I ask her after a rest- if she wants to have a little dinner, and she says she doesn't think she can, and I say come on, let's go for a ride- I sit her in the rolling desk chair and wheel her out for her Shabu. And like the mad tea party, which is the most fun that Alice has if I remember correctly, the food is dropped in the pot and Cassey eats a bit more than usual and Ba and Ma get to use the new hot plate. And the day takes a nice turn. We settle in to re-watch A Mighty Wind and that is where we are now. She is watching Mitch and Mindy and I am clip clapping away. And all is calm and she lets out a little moan that means she has fallen asleep. And as I shut off the movie I wonder how long it will be before the dormouse or the white rabbit come running through the room and off we go again.

Sent **Wed. November 24, 2004 7:51 am**
Subject **The promised land**

We've been to the mountaintop! And we've looked over... The weather held up and late morning we made our way up and mother

mountain made her peace with us and we sat in took in its splendor. It was very beautiful and I have attached a few pictures. Cassey enjoyed the air but she was shaky at best. Perhaps the mountain knew and let go, sensing Cassey's discomfort and inability to struggle. If only she could have taken it all in without the constant pain...

While Cassey slept I went for another run and even got into a pickup basketball game with some locals on the college courts. They invited me to play with them every Wed. night, which should be a nice release. Funny that sport can bridge all language, social, and geographic barriers. I have attached in a separate email some pictures of the University of the Arts where I run and the track and the view so that you can see how peaceful and nice it is. NYU folks: they have three beautiful theatre spaces and the campus is quite large. It is like an entire university just for Tisch. Maybe someday.

Cassey and I send you our friends the warmest wishes for the holiday, and please remember the true spirit of the day and be good to yourselves and those you love. Thankfulness is something so profound yet illusive. And it has so little to do with cranberry sauce or stuffing. Happy Thanksgiving. We are so lucky to have you in our lives and we love each and every one of you.

cassey and lee



Sent Wed., November 24, 2004 8:01 am
Subject Tisch Next Year?

Pictures of the National Arts University near the house where I run. Please forward to President Sexton.

Lee



Sent Thursday, November 25, 2004 5:21 am
Subject Somewhere, beyond the sea

Mea culpa. I have noticed that in my desire to recall events that some details I got flat wrong. The small children's chair I often sit in our room is blue plastic not red. It goes rather nicely with a yellow plastic desk that my computer and cell phone and various rechargers rest on. Remi and Linglong have graciously offered to buy a new adult desk for me and asked me to pick one out. But this seemed silly. My Fisher Price desk works just fine and I guess purchasing a new one in some way represented a commitment to being present for a longer period of time than I am frightened to commit to. I want nothing more than to be here as long as Cassey can fight this and stay alive, not one ounce of me wants less time for her. But it is hard for me to accept and come to peace with the thought of months and months of being so far from the other pieces of my life. How to juggle those two emotions is just one of the continual cirque de "solaces" I wish I had trained better for. Oh to only be able to be calm and content in the moment. Worry about this one and not about the next...

The other detail I got dead wrong is Ba's notebook. A medium sized spiral affair with worn brown covers and white paper not yellow or legal sized. He has phone numbers, notes, and of course the Ch-gong chant that at least twice a day he performs on Cassey's shoulders behind her head. This morning when he was doing this, oh- and he

rubs his hands together to better conduct or cleanse his chi before doing it- rubs them rapidly- as he was doing this Ma was standing nearby and blowing on the congee that she had made for Cassey. Her blowing softly but methodically, then stirring, Ba rubbing then tracing, each caring for their daughter with all their being- that was better than any parade in the rain with hot air balloons.

There are probably many other details that would have lost me first stringer, or in some cases in the press lately that I might have been indicted for, that I must have slipped up on, but the most important facts- the ones I wish I could miss-represent are all too present and unforgiving.

Cassey is still having great difficulty breathing, even tethered to the mother liquid oxygen tank which looks all too much like a casting reject for R2D2, like some canister shaped device sent to aid the Jedi. I sometimes think it will bleep alive and spin its head around and say in that too cute metallic synthesized voice- Miss Cassey, how may I be of more service? No that was the other bot. D2 never talked did he/she or it? Just made unintelligible bleeps. That makes me the gold faux British one who talked too much...Lee3PO. She sits exhausted for a few moments after each trip, and she is perspiring more now than she ever did, ever, even after tennis or a run. Cassey never shed one drop of perspiration. I remember her taking up running during her all too brief remission, her joy at coming back from Riverside park and saying: I went for run.

How many lung cancer patients can say that? Well, not maybe a run but a damn nice trot. And now there is no mistaking her effort to walk from here to there is much more of a challenge as any laps in the park and her bravery at each jaunt is overwhelming for me to watch. But here it is Thanksgiving and she remembers just days ago her blood clot in her leg and that pain that made her immobile and she said to me yesterday- hey, I can walk. Should be thankful for that. You don't have to carry me everywhere."

But now her breathe is even worse and she is having Ba call the nurse to see what we can do because the pill that she has to help her breathe is the one that made her so anxious. Later Ba reports that the doctor and nurse will be here on Monday. But she insists on heading out since it s nice weather, so to further make our peace with Mother nature we are heading to the seashore. They call it the Left Bank because the Taiwanese word for the town Bali where we are headed sounds like the word for Paris. Don't ask me. I'm sure it won't be as romantic but under the circumstances we'll take it. We arrived there and in another of a series of treaties with the outside world, the high winds prevented Cassey from leaving the car. But she got the view and the fresh air and she seemed content with what she had. As I went for a short walk I stumbled on a large fried egg "sunny side up" as it were. Attached is a picture of this glorious public art and some others of the view and Ba talking to

some fishermen, he has never met a stranger, to give you a more "you were there" feel.

Katherine is due in a few minutes so we are relaxing watching Cameron Diaz take off her clothes in yet another movie, this one with Christina Applegate. Horrible movie, but I am sure most men and half the women I know wouldn't care as long as she kept her butt wiggling.

Katherine got to spend some quiet time with her old friend as I read an interview with Tom Stoppard about how some days he can only write three lines of dialogue and I think well, I have spent over a week here and so far managed to avoid even that, and if I could only write three lines a day and they were as good as Thomas I'd be thrilled, hell three lines nowadays is almost an entire evening of theatre.

Remi is due soon and I will probably go to the night market with her. Taiwanese night markets are unlike anything you have ever experienced. If Target, met Costco, and threw in the county fair, and add the crowd from Times Square on New Years, and lots of food and sweets vendors well you get the idea. And there are many of them here, and they are packed every night. We are going to the largest Shulin. It was always one of my favorite things to do when we came home to Taipei, but I have never been without Cassey. I want to go to get her a pair of plastic slippers from Reebok she can wear into the bathroom to shower, we left her favorite pair

behind stupidly in NY. She is napping again, gets so tired so easily and she looks so beautiful.

I hope your day of football, and whatever that drug in Turkey that makes you sleepy. and too much pie was peaceful. And that you were able to get to your loved ones, I hear Nature Ma was not co-operative on that side of the world either. I read today that the US govt. finally agreed that the artic regions are endangered by gashouse effects. There was a big summit in Iceland, soon to be Slushland, I think. But of course the stumbling block was agreeing on what to do about it. Our boys think the rest of the world is wrong. That oil is our friend and we should be careful about regulating too fast. Don't mess with Texas...I only think about that as I am about to lay down the computer, and as the wind is howling outside- the doors sometime slam here caught in wind tunnels, because Cassey told me before she slept to be careful not to set the laptop too close to the edge. We have earthquakes here all the time , you know. You don't want it to fall off the edge. And I keep thinking of that old commercial, it's not nice to fool mother nature...what was that for? Oh yes, margarine...God bless Google. Well, as it turns out margarine is terrible for us, so the moral is it's doubly not nice to fool with what we've got. She's coughing now and awake so I am headed back to be with her. May the butter be with you.

Lee



Sent Friday, November 26, 2004 1:51 am
Subject The gods must be cranky

A rainy start to today. Cassey was very anxious waking up and went right back to sleep. If she is that nervous when she does wake up again, the family, she and I will discuss going back to the Hospice. Don't want to see her that uncomfortable. The rain is just constant enough to sound soothing but it also drenched any hopes of me getting out and running to release. Oh well. Take comfort in ways we can. She is so calm when sleeping. She lets out some noises every now and then and most sound pleasant. Every once in awhile a sense of distress. I wonder is she dreams as if well, or if her dreams are trying to bridge her to whatever lies ahead, or if they are full of fear or some combination of the all three.

Remi came home last night with a pirated copy of the Incredibles and I hope that justice will relax long enough for Cassey to enjoy it. I know how much she will like it, she loves the trailers and has loved every Pixar film. We were even talking about wheeling her into the theater to see it here, but she is too weak for that now. I dreaded seeing it without her. It was a nice gift and I only hope she will be able to enjoy it soon. We did go to the night market and I got her some plastic flip-flop sandals and Remi and I bought the family some new sandals for company when they visit. I bought a basketball to play to alternate with my running, but the rain is really coming down now so it will be a

few days before I can break that in. It will be a nice gift for Brian and we can hopefully play together soon.

Most of the day is filled with helping her and trying to ease her mind as we go through this, who are we kidding as she goes through it and I help. I am so unable to even begin to fathom how terrifying it is to fight for each breath. And with what grace and, every once in awhile, real fear that she endures each day's compounded symptoms. My greatest regret is that I cannot truly ease her suffering. I can only soften it just that much. A pillow under a tumbling boulder it seems.

I think of all of you praying for her in your ways and of the social worker asking if she was a Christian and of Ba leaving every morning with fruit to be blessed at the temple and my rage inside that if there is a deity at allowing and accepting so much suffering and pain, troubles the world over -what magnificent plan must we construct that allows for so much horror? What sermons have been spun to rationalize this terror? I do not wish to anger any spirits further, they are obviously mightily ticked off at me or her or the world at large these days, and I have even tried to speak with them from the depth of my soul and bow to the ancestors shrine here at home, rekindle the acquaintance of my old friend the Hebrew God, I even chatted with Christ to say I deeply admire his teachings and wonder what he'd make of all those charlatans reaping riches in his name? Why allow it? But I can't seem to find

much solace in those spiritual longings when I see her wrestling with her worry. But for now she sleeps, and here we are with time upside down and most of you sleeping, or vice versa...So I will do some reading.

This will have to be a two-part cliffhanger. After waking up, Cassey reluctantly but bravely said it is time to go back to the Hospice. I am typing this quickly from there as we do some tests. More to come. We love you.

Lee and Cassey

Sent Friday, November 26, 2004 5:40 am
Subject Back to the future

It is almost 6 and the world has shifted a bit and it didn't take an earthquake. Cassey is resting in the hospice bed. We got the results of the x-ray; she has a type of pneumonia in both lungs and has begun antibiotics intravenously along with vitamins. Happy about the latter because she has only been eating nibbles. After a few more blood tests tomorrow to better determine the type of infection the IV may be adjusted to a different antibiotic. We have been warned this is a very serious stage. She has to fight it off or she is in trouble. She has taken this latest setback in very Cassey fashion. Resting, coming to terms with it, sitting with it, and then ordering us about as we moved our stuff in for the

struggle. DVD player ready, Ma and Ba coming with the courses, family, friends and the reinforcements-now Sylvia from Shanghai-standing by. Taiwan team is somber but hunkering in. We all have to wear masks and Purell even more than we already did, but other than that we can sit with her, hold her hands, and help her wash. She is resting a bit now and Remi is with me. I will try to stay here as much as possible, certainly sleep here to help her during the night. We also must document all her food water and urine/bowel intake and outtake. Sorry if this is into the way too much information part. Charts have been set up that are collected twice daily. Since this is long term care and family are involved we are all expected to help. We change the commode pans, we supply the paper tape for bandages, and we bring the toilet paper and towels. Again big difference from the states. But the level of care, and I mean the care part of the care is very very good. Everyone we have encountered here is understanding, if not of English, and very committed to their work. Both sisters are now napping as I write this. And we await dinner that I am sure Ma and Ba will bring. The house is about ten minutes drive away and is only one transit stop. Considering how big this greater city area is that is like saying out of all New York City five boroughs the hospital is 10 blocks away from our house. In that we are very lucky. And we got a slightly nicer room just off the courtyard as before but a little farther away from the nurse's station so it will be a bit quieter at night. The room is all shades of green

with pleasant enough yellow blue and green floral curtains. Large floor to ceiling patio windows full of light. And the oxygen and some other medical equipment is hidden behind a sliding painting like you see in those movies like to Catch a Thief. Small refrigerator, kitchen across the hall with a microwave. Near the nurse's station are two massage chairs. The kind that feel like some sort of sharper image torture devices. Kneading you in just as many of the wrong places as the right. But I will be taking full advantage anyway. Did I give all those details last time? Sorry...

Okay now I must really take in this information and process. We will not know for about two or three days if she is responding to treatment. They are also, with Cassey's agreement, going to give a steroid to help with any swelling in her head and as a strong anti-inflammatory. Cassey did not want to take any more steroids after the last round during her radiation, they have such nasty side effects. But she gave her permission, I think more to settle Ma and Ba who want her to do whatever it takes. I am trying to steel myself in case there is a disagreement over whether to resuscitate. I know Cassey has asked for this to not happen, I only pray that her parents will understand. The nurse expressed to me worry about this so (She wants to honor the patient only, but Ba has already hinted) I have asked Remi for help with this and she promises to talk with them and be there for Cassey and I. I dread that day if it happens for the obvious

reasons, but I worry even more for the awkward position I may be in.

Please know that my writing it down is my way of looking at it head on, and I know most of you are there by my side wanting as much information as I do once when I finally get it translated. I have desire to disrespect my family here. They have been nothing but supportive and wonderful to me. And lets face it, I am this oversized difficult to communicate with and feed American who they love but must seem sometimes to not be fully on their side. All right, there is the latest and this day will hopefully end with our screening of the Incredibles. Now just more appropriately timed and titled.

That's all from the green chairs in our muted green world...

Sent **Friday, November 26, 2004 5:53 am**
Subject **Please forgive the no "No"**

I should have proofread. I meant to write I have NO desire to disrespect my dear family here and did not even Freudianly mean to leave out the negative. I am sure you were with me, I mean I can't get breath and breathe sorted out my command of the language is that poor.

Lee

Sent Saturday, November 27, 2004 0:49 am
Subject Roman Holiday is on hold

Day two of hospice living- sounds like a very niche leisure mag- Modern Hospice Living. Cassey is trying to stabilize her uncomfortable breathing. Bit more morphine and the steroid was administered. Ma and Ba arrived and Ma seems so uneasy. For obvious reasons but her worry seems to be a bit unsettling for Cassey. I took my first shower in these strange settings, weird to think of such everyday things as what your bathing will be like and how important those little things are and aren't and it was odd but not terrible. Like a poorly designed hotel. Cassey has decided to watch a movie to unlock her worry and she turned to me and said in the most tender but weak voice- Roman Holiday. What a great choice...

I thought of our trips to Italy though I know I am no competition for Cary Grant and how much fun we had. And I thought of how I had never seen that film until after our second trip to Rome, And I thought of the beauty of Audrey Hepburn and how my wife is even more radiant- well right up there with her- and that is saying a lot. And just as it was beginning, elder sister Jia showed up so we shut it off. And now we are all sitting here, Ma and Ba and Jia and Cassey but so little is being said. The Chinese are so different than us Jews. We'd be blabbing and blabbing trying to fend off the silences with chatter. But this culture is stoic. And so we have paused Audrey and I think of the picture

Concetta photoshopped of Cassey and Cary Grant scooting somewhere probably the Spanish Steps and wondering if Cassey's thoughts are there, clinging to Cary and feeling the Roman wind kissing her cheeks. And we all sit with our collective thoughts...

Ba noticed that Cassey's IV had stopped and the nurse was called in and she flushed it but Cassey turned to me and said I have to pay more attention it had stopped. I know she is right I should have noticed what Ba did but boy does it sting when I let her down in these little ways. And I know how much I am doing- changing commode trays at 3 in the morning, but it is the straight A student in all -okay most of us, Sue- that wants to get it all or at least the what I can do- more than right. Perfect. And so I close my eyes and allow it to bite- the recommendation to pay more attention even as I know Cassey does not want me to and will feel I am over reacting. And the sting passes...

Ma and Jia are shopping through the ads of the newspaper and Ba has gone for a walk so I will try and snap a few photos to continue the faux national geographicity of these events.

Got back from a short walk to get some air and a piece of bread and there was a medical summit meeting happening in the room and no one had called me to come back. The pulmonary doctor was speaking with Cassey and Ma and Jia and two of his team. After they all talked in Mandarin

he spoke with me and said that he was not sure it was an infection from a bacteria because of the absence of fever. She is fighting one of three things- a pneumonia, which is doubtful, a tumor caused infection, which is probable, or more fluid in the lungs, which might be in tandem with either of the other two. Regardless of the what her immune system is very fatigued and may not be up to the struggle. No shit Sherlock, I thought, bombarded with radiation, more chemo than almost any other patient our NY oncologist has ever seen and three years of emotional stress and Bush being re-elected and you show me an immune system that wouldn't be exhausted. He said that he may order another x-ray in a few days to better gauge which of these it really is. But that to talk with Doctor Lai our oncologist here and the head of Cassey's care team would be important. There may be other treatment options such as chemo... (yeah that'll help a plagued immune system..) I thanked him for his care and he was very caring as he talked. He new the gravity of what was going down and he even tried to cage his difficult attempts at English to gloss over that concern in front of Cassey, but there was brave Madame Chou to chime in, it is alright Doctor, I understand. It's really okay. Such grace to think of his struggle in the midst of hers...

Cassey then, as Ma and Jia conferred in Mandarin or Taiwanese probably digesting what they had just heard, turned to me and said very calmly in a whisper: help me to die please. No chemo. Just

help me to let this happen. I said are you sure if there is a way do you want to try, and she said no. I said can we just ask about it, explore, and then see? Find out all the possibilities? And she said that she no longer wanted to be like this. This dragging on and on. What can I do, my dear, what more can I do? I will help you do whatever you want. Whenever you want. And if you change your mind please do not be frightened to tell me. I am here only for you.

And then Dr. Lai came in. Very quickly, promptly I thought. It was hours waiting for other doctors in NY. He was so caring. Full of such compassion this man. He spoke calmly mostly with Ma and Jia explaining options and where we were. Cassey nodded acknowledgement of some questions and I believe he even asked her what her birthday was possible to make sure she was lucid. Again cannot be sure. Will ask her later. He then explained to me that we are waiting for the antibiotic to try to work but that it is doubtful at best. There is only about 40% scientific that we can do now- and the rest 60% is spiritual and must come from her life force within. He has seen it before but it is up to her. I said of course we understand. And then I found the need to let him know that the Cassey he is seeing was not the only picture he should have of her. I said that he unfortunately is meeting her now but that for three years there was fierce life spirit that was unstoppable, he would be proud to know her. I am so mad that I didn't say should be proud even now and that lying there with all that is going

wrong with her there is still a fierce life spirit because I know there is. She is so tough and it still is there in her eyes even through the morphine and IV's and lack of nutrition. Her eyes shine so brightly. I asked the doctor if there was more that he wanted to do- any other treatments and he mentioned he felt that chemo was not an option her immune system was too weak, and there were some "non-scientific" options- weird choice of words I thought- such as stem cell or a process from Germany that is very expensive and he is not sure works but he would discuss them with is soon, he wanted Cassey to rest now. She needed to let the antibiotics try to help and the nutrition and rest.

He left and Ma and Ba went out with Jia and they were all crying and discussing things and I was glad for once that I couldn't communicate because I didn't want to have to try and convince them that it was best to begin to help Cassey let go.

I sat with her a bit rubbing her feet and then the friends started their visits- Jerry and Winifred and Crystal and Jacqueline, Sylvia and Jennifer. Ma and Ba and Jia left to get some rest and after a short visit more silences, every wishing they could say so much but knowing there was little to really say and then some attempts to share memories, the friends went to get lunch and those with new babies went home to be mothers and now we are resting and it is only 1:00pm. A long hard morning. I will attach some photos I took on my walk in the next update. Roman Holiday is still in the DVD

player. I forgot to say we watched the Incredibles for a bit last night. A dark poor copy but watchable. One of those taped in a theatre bootlegs because every now and then someone gets up and goes out to get popcorn or whatever and it looks like their silhouettes are part of the movie. Funny...Cassey fell asleep about halfway in- so I stopped it- and this morning I asked her what she thought and she couldn't remember it. I said what was the last scene you do remember- and she said none of it. So we'll have to see if she remembers Cary Grant... Even through morphine you must be able to remember Cary Grant...We turned it on and she is watching now and Audrey Hepburn is in bed and so is Cassey. Long haired Audrey before she sheers it all off, Cassey with her hair just beginning to come back baby fuzz, princess Audrey in a big overstuffed fancy bed has had a panic attack, Queen Cassey propped up in hers...and then the friends come back from lunch and Cassey politely shuts off the movie and the visit will continue. Cary is patiently waiting ...and the nurse is here to give Cassey a breathing treatment for the dryness in her mouth. And a light massage. Not that helps ease her pain...More tonight and remember as these go on and on you can always just hit delete.

Lee

Sent Saturday, November 27, 2004 3:33 am
Subject I know Gregory and trust me Cary,
you are no Gregory...

Okay it is Gregory Peck not Cary Grant. We are watching the film now as Ma and Ba are reading the paper and so I got the child's chair color and the gorgeous movie star wrong. Oh well...Gregory Peck!!! He is like a more hunky pouty version of Cary Grant isn't he? Nice voices and faces, look great in a suits, one faux British the other faux acting, but otherwise –no, they are nothing alike and I stand corrected. Like saying Robert Redford and Paul Newman are the same...or for those under thirty Jude Law and Brad Pitt- wow hardly the same quality is it...Like each generation the hunks get a little watered down...

Cassey is resting a bit better now and even ate a little bit. Out in the lobby there is a buffet and a piano player and a violin. Apparently every Saturday there is some entertainment. Nice that they have that, especially for the families with children. I have enclose some pics in this update- the outside of the main hospital much older than this addition for Hospice care, the entrance of the hospice, the garden, Ma reading the paper in the room to show the windows, the bad painting hiding the oxygen, the massage chairs that make what I call the spa area, and the street just outside the hospital and the juice stand where I get my daily sustenance.

On my walk I discovered a little traditional market area, butchers, food stands, veggies, all packed together, live fish and poultry, even rabbits, not the most fun for vegetarians, but fascinating to watch and take in. Every area or neighborhood of Taiwan has these market areas and they all feel like stepping back in time. I mean right down the street are modern supermarkets.

One other thing before I get back to Cassey. There was a very tender moment between Ma and her not more than fifteen minutes ago. Ma had finished feeding her, not exactly feeding, Cassey can still do that herself, but coaxing her to eat, which only Ma seems to be able to do... and just after she had bowed her head and was grieving for a moment. And Cassey notice and asked her to hold her hand and then said very gently in Taiwanese: Don't be so sad Ma. Please. I'm all right and you need to be to. And Ma shook her head that she understood but she couldn't help letting a few more tears and sobs out and here was daughter comforting mother and it was obvious how many times the picture had been painted from the other point of view. How many knee scrapes, fights with sisters, stomach aches had been nursed. And how could Ma be expected to not feel despair and yet to do so would only cause her beloved daughter more worry. Such a very tender and impossibly meaningful exchange.

Attached is another photomontage. I am off in a few moments to get some plastic sandals for myself so I can shower and walk around the room. Probably a fresh juice from the stand too. Gregory Peck (not Cary Grant) is scootering the sights with Audrey even as I type. Cassey is glued to the set and I know exactly why...the wind is kissing her cheeks.

Lee



WEEK FOUR - NOVEMBER 28- DECEMBER 4

Sent Sunday, November 28, 2004 6:30 am
Subject On the Day of Rest

Very quiet and peaceful morning. Not that it was easy especially for Cassey but it had a Sundayness about it that was very soothing. I gave her a sponge bath and a change of pajamas and she rested and then ate more than usual. A nice muffin like piece of angel/sponge cake and some papaya. Seemed to like the papaya's coolness and easiness to chew. For whatever reason she was more awake and alert this morning as she ate.

The friends and family began their visits and at one time there were ten folks sitting around staring at her. Janet had brought Cassey's favorite fried chicken but there was no way with her stomach so tiny and tender, and she looked at Janet and remember she had not talked at all that day, and with that timing that only Cassey can work a room with- "Janet- are you trying to kill me?"

Knowing crowds were not helping, I went for a walk with half of the friends to get dumplings and Jerry and Shu-min even brought new eyeglasses on sale half price- they looked so nice. A beautiful stroll allowing for some emotional release and a taste of normal for all of us as we allowed elder sister some

time with Cassey. We got back and the summit resumed and finally I said to the friends why don't we do this one at a time each of you get some alone time with her and then let her get some rest. Cassey nodded her head as if to say YES! Five minutes okay she added. So each friend spent some time with her (and five became fifteen) and afterwards Katherine said the nicest thing- she said Madame was honoring us each in our own way. She asked me to massage her gently not for her but for me, she knew I wanted to. Jerry said that after he sat with her and talked she turned to him and said one thing- it's all right. Shu-min fresh from NYC chanted a bit for her. And after the six or seven visits and Remi and I were alone with her, she said- that was much better, I hate when everyone stares and makes me feel like a show dog.

Then if that wasn't enough to yank your heart into your throat, Cassey picked up a pad of paper and wrote something to Remi and spontaneously they began writing notes back and forth communicating both because it was hard for Cassey to talk and because what was needing to be said was more negotiable in writing. Unbearable if spoken.

Ma showed up and as she dabbed her eyes she watched this exchange. Remi and I had talked about needing to allow Cassey the chance to convey her wishes for her death and anything after that the family or friends should be included in or taken care of. How could we begin that dialogue

and whether we should let begin it when she is ready. But what if she slipped away before we got the chance? As they passed the pad, more valuable at that moment than the tablets of Moses, I begged that the script was about those final vital matters. Was Remi finally able to have the conversation that she (and I who tried to have it a week ago and was told by Cassey that it was too soon) had so dreaded but knew must happen, and would I be allowed relief that it was her family that helped so that it would honor that tradition?

As they continued writing and passing back and forth, not a word being spoken, I remembered after relaying this fear to Deb her saying she will let you know everything when she is ready, and another friend who had said that Cassey would know when her family was ready, and how the truth was some strange combination of both. Finally Cassey turned and said you will need to read this and Remi handed me the hard-backed pad the size of those while you were out memo pads and on it was the dialogue outlining Cassey's wishes. Her affairs were being set to order exactly at the right time.

And then just like that Lee Mamma- the mother of Cassey's best friend who died over a decade ago- is visiting with her younger daughter and son There has never been anyone closer to Cassey than Jesse and she never got over her death and her visits with Lee Mamma are always tough emotionally. Lee Mamma is in delicate health has

always been and is worth a book by a much better writer than I will ever be. Amy Tan meets Alice Monroe. A very complicated woman and a very fascinating family. But not ten minutes ago Remi was writing if Cassey wanted to rest next to Jesse in a temple overlooking the city, in a wall full of urns with a small picture and nameplate of each person, probably the most difficult question of Remi's life, don't think I hadn't thought of it Lee, she said to me last night. But how can I ask? And now just moments ago, she had that conversation without voice and Cassey had written it doesn't have to be there but it would be nice, an impossible paradox of value, where one's remains would lie for all time, and there it was jotted on the pad and with no hint of exclamatory language, exquisitely understated, and then minutes later Jessie's mother and sister were here. And the timing of that- the awe inspiring beauty of the order of events was overwhelming. Lee Mamma got choked up on her own just seeing her daughter's good friend, no idea of the things decided just earlier and the visit was very brief. Just moments. I helped her go to the lobby with Remi and then I lost it. As I was trying to explain how much Cassey loved her I felt the welling up of emotion and as I spoke to Lee Mama and her son and daughter, I found myself sobbing. Was it my knowledge of knowing where my wife would be for all time, the jealousy of the perfection of the relationship between Jessie and Cassey-like James Dean it would never get stale and it was always, without need for argument or spokenness,

profound in a soul matching way that we never were. Cassey and I had grown wonderfully close, but our spirits never had that puzzle piece fit. Let's face it I was just exhausted and well past due for a flood watch and it was e.) all of the above. So there was Lee Mamma choked up at my display of emotion and unable to have her cry because I had beat her to it. I did manage to convey how much Cassey loved the Lee family and Jessie and Remi spoke of Cassey's wish to be near Jessie and Lee Mamma was very touched. My lord what a full day. And how emotionally draining it must be for Cassey too I thought as I recovered. Lee Mamma went back into the room wanting to say her goodbye to Cassey and then slid a red envelope (the Chinese tradition of giving money out of love and respect at any occasion, wedding, birthday, hello, goodbye). Lee Mamma is famous for this and not just because the family is fairly well off, but because she is TRADITIONAL in every way and generous beyond belief. We always spend the last half hour of our visits handing the envelope back and forth and then finding a way to put it in her bag without her knowing it. Cassey and I use to laugh about it and more than once when we were broke I used to say may I just let her win once? But this time she was not going to be argued with. She slid it quietly at first under the covers, and Cassey gave it back . So she handed it with such force that she even hurt Cassey a bit and then kissing her hand with regret after slid it back again. I waited for her to leave the room (after assuring Cassey I would handle it) and then gave

the envelope to her son Matthew who put up his own struggle apologizing "it is custom, please" and I told him politely to please put it in his back pocket and never tell Lee Mama. And he walked away trying to fit the rather thick envelope into his back pocket.

We are all sitting here now, Ling-Long Ma and Ba, Remi -- and Ba has cooked a dish for me- the first time he has cooked for me- and I thanked him, such a sweet gesture, and he asked me with a thumbs up "good?" and I said very good Shey-shey. I so wish we could have a father son laugh... And earlier Jerry has brought Sex in the City-look out- the first five seasons. Six is on the way, he said, so season one is three episodes gone already. But Cassey has asked for a catheter, she is too winded to get out of bed for the commode even bedside. I help the nurse fit it to her and then we all sit back again and as she asked for episode four it is so clear that we are slowly stage by stage ending things.

One last bit- Asia- our niece for those who forgot to do homework, though if you are still reading at this point you probably have- asked if she could come into the room and say goodnight to Cassey. And so I asked Cassey, who had said no children in the Hospice room, she didn't want them to get sick. (or have them remember her like this was the understood) I requested as advocate for both Asia and Cassey who I know was missing her- I said Asia didn't see why if she could play with her Goo-goo

(auntie) even though she was sick at home and eat with her and see her, why not at the hospital? Cassey said okay just for a moment to say goodnight. My heart was about to rip again as Asia in her little jumper and hair pulled to each side in huge pig tails and her Hello Kitty face mask said goodnight to her Goo-Goo and told her to please feel better so we could go home. And then went skipping down the hall happy that the forbidden had been erased.

Sent **Sunday, November 28, 2004 8:29 pm**
Subject **Monday, Monday**

Even quieter morning than before. Cassey looks at me with so much to say and no way to say it all. I try to stay in the moment and just let our silence speak for itself but I am so not good at it. Learning...

Silence is broken by Sylvia text messaging her regret for feeling unwell and missing a second goodbye last night. She is boarding her flight back to Shanghai. I must email her and let her know that it is all right. Cassey will understand, please do not be sad and hope that she is feeling better. Cassey began sending some emails to NY friends this morning concerned they would feel too remote from all that was happening. She only managed one before she said, too tired, too short of breath... I said later, when you've rested more.

Ma and Ba have arrived and the distraction is tremendous at first then settles in. A wave of too much care as they try to make up for the hours they were away. I sometimes fear that Ma through her love will Mother Cassey to death as she begs for her to try and eat this and that, so after Cassey says MA! In that tone of do not ask again and a wave of sadness comes over Ma, she offers some eggs that she has made me, and even though I have eaten some cereal I eat again and this helps. As Ma settles into the morning paper, Ba steals a long, long look at his daughter and I think of his anguish, all the years of watching his beloved cockroach of a girl (Cassey used to go down south to the grandparent's farm every summer and get too tanned and she looked as brown as a cockroach) How proud he was of her studies, her good grades, her intelligence, even her wanting to study in America. (Not sure he was proud of her wanting to live there...)

Remi said to me as we were walking yesterday that this may be the hardest on Ba. I asked why and she said without the faintest (okay maybe just a bit) touch of sadness that Cassey had always been Ba's favorite. For all of the reasons I just said above. He was always the most worried and proud of her. Funny how families always know this. The dynamic of degrees of love. Even if they minute.

Ba then looks at the IV to make sure it is running properly, and after I glance quickly too to make sure I have not let him and Cassey down again, as

we mark our responsibility territories, I sense the rhythm that we all have of doing things. The patterns of our personalities, and I think of the moment that just happened when Cassey asked me to hand her the pad to write something for Ba and I opened it to a blank page and she turned it back a few pages to the first blank page so as not to waste, but that through the morphine, the weakness, the finiteness of her time left, she still needed both to correct the imperfection, and to make sure it was her piece of paper, so Cassey, and so many fights we have had over things like this before-slightly more important examples mind you, but sometimes maybe not- and how now it was only curious to me for the familiarity of the pattern. No need to ever argue again, how petty I'd been, we'd been. And Ba was concerned that the drip was not fast enough so he left to have the nurse check. And here we were, me typing to deflect by sharing, he administering, Ma cooking and reading and Cassey left hoping she make this happen more her way...

Sent Monday, November 29, 2004 5:23 am
Subject Wiping the air clean

Cassey's IV did need to be switched, the vein had fatigued. I only bother to tell this detail not because I failed to notice again, but because of the care that the nurse gave in the removal of the old IV. She knew the tape and the needle would be painful to remove- such a little bit of discomfort

that Cassey would be feeling in the grand register of discomforts, but why tip the scale even that bit if she had to, so she removed the tape as carefully as if restoring an ancient mosaic, slowly bending it back and then coaxing each hair from under it before slowly so slowly bending more of the tape back. I held Cassey's other hand so she could squeeze if there was pain like we always do, and I motioned to Ma to join us by rubbing her feet. She seemed pleased to be able to Ma in some way and cradled her feet and massaged. And as this delicate procedure progressed there was no need for Cassey to squeeze because this wonderful nurse was going so slowly and tenderly and call me dramatic-moi?- but I thought if only all of the world's problems could be solved like this, if the clogged foreign policy that was not responding or working anymore, and needed to be changed, was negotiated carefully and tenderly with all involved understanding the possibility of pain and working to avoid it even as it was understood that it would be, maybe then ,even though there was so much greater pain in the world, and need for anti-inflammatories, just maybe the little quarrels would not be allowed to tip the scales. If only if only...Bless this nurse who looks twelve and I can't read her name in Mandarin. But she is as virtuoso at her work as Glenn Gould at his keyboard or any brain surgeon for that matter. A three-minute procedure took fifteen or twenty but it had never been performed more beautifully. There was God in that. That much I can grasp.

Cassey went for an X-ray this morning wheeled in her same bed out the door and into the street over some speed bumps and into the other hospital full of people. She had to wait in line, her in a bed them standing, until she could get her x-ray. Folks lined up in the hall. Must have been twenty people waiting their turn. Some little babies, some old and infirm, a few others in their bed. She was mercifully third in line and I thought what a strange pecking order of need. And all were watching each other wondering what they were each in line for, who might need to be allowed to be seen sooner. Trouper that she is and armed with her only her pointy eared black cap she sat there and waited her turn to have confirmed what she already knew. And then back over the speed bumps and again you had to see it to believe it, sharing the small road with an impatient car that wanted her bed to move over to the side so he could get to the parking lot.

After that, Ma and Ba left to do housework and cook lunch, Cassey began to sleep peacefully. This was interrupted by the Doctor and the chaplain, a puffy older woman with a bit too much rouge, and some interns and the oncologist here at the Hospice a woman of great grace and very young, I swear she seems twenty in her ID picture. They spent some time speaking to Cassey and for the first time the head Doctor's compassion seemed measured, like a planned bedside manner. Was it all just a needful act? Was he like the great and powerful Oz? As they left I ask the oncologist about

the x-ray taken earlier, if the results were ready and she said she'd be back to talk with me soon. The doctor led them out and for the first time I saw the Western medical power structure I so abhor at play here. Doctor speaks all are quiet. Doctor moves the waters part. Doctor holds your hand and looks in your eyes, he is giving you his time and it is very valuable. After they left I asked Cassey

if there was anything I should know and she gave that gesture I so love where she waves her hand back and forth like wiping the air clean. This means NO in Madame speak. But then I am sure most of you know this already. I said you were sleeping so peacefully I am sorry they woke you. And she whispered: and for so little. More spiritual stuff...I have told them I understand. They don't believe me.

Jennifer came with her husband and they sat a bit and he left to pick up their daughter and she has stayed on and I am glad. She needs some time with Cassey and if more doctors come, she can help translate. And then the oncologist comes back and asks to speak with me and she leads me in to read me the film and it is clear the white patches have gotten worse. Whatever the blockage or infection is it is not better. She asks me if I am prepared for her to get worse, and I say yes, I understand. I asked how long this process would take because in the middle of the night I reassured Cassey who was so restless with the minute to minuteness of it all, the slow ebbing away of her life- "what do I do?" she kept asking, and I said

nothing, you no longer have to do. You just have to allow. But this didn't help her restlessness, so I asked if knowing how long, would help. Would it help her to sense some relief- a way to measure her stamina. To allow her to better prepare. She said yes.

And I promised her I would try to find out and now I was asking this kind woman and she said "we are not God, that is up to him, but her symptoms are not good. Maybe two weeks, maybe one. It is up to the infection. When it becomes too much...She asked if the family was ready and I said the sisters and brother yes, but the parents are a work in progress. She said that she was concerned about that and maybe talking to Dr. Lai would help. Dr. Lai had asked for Ma and Ba to be there tomorrow early afternoon to talk with him. I said that Remi and Ling-Long would be there as well. And then I thanked her for her kindness and for devoting her life to such a difficult and noble line of work. Surrounded by such deep pain and performing so much simple good. She thanked me for acknowledging and then I went back into the room and there was Cassey fast asleep and I thought of the knowledge that she already knew but I would reassure her with. Like Polaroid pictures used in trial we had the black and white evidence now.

I must say here that I appreciate all of you concerned about me and my handling of these events. It is so kind of all of you to ask me to allow my feelings and to do things for myself. I must

reassure you that I cry at least fifteen to twenty times a day, for all different reasons, some just loving the way my wife looks, some because I cannot find any logic to a life that must end in despair. Sometimes just out of language frustration. But I am feeling, deeply and profoundly, and if I don't say and at this point I was blah blahing, trust me the keys are turning a little rusty on our brand new laptop...

And I am eating. And there are bakeshops on every corner...

Another of my profound cries came with my Father in the hallway with Jennifer, bless her, translating as we talked about what was written in English in the pad by Cassey's bed. He had seen it and wanted to know. It was the doorway to letting him finally release his façade of she can "beat this" and as he grabbed hold of the will to let his daughter go, we both acknowledged our love and respect for each other. He is a very dear and noble man, and he deeply loves his children, would rip off his arm if he could for them. And clinging to the wheelchair in the hallway for ballast we discussed each of Cassey's final wishes. There was a God in that too.

And then Ma came out and wondered why everyone was leaving her alone with Cassey and making such a fuss, and it was her turn. And poor Jennifer was such a good surrogate daughter, holding her up and helping her weep. And I had to run back and forth from the room to the hall so as

not to leave Cassey alone for too long. But she had been heavily sedated now. Her anxiety was growing from her impatience at not being able to even chew or drink without fatigue, and so we asked her if she wanted a kind of ant-anxiety drug, she had loved her Adivant when needed in the states, and now she was fast asleep cradled by the kiss of this new sedative. It will wear off in about three hours and we will ask her if she prefers being asleep. I would imagine so... And it is the late afternoon, of the long day's journey, and I will try to find the right time to ask her how much she wants to know. But for now let her rest. She already knows, it is not the knowing, it is the waiting...

Sent **Tuesday, November 30, 2004 0:49 am**
Subject **I Started A Joke**

She was very alert this morning-and thought's raced by with my small joy- how long will it last, just enjoy while you can, what a cruel sensation of maybe there will be a way to just wipe the board like those magnetic plastic toy slates you press on drawing and then lift the sheet and begin a new drawing, clean slate start over-I'd even settle for this stage for the rest of my life.

She even began watching Sex and the City, which I thought was long over and done with in every way cancelled. Last night Remi had asked if she thought Cassey would want music if there was a service and so earlier this morning I asked her so happy that she was eating a little sponge cake Ma

and Ba had bought for her. I can think of no better ad- though agreeably a hard sell for Apple- than a husband and wife creating a playlist for her funeral service. No more important and practical use for the gadget then that. Talk about grateful for technology. She selected the old dance song Native New Yorker first, a favorite of hers from school days dreaming of living in America and NYC. Young and pretty, New York City girl...then the Cranberries song Dreams, and a Bee Gee's song (she wanted I Started A Joke) but settled on Words. Surprisingly no Paul McCartney (one of her favorites or Beatles- probably just too damn painful or hard to choose which) She rejected Let it Be- and said in that tone of only Cassey's okay, Lee- let's not get corny. And I thought BeeGees? She then showed her wonderful taste by saying And the entire Well-Tempered Clavier played by Glenn Gould. And that is it, okay Lee, stop suggesting... Finished. A very beautiful morning.

As elder sister came in Sex was snapped off the TV- such subtle a show of respect, an American would watch what they want especially given the circumstances and yet Cassey knows the content is too racy for Jia- and they are now channel surfing what I can only describe as the tackiest television since that found in Lost in Translation. Commercials here jump out at you, assault you, and the programs all seem to be created by people on crack cocaine, too much color and imagery, everyone over acting. Talking too fast. Forgive me those of you who are from here, but this

is my jaded American few hours of sleep perception. I am sure Fear Factor and Desperate Housewives are no works of art either. They have ironically settled finally on something with Matt Damon from America-oh yes-Legend of Bagger Vance or what ever it is called. Cassey hates golf but the two sisters sit together and watch a man who has lost his swing.

The oddest thing just happened, on top of another odd thing which I will get to- but on the way back from the doctor for me- I will explain in a moment- I was walking back and I had just spent all my change on lunch and a bakery run and I was walking past this bent over beggar woman with horrible teeth, though not very old, who has been out front of the hospital every day with a box of doublemint gum that I thought she was trying to sell packs of. She would walk up to you and ask and then walk away. I had no small amounts of money but wanted to help her so I walked inside put my food down and came back out to the street with a 50NT piece which is about a dollar fifty. I gave it to her and smiled and did not take the gum and as I walked away she screamed something to me in Taiwanese and everyone on the street turned around and then she hurled the coin at my feet, saying something that felt like it must be cursing my entire clan. I look around for help, someone to tell me how I offended and no one seemed to be able, so I picked up the coin and tried to give it again and take a pack of gum thinking I may have insulted her making her feel like

a beggar when she was an honest gum seller. I laid the coin on the gum and tried to take a pack and she kept exclaiming and seemed even more upset. Could the gum really be more than a dollar fifty? So I took my coin and as everyone was staring I walked away. I was trying to do the right thing and it was obviously not what the gods wished...I will have to ask Remi later why.

Now about my need for medical attention.

Disclaimer- Read on only if these CSI details do not annoy- This started last night when I was saying goodnight to Remi so Cassey and I could go to sleep. She was telling me thank you for all I had done and I was saying stop, please for the fifteenth time but still it was so sweet of her to acknowledge and as her hand rubbed my back patting me- she said what is that? And for the first time I realized that my usual stoop had been made more Quasimodo like by some kind of large lump. We went into the bathroom and lifted my shirt and in the middle of my oh-so unsexy-hairy-thank you Hebrews-back was a large cyst like area about the size of a small former soviet republic. Of course I thought great – now me... As Remi began to help- well we will stop here- just suffice that Something About Mary had a less embarrassing scene. Bandaged and really in not much pain just mortifyingly embarrassed we were coming out of the bathroom and bumped into the nurse and I had my shirt off and the lights had already been dimmed for Cassey to sleep and I am sure that it look like this was the pervert family for a minute.

Nothing like a hospice quickie. We explained my state of undress and the stumbling out of the bathroom and she helped put some ointment on it and we bandaged it with some kind of rocket ship embossed band-aid that I hoped was left over from some children's set. Remi and Cassey had a good laugh about our playing doctor patient, actually it was the only real smile from Cassey all day, and she said let's have someone look at it tomorrow. But all night I can't say I wasn't a wee worried I have never had a lump like that, and all sorts of doomsday scenarios magnified by what is all around, and alternating with me saying don't be foolish, but I had tried to heal Cassey by holding my hand on her lungs late at night and praying, and I had ticked off many deities of all faiths recently with my despair, so much of the night. I Googled every possible combination of diseases when I was up ministering to Cassey.

But we were having such a good morning and I had almost forgot when Cassey asked Jia to look at it, and she seemed a little alarmed and said she would take me to see the doctor. Chien-te had arrived and he looked at it and messed with it and yelled ohhh when it performed grossly again, that was very comforting (actually his want to help was comforting- the first real brother to brother moment breaking his reserve that has been equally metallic because of his fear for Cassey) and just then the tall Social Worker that has become the sort of quiet Dickens villain, the character that when he comes in the tone of the story shifts- you can almost hear

the soft howl of the wind- entered and he asked how Cassey was doing and she just stared blankly ahead playing much sicker than she was feeling today. She really has no patience for him, as if the need for social grace is gone since she only has so much time, why bother pretending, and he nodded this understanding nod as if to say- I know she hates me but it exactly this anti-social behavior that leads me to believe she needs saving or her mortal soul is in jeopardy. He then asked what he could do for me and I said I need a doctor, and we were just going to see one, and his eyes lit up-- finally someone who would admit they needed his services. I told him I had had a large lump and turned my back to show him. Obviously not his line of work but he did in that now Stepford or Manchurian Candidate voice of kindness say I will see if I can find a way for you to see a doctor. As he left Cassey rolled her eyes and said what is the big deal, just go next door they will see you, you don't need him and she was right. He came back in the information that if we went to the outpatient area there was a skin doctor who would see us and that is why I was outside coming from the doctor.

Now okay I am fine, I think I am, let's hope so- I have antibiotics to take and a cream for what they have said is either an epidermal cyst or a carbuncle. Having never had either and not needing any more medical show theatrics I ask straight away is this serious and she, the doctors here are all twenty year old school girls or fortyish

men who wear gold rim glasses. The doctor said most of the infection was gone already (and I thought of poor Remi and our awkward moment of filial bonding) and that I should see her Friday to make sure. I lead with those details to break any undue suspense but I must also say that the whole thing took only twenty minutes, thank God and Jia and Ba were there to make sure it went smoothly. We were for obvious reasons minutes from the hospital and there seem to be hundreds of people waiting for various doctors in a large holding pen with many many yellow doors. I guess behind each was a different kind of doctor and the carbuncle doctor was having a slow day. No need for a deli style wait for your number to appear on the digital readout near the right door. We were ushered in right away and this very young but efficient doctor who did speak English examined and treated me in about five minutes. Prescriptions were entered in a computer and I was sent out into the holding pen to weigh myself, get my height, and take my blood pressure with a tear it off cash register style reading. All do it yourself. Blood pressure was very good and it was another line to pay and Jia and Ba fought over who should pay for it like a dinner check and Jia won and I asked how much to pay her back and she said 500NT which is about 15 dollars. So cheap- a co pay in the states. We then went to another line and picked up the pills and cream, again pretty fast and this time I insisted on paying and Jia said it was already paid. 500NT for all of it. Pills and doctor. Now you understand why I felt I should give to the gum lady. I was so grateful. I

will see if I give more if she will throw it at me. It may not be a pretty hospital and too crowded and old very old, the restroom has those old European style squat toilets I first encountered near the old graveyard where Jim Morrison is buried in Paris. But I digress. It may be old but health care here is what it should be affordable and for the most part compassion filled. And when I got back Cassey was still "up" and Ma and Ba and her were eating. And it was tofu not songecake. And she said good when I asked how it was. Please let me have more days with that sight. And Chien-te was snoring in a chair, not wanting to leave but needing sleep having worked all night down south on a project designing in his factory. And on the TV, Matt Damon had found his swing.

Sent **Tuesday, November 30, 2004 4:15 am**
Subject **With or without salt**

Some quick things I have forgotten to include- what there is stuff you haven't said in these ridiculously long emails you say? Yes, my friends I have spared you much.

But as I was walking to the bakery yesterday, hey if there was a great bakery right outside your hospital would you say no? It was so odd to be outside not because of the bright sun on my face but because of the enormity of all that is going on inside this room and this building it feels like there is no outside, like stepping off the movie set in the middle of the movie or leaving the Dollhouse for a

scene at the fjord in the middle of the play. It is really rather small this building with very finite dimensions and outside there is no sense of the enormity of all within. Looking in the window from outside there is the kitchen where I make my sandwiches next to the mothers who are making rice and soups and cooking entire meals. But out here it is just another window.

On the street there is a man with a large barrel of hot water that sells corn. It is so cheap three ears for about a dollar. Same price, he proudly told me, with or without salt.

Another touching moment this afternoon as Cassey was watching *Sense and Sensibility* for the fifth time since we have been here. They run movies over and over on three of the regular cable stations not just HBO. Sort of the Taiwanese version of premium channels but no pay involved and Emma and Hugh have been alternating with Harrison Ford and the plane on one of them. The movie makes her think of *Concetta* I know and she loves the last scene- must be the most romantic in all movies she said to me the other day...She never was a fan of *Casablanca*- did I tell you I have been trying for years to get her to watch it and last month she finally did. He's a terrible actor isn't he she said and then when it was over she said okay it was a little moving but really, where did she get all those clothes in the middle of a war. And now as the good day is fading she is watching this movie with Remi and because Remi came in late and has

never seen it, she is explaining it to her. Who is who, who loves who. Why they need the house. And talk so formally. Remi is sitting very close to her on the green plastic children's stool I had brought over from the bathroom at home so we could sit closer to Cassey. The same stool I bathed Cassey on because she couldn't stand for that long. And the sisters are talking almost touching heads but staring ahead at the television, enraptured, and the light is coming in from the garden and hitting their faces just right, That shot would win the award for cinematography I promise.

And then not two minutes later as she and Remi laughed at the moment when the young sister stabs at Hugh in the yard, fencing and he collapses having looked too long at Emma and was caught off guard, Cassey said I can't see much anymore. It's hard to see. She lifted her glasses and rubbed her eyes and put them back on and then said, nope. So Remi and I wheeled the bed into the middle of the room, four feet closer to the television and she said thanks that's much better. And they went right on watching.

We have come back from the Tuesday afternoon summit with the Doctors and their team. The young oncologist has told us we won't see her tomorrow there is a change of shift for the new month. I hope this means only for the day, I trust her very much. She reminds me of our friend Anita who is an oncologist in Houston. Dr. Li spent time talking with Ba and Chien-te and helping them understand- I

could catch some of the ideas- terminal does not have to be the end – but think of it as a gate- like a terminal in a bus station or airport- a gateway to another journey and on and on and I am grateful that I can't understand it all and glad that Cassey wasn't listening because she would have tried editing the metaphors. It was nice of him to take the time and Ba was appreciative but had already come around. So there was no new information except that they would be stopping the antibiotics and would be focusing only on helping her pain.

I went back into the room with Ma and Cassey and she said so? They are going to stop the antibiotic, right? And I said yes, is that all right and she said yes, I never wanted them in the first place. I don't have an infection; it is my cancer. She is so solid sometimes I cannot bear it. I said is there anything else you want to know? Or talk about and she said no, and then looked at me and I knew she wanted some idea and I said it won't be long and you remember it will be in and out of sleep and then mostly sleep as you get less and less oxygen. And she said yes with a trace of fear but mostly the yes was bathed with relief.

And now Remi is rubbing her feet and the bed is away from the wall and centered in the room and Emma is hearing that Hugh is not married after all and she is sobbing both out of joy and release and the sisters here are smiling and the music is softly swelling and Cassey has seen this scene not more than three days ago but if I could I would play it for

her until she begged me to stop. And he says: My heart, Miss Elena, has always been and will always be yours...

Sent Tuesday, November 30, 2004 10:20 am
Subject Free online phone service so we can talk

Please go to the following website

<http://skype.com>

and download the free phone service called skype and if you have a microphone and speakers in your computer we can talk online for free. My user name is leegunder and I await the chance to chat. This is not BS and it is free and no pop ups etc. Let me know your skype names. Calls are secure and it is virus protected.

Lee

Sent Wed., December 1, 2004 0:19 am
Subject Please Fed Ex the Prada & Helmut Lang

This is a bad day. Now she is resting but she was very uncomfortable most of the morning. Head is hurting, vision is fluttering around the edges, and she has the continued shortness of breath. Spent most of the morning rubbing her feet. Glad she is sleeping again.

Dear Concetta has Fedexed from NYC the dresses she wanted to choose from for her service if the family decides to have a small one. She will look fabulous of course. So important to Madame to be chic for all time. She will only allow a non-traditional very brief moment of reflection for friends and family. With the Bee Gees and Bach.

I cannot bear watching her look at her lovely hands. She was so proud of their daintiness and dancer like grace, and now they are turning lifeless in color and are swelling slightly. She rubs them gently and I know they unsettle her. I hold them as much as possible and have used crème to rub them. And we talked about the stage, so that she could give her sadness some voice.

I think of only last night when she and I were finally watching the Incredibles and she was smiling, and when it was over, and despite the very dark poor quality of the bootleg, she said "there were some very unique and beautifully realized parts. Weren't there. When you could see it. Thank you, that was fun."

This morning very early about dawn she watched one more episode of Sex and the City- again I kid you not- Four Girls and a Funeral- I think it is called and it opens with a famous fashion designer's funeral and as I was about to ask if she wanted to skip ahead to the next episode- when she started to smile at all the jokes about how phony people are at funerals. Somehow I guess it wasn't so

upsetting and I thought about how a few days ago I picked a movie out for her from the video store with Keanu Reeves and Charlize Theron-I liked the title Sweet November- thought it was appropriate- and had no idea it was about a woman with cancer. The box was in Chinese, I just knew she liked to look at Keanu and it was Nov. I got back from the night market and asked her how it was and she sad not bad, a little sad, and I said oh, I'm sorry it was in the Comedy section, the store is all mixed up Elf is in drama, Castaway in comedy, and she told me what it was about and then said stop saying you're sorry. It wasn't that bad. And now Carrie and Co. are at a funeral and the brunette-Charlotte? starts picking up a widower at the funeral. And the girls are in a cab arguing about the right and wrong of that and I quietly got up to take a shower. She watched no problem.

But that was hours ago. No more TV today. Maybe tomorrow. But for now sleep. I am thankful for that.

Sent **Wed., December 1, 2004 7:48 am**
Subject **Cherries in the refrigerator**

The day took a somewhat sweeter turn by the evening. Cassey awoke about 5 and her head was not hurting as much and she asked for some dinner always a good sign. But it is clear she is very tired and fighter that she is this is hell on her. I am deeply in awe of her ability to endure. Jerry, one her oldest friends disobeyed and came by and she watched

some of his Sex and the City episodes with him. Oh to think last year they were doing this in our living room and laughing and giggling and planning their next hot pot run to Flushing together.

Jeremy sent the most touching email along with the Beatles song I Will from the White Album. I cried listening to it, such a simple and beautiful song. Another wonderful moment this afternoon when Cassey decided to amend her music for the ceremony. She has added some other wonderful songs and cut back on the Bach to just one selection. I love watching her plan this and I hope you don't think it weird. The designer in her is still going strong. I am sure she would whip up a killer invitation if it was appropriate.

I am attaching the photo that Concetta made of Cassey and Gregory Peck. I have put it as my wallpaper on the computer and it makes me smile every time I look at it.

The night is ending with Jerry and Ling-Long and my favorite night nurse who has acne scars and is a bit overweight and possibly the kindest and most generous person I have ever met, and I all assisting as we hold Cassey up and two of us massage her back and one her feet with the French massage oil that Katherine bought for her. Ba is sitting in the chair watching us and I think it gives him peace knowing that his daughter is being cradled and cared for by so many and with such love. He wrote this beautiful note last night on the hard-backed

pad that will come home with me and I will keep forever. He has the most beautiful handwriting it is like calligraphy and his little notes just laying around the house look like they should hang in a museum. And here was this work of art and he took such care writing it and after he left I asked Cassey what it said, expecting the most profound or deeply passionate expression of his feeling, and she said: There are cherries in the refrigerator. And I realized Chekhov could not have said it better.

Now Ba has Cassey's arms and Jerry and Ling-Long her back and they are rocking her slowly back and forth from sitting up to reaching forward to stretch out her arms and back from days of lying still. Back and forth, back and forth gently, take me in your arms and rock your baby...

Sent Wed., December 1, 2004 8:04 am
Subject Cassey and Greg a'scootering

Here it is.

Lee (See page 66)

Sent Wed., December 1, 2004 11:49 pm
Subject Rear Window

Wow, the sun came out to fight off the clouds and just in time. Cassey woke up and seems to be feeling pretty strong. She slept a little long this morning and I thought, please let her wake up, I know sleep is good for her, but I dread the stage

where she is not "awake" even though I know this will be so restful for her.

She is getting a steam and medical nebulizer now for her lungs. And it looks so much like when she would go for facials. She ate breakfast and looked at the picture emailed to her by the girls at work I updated her on everyone's thoughts and wishes and we got our first "digital" phone call. Way cool and I urge those of you that want her to hear your voices to try and take me up on the skype email. It is free and works and is amazing. We look forward to hearing from some of you soon. Borrow a microphone if you can.

I went outside to get some knee high stockings (no, I am still in the closet) the nurse needed them to tie up Cassey's tube to her leg. Apparently they work the best and are the most comfortable thing for this purpose. But outside I realized I hadn't gone out all day yesterday. I will try and at least sit in the garden today and Cassey even hinted she might try that as well. Oh how I would love that.

I walked past the halls here and thought of each family and each patient and how many folks in this one hospital and this one city in this one country are going through this. The magnitude of lives that reach this pinnacle all at the same point in time. Each with their needs and pains and relatives hovering helplessly. It humbles me. As I was making my rounds that I do for exercise I walk the halls at least twice a day, in one of the rooms a patient

stumbled and fell and everyone ran to the room to help. Nurses assistants and family members scurrying like when you disrupt the ants' nest and it bubbles over with activity. It seemed to settle down rather quickly so the stumble must not have been too damaging but there it was, the symbol of all that happens here, someone tumbling and we hope we are there to cushion the fall.

We have pushed Cassey's bed right up to the picture windows and she is looking outside at the garden. Don't think the air is very good out there she said, but I can see the sun and feel it from here. She is even eating a piece of corn on the cob-too salty she said- that ma has brought for us. But this image is worth five trips to Florence. He face in the sunlight and her munching away. At two she gets her massage and I think of our cruise and our going to get massages together in the spa there and how much she loved her masseuse in New York. And how picky she is about them. Hated her massages in Arizona and we have a masseuse in our building who makes house calls and she still traveled to the West village for her treatments. I remember our massages in Shanghai how cheap they were not even twenty dollars for almost two hours of bliss. I hope the volunteer here is ready for her, and that she her hands are blessed with the Madame seal of approval.

Ma is sitting now next to Cassey and they are looking out over the garden. And I realized it is almost 1:30 and I haven't showered. But first we are

going to bathe Cassey and then I can hop into my spa and wash some of my worry away.

Sent Thursday, December 2, 2004 4:08 am
Subject Movies for the blind

While Cassey was getting her massage I was sitting in the least frightening of the massage chairs in the hall "spa", not wanting any further damage done to my carbuncled back. And this camera crew and director began setting up shop to shoot the nurses station nearby, Tripods and lights all around me. I finally chose to move but it was odd to see this much maleness and equipment if you will in the middle of the lobby. The heard nurse whose English is the best, but that is not saying much, came over to me and apologized and I said no need, and she explained that one of their patients who is blind wants a movie. She is blind and dying and has requested record for treatment. Director works with Hospice foundation. I think, roughly translated, that means that she has underwritten a documentary to benefit the Hospice Foundation and the work being done here. Or else the blind here produce movies. I reassured the nurse how important their work was and what a good idea it is to make a record. And would graciously gave up my vibrating chair no apology necessary. And as I watched them set up, I looked around at all the young women fluttering about, these nurses seem to move like water birds across the marsh, not quite running, not quite flying but somewhere in between, their weight and the ground in unspoken

negotiation with each other. The nurses are in pastel orange smocks and white pants, stockings and shoes, the residents or candy stripers or whatever they are and I swear they look younger than high school some of them, are in a kind of lime green and white apron like skirt. They also wear nursing style hats perched perfectly atop their heads. And there are always, even at two in the morning, an impossible amount of them. But during the day there must be twenty to thirty at a time, filling out these endless reports and charts and darting hither and thither. And I think of their young lives surrounded by so much sorrow and pain and how diligently they work and does it ever make them just go home and weep and bathe for hours and hours. Or is it like working at the carwash after awhile. Or somewhere in between. And there they sit in little groups these women (and it is just women, no male nurses here, not one and the feminine nature, the female feel of this habitat is part of the wonder and rightness of it all) chattering and every once in a while a laugh or joke, and the reports never stop being filled out, and I wonder: the beauty of the lives of those they are vital signing is that even noticed, can it be? Do they ever ponder if the patient they are poking liked restaurants, or traveling. Or sex in the middle of the night. Were they just and honest or conniving and deceitful? These men and woman, boys and girls in these beds, can there ever be any profound understanding of the complexity of what is being ministered to? All is quiet in the fallen patient's room. But out here in the lobby there is much

activity always. And now even more as this movie is being made by these brutal men of this most delicate yet weightful work being done...

I went back in the room and while the Healing Island CD that Judy and Arthur made for Cassey and was introduced in the spa Bartow in the Catskills was playing on the computer Cassey was being rubbed and aromatherapied by the volunteer masseuse. She is very patient and thorough (again she volunteers to come here and rub the dying- why isn't there an award somewhere greater than the peace prize for folks like this and don't give me that there is in heaven crap, why not here, why not value this saint of a woman more than a hockey player or a president for that matter) and she has been working on Cassey for about an hour. I asked my sweet patient of a wife if it felt good and she said simply: I can't breathe. If I can only describe that regret- not enough to take the wind out of you, again as it were, but dropping down to my toes with a thud. Why couldn't even this gentleness transport her, give her respite? I adjust her oxygen level a bit higher and that seems to help. And the birds chirp on the island and waves wash ashore and she drifts asleep and the woman I will never be able thank enough completes her rubbing.

Outside the peaceful sound is being broken by the latest WWII era loudspeaker announcing another candidate and like the terrorist bombings in the movie Brazil this has been going on every few

minutes in the background for so long one forgets that it is even there unless real peace and quiet is hoped for. The election is this weekend so in anticipation of the apex of opportunity the recordings even have loud rounds of fireworks sometimes real, sometimes faux- and is there anything more canned than fake fireworks, before and after and awkwardly during some of the dumber candidates rants. Mercifully there have been fewer of these as she was being rubbed. None actually, a brief moratorium. I looked at the election ads this morning in the newspaper, which comes each day and I can't enjoy, and the politicians here all look the same and very much like Asian counterparts of the candidates back home. I long for the day when artistic or odd or unique people are valued enough to do public service and not homogenated plain toast talking heads. And they number their candidates here, I guess so everyone can tell them apart, so on every ad usually above their head is a 7 or 12 in a big circle. And I wonder if numbers are assigned first come first served, or if the corruption even permeates to the order on the ballot. If they vie for the lucky 7. And I think of what is happening in the Ukraine and does it matter in this room? What an odd game politics is, like some sort of super lotto with people's futures and our way of life in the balance. And they continue to take Cassey's vital signs and they are all sound, no fever, blood pressure steady, and yet she is dying. What is vital and when do the signs show it? And the nurse always yells out (this one should have been an

actress) the number, again like bingo, to let all of us know the result. 142 she says a bit too loudly for the room. It always is reduced to numbers and results...

As you can see I have way too much down time here and the hot water was shut off so I never got my shower. I will see if it is back on now.

Lee

Sent Thursday, December 2, 2004 10:14 am
Subject She likes Gene Kelly much more than Fred Astaire

Ended the day with the most wonderful moment. Cassey asked to sit up, so tired to be horizontal for so long. And after some tube adjustment, there she was, sitting up. And then she said why stop here and motioned for me to help her stand again. And as I held her, she tested her legs like young Bambi on the ice, and then feeling wobbly but a bit sturdier, she held me as we stood there, and though we weren't dancing, I swear it felt like it. I'm dizzy she said after a bit, and I said of course think of all the drugs you're on, and what I wanted to say is dizzy is not the word for it. Was a moment I never thought we'd never have again. and though it lasted maybe thirty seconds, it will do for a lifetime. Goodnight.

Sent Friday, December 3, 2004 0:44 am
Subject BYOB

Cassey did not wake for a long time again this morning and I try not to worry knowing that she will be up soon. But I can't help it. Each day there is my selfish worry that she will slip further and further into sleep, which I know is ultimately better for her. And then long after Ma and Ba arrived and were hovering, she finally opened her eyes while they were changing the water filter on her oxygen. Always knowing her body even in deep sleep she could sense the air was gone. As she stirred, I got her hot washcloth ready to wipe the sweat and sleep from her face and as I was doing it her first words of the day were: not too much, and then with the sound of someone about to fly to Paris- I am going to take a bath today.

The nurse had let the cat out of the bag last night, possible to appease the pain in her head, to give her a treat to look forward to, and it worked. The thought of actually being washed fully clean again was enough to cause first day of school giddiness and as I was leaving with Ba to go to my follow-up doctor's visit I said I'll be back long before and she shook her head as if to play down the event: please I know, it's only a bath.

Ba and I had already visited the doctor while she was sleeping and since we were number 16 and the deli sign was only on five (obviously a more carbunched day) we had come back. I'm glad. I was not liking the thought of her waking up without me there a bit, though I know she'd understand. I crave every moment I have with her, and

particularly the end and beginning of each day when we are alone. Now the deli number was on 24 so we would have to wait until they wanted to squeeze us in. And in the waiting area there was a chorus of volunteers wearing red Santa caps and singing Christmas carols in Taiwanese. You haven't lived until you hear Hark the Herald Angel's Sing in the native dialect. There was a man playing a portable keyboard like the sketch on Sat. Night Live with Will Farrell and another woman doing the Anna Gasteyer part by pointing to a large presentation sheet with the words of each carol and the notes on it with a pointer. As we waited they moved through their repertoire: Silent Night. Joy to the World, Oh Come Ye, and ended the set with Wish You a Merry Xmas. As we were called in, they were singing a native song and passing out literature to those in the waiting room that needed saving before the holidays. Once again in the doctors room we waited while she finished with someone else, a very, very old man who left with a big grin on his face. She then looked at me and said it looks much better, definitely an epidermal cyst and that I should have it removed. Simple outpatient surgery and it would be sutured and would take about 10 days to heal. But the surgery would have to be at the other hospital in Taipei city and it would cost about 2000NT– I gasped until I did the math- about sixty dollars. I asked if it was imperative and she said you can think about it but if it was me I would go ahead and do it. It may get infected again at some point. And I can't exercise or sweat for a week she recommended. So now I

have to decide if I do this here or wait and see a dermatologist when I get home. And Bryan will be so bummed we can't play basketball this weekend either.

Got back to Cassey and she was upset because they want to put a pick (or port) in her leg to stop having to change her failing IVs all the time. It is a very simple procedure but she hated having a pick in Arizona and has bad memories of them feeding the tube up her neck toward her brain instead of toward her heart. It was corrected but it was a stressful day and painful. She deflected to what I wanted to do about my surgery and I said let's talk about you first and she said what's to talk about they need to do it so they will do it. I knew this was upsetting and held her hand and said I'm sorry and she said so what are you going to do about your back and I said what should I do? And she said rather sharply bleeding her anger over to me and with a tone laced with can't you make up your mind without me: "it is your decision, and you know you, if you wait you'll do nothing about it" and that stung and I said, help me would you? There may not be many more times that I can ask you for advice like this. But the moment was shattered by the bathing excursion, as the nurses bolted in and said please get ready we need your towel and clothes and soaps. It was BYOB- bring your own bubbles.

Now the bathing room has a container that looks like a blue bathysphere or something out of Jules

Verne but is a sort of Jacuzzi above ground with a door that pops open. She was scrubbed and flushed with water and cleansed with her favorite soaps and if she could have breathed better she might have enjoyed it but as they wheeled her back and got her into the room, she said to me that she felt like she fainted. She hadn't but I understood how winded she must be- even though she was on O2 the entire time except for the 30 second trip to and from the room.

It is raining steadily now and I will wait and talk my surgery over with her when she is rested and we are with Remi. I know her too well, she will be worried about it and will want to make sure that it is taken care of. And she will bring it up again and give me her opinion and it will be probably the last time she can be the mother to me that I wish she would have let herself be to our child. And that will feel so bittersweet indeed.

Sent Friday, December 3, 2004 8:10 am
Subject Love means never having to play a little roundball

Cassey woke from the procedure of getting her pick and began to anesthetize herself with more Sex and the City. We are midway through season three now and I wonder if there will be enough episodes or will we have to get the girls together to shoot more. I fantasize that women and gay men the world over would thank Cassey because the series was revived to help her as she fought on. I

also have the series to thank for another of those heart leaping out of your body moments. It was the episode where Miranda's boyfriend Steve, who I like a lot and not just because we both play basketball, was going to have a half-court shot for a million dollars as one of the story lines, and they were fighting over the fact that she would not go to the court and help him practice, and then as he is all alone on the court, she comes walking up and roots him on. Now mind you I am grading a paper from Audition class but I do hear what is going on, but we are not watching together and Cassey calls out all of a sudden Lee! And she is crying and short of breath and I run to her and kneel by her side "What my dear, what is it, do you need the nurse?" And she says through tears and gulps of air, "I am sorry I never went to the court with you..." And I said stop. And she went on, "I could have played with you." And I said "you did once, don't you remember? Which is exactly the amount of times I went to the ballet with you, so we are even." And we sat with each other and if I could have gotten in bed without hurting her I would have. "I'm sorry I never went to more restaurants, learned to like more foods so we could share, learned Chinese. And there it was, the exchange of regrets that had been so unspoken and yes sometimes spoken, sometimes fought over and never changed, but we both realized now that it hardly mattered. And it mattered more than we could say. And oh, what we would give to have the chance to change it all if we could.

I beg you to find the things that you can share with your lovers, family, and friends that you know you could, and share them. Please. I thought of Ling-Long and Lee-yin and how he loves ballroom dancing and she hates it, but the other day I begged her to try it and she said she would. Now, I know that people are allowed their differences, and that is healthy in relationships, but a little sharing of interests is much more healthy, that every once in awhile overlap is a true sign of respect and affection. Okay, no more gratuitous self-help, I promise.

She was looking at me and feeling so sad, so I said I could not love you more, it is impossible, so please no more apologies-- and then it dawned on me I was living Love Story and the thought sickened me for its cliché ness, how could I not have realized it before. Another long silence as we looked at each other, and I realized we both were wanting to remember our features. She broke it to drink some water, so I said "we are going through our first Taiwanese typhoon together tomorrow." Ba had warned us and to stock up on groceries with another of his works of art memos. It was not supposed to be a dangerous one, but the stores would be closed all the same. "How fun," she quipped, "so romantic." "Do they name them, like we do with hurricanes?" "Of course." "Both English and Chinese names?" "Yes." "Wow, I wonder what ours is called." "What are you going to do about your back?" "I don't know what should I do?" "Just

go ahead. Have the surgery." I said "okay, makes sense. I will take care of it. Don't worry."

And then, even though it was seven thirty on a Friday, in swooped the doctor with two interns in tow. He began his feel good song and dance, the need to be positive and keep busy, and I thought does the music for your funeral fall into that category. As he began talking in more English than ever before he asked if I was a 7/11. And I tried to continue the banter, "oh do you mean am I here all night?" "You are 24 and 7," he laughed. This dear man trying to make such small talk while his patient's life was ebbing away. "So you are so lucky," he said to Cassey. And I swear Cassey shot him one of those- you have to be kidding looks. I am dying and you are calling me lucky. "Lucky to have husband, that can be open all night." "Yes," she said trying to play the game and looking at me with a didn't we just do this look. I held her hand. "You need a plan," he went on. "Have you planned what to do next?" "Like what?" I said, truly wondering what he meant- funeral? Afterlife? "You are not at an end here. You must make a plan of what you want to do next. Planning helps us to live. One patient here, she is redoing her photo-albums." "Well, she just planned the music for her ceremony," I said. "Good," he said before he could realize this was not quite what he meant or maybe it was. He looked at Cassey. "When we are at the bottom of the sea, we must remember that it has a wave and it comes up again." And he went into the wave speech he gave Ba earlier and

I could see that Cassey wanted to un-pause the Sex and the City, she was doing her best to let him show the interns his way of helping. But I couldn't stop myself. I told the doctor that Cassey appreciated his need to be positive but with the enormity of what she was facing it always felt slightened a bit by his desire to make it okay. "I understand," he said, and I was relieved he wasn't angry. "We Taiwanese, we hardly ever say what we want to say, we think thank you, but we never say it." And I said, "no we, she and I talk all the time, we just were talking about how much we care about each other, it is not the not talking." "I understand," he said, "then you are doing better than most, I can see that, and I am proud of you." And Cassey smiled. "I like this, when you smile." "We will find a way the three of us," I said "a way to talk about it together." And he nodded and realized that he had spent more time in the room than he planned. Checked his watch, and then as he was leaving: "I have gone over all of the medications, no need to worry about that." And with the interns following, he was gone.

Cassey un-paused the DVD and I said "does he drive you crazy?" "And she gave me that look that said doesn't he drive you crazy? "Did I say too much?" No, she shook her head and settled into Samantha complaining about a man's sour spunk. Like I said you can't make this stuff up. And I still don't know the name of our Typhoon.

Sent Friday, December 3, 2004 9:37 pm
Subject Let me think about it

Last night ended with so many tender moments I feel I must relay. First Ling-Long showed and began the most loving and long massage of Cassey after, in true Ling-Long fashion she organized the already organized by Ma room. She brought with her the dresses from New York, and I thought of all Concetta did to make sure this precious cargo got here safely and in a timely manner. She also brought with her every Incredibles toy that McDonalds is selling with their happy meals because Remi got them for me. They are now atop the TV and make both of us smile, especially Jack-Jack.

Before she arrived someone on Sex and the City asked Charlotte to marry him and I turned to Cassey and asked her to marry me and she said let me think about it...and we laughed and it reminded me of when we actually went through that. I think I asked her to marry me over the phone long distance, it doesn't get any more traditional than that, does it. We were talking about how much we missed each other, just too early relationship long distance lovers, her 17th student visa had expired, and there could be no more, having exhausted the amount of time you could be a student, and she was back in Taipei. We had dated about six months and knew each other for two years but the relationship was not exactly in

the advance and solidified, should we even entertain the thought of living together let alone get married, stage. And I had never believed in marriage for me. The under God thing wasn't necessary for agnostic reasons, and I felt the whole thing was an archaic ceremony that reeked of costume party neediness to be queen and king for the day, like performing for non-performers. I had always believed if you commit to someone, you are married and you don't need the public aspect to make it valid. And we had both just come out of long relationships, mine particularly ended poorly with a business and relationship stupidly interwoven. And there we were pining away on the phone and I think I said "well, I could marry you and then you could stay as long as you like." And there was a long pause. And I remember thinking that is as valid a reason as I will ever need to do it, she needs it legally and I can give it to her. And I did care about her but lord knows if it was even close to enough, who ever knows. What we both knew was how risky and stupid it was and how risky and stupid we were and by the end of the very long phone call, one of those two early in the relationship to care about damn phone bills calls, we had agreed to think about it. She suggested-no demanded- that there would be a contract- a kind of greencard prenupt- that stated that if (and when) we needed a divorce, she would pay for all of it and any other costs related. She would only agree to this if she knew it wouldn't cost me anything if it was a big error. And within a few days she was on a plane armed with only a tourist visa

for the last time. Young and pretty, New York City girl.

We got married on New Year's Eve at city hall with a few friends and many other strangers and I had left work that day and went back to work because I had no more days off. I was on a long lunch break. I always tell folks that when you get married at city hall they take your license and right after you both say I do, they stamp it in this machine that seals the license as valid. I do, I do- kerplunk, and you are on the clock, as it were, forever. No Mendelssohn needed.

We did go back to Taiwan and have a small family wedding banquet soon after, that is a whole 'nother story trust me, the Chinese wedding banquet- see the movie by Ang Lee for starters if you haven't. And a year later we took our first trip to Europe as our honeymoon.

And last night I was asking her if she remembered what she was feeling then: how stupid can I be, but I do really like him, maybe I love him, or well, I will finally get what I have always dreamed of- not the wedding, but a green card. Or all three. She said she couldn't remember, but I think she was just being nice. She did remember talking with Pei Yin her good friend and told her how she insisted on a contract and he agreed to that, and Pei Yin said that was just a formality, he wouldn't have said yes if he didn't want to. And I reminded her that the contract had never been signed or drafted for that

matter. It didn't exist and then I kissed the top of her bald head and said sneaky little bitch aren't you.

I thought of her mother and father and how shocked I was when she told me that they had been an arranged marriage. Very traditional especially in small villages in Taiwan at that time. But it stunned me. I had always thought of that as ancient, biblical or at least old west, dime store bride like. I remember asking Ma and Ba about it carefully once years into my relationship with them. Through Cassey, which always made it awkward, I asked when they knew that it was going to work, when they knew it had turned to love, and I don't remember the answer, or if it was ever answered, maybe Cassey said you just don't ask that. But there they were, five children and fifty something years clocked in, and both loving to hike in the mountains, so something must have clicked. And then I thought of how Cassey and I really were no different. We had our arrangement and so why was I so shocked at Ba and Ma. And I thought of my mother who once consoled me about a wounded love and I must have asked her when do you know when it is right: "it's like the scene in Radio Days, Lee, the Woody Allen movie. Have you seen that? Love is not always the sparks and fire kind of love, sometimes it's the kind that grows on you. And I remember thinking "like moss or mold? And was that the kind of love you had Mom?" And I was sad for her then. But not any more. I realize now that the mossy, moldy love is pretty damn fine

indeed. And maybe when it comes right down to it, as they said so eloquently on episode five, ten, and fourteen of *Sex and the City*, the only kind that really knows how to not die off. And then I thought all marriage is a kind of arrangement of sorts, but I guess it helps to choose the plaintiff.

And when Cassey had fallen asleep and Ling-Long had re-made the sofa turned into bed for another night that I had already made, and asked if I needed anything and reluctantly left (and not because it was already pouring rain), I turned on the one lamp to low that Cassey likes so when she wakes up to take a sip of water she isn't in the dark. She always slept with night-lights, another thing about her, and she gets it from home, they do there as well. We never did, it was learn your way around or stub a toe every now or then. And I got up to Google the name of our typhoon and it is Nanmadol, which means "better or more romantic if left unknown or unnamed" I think, and we went to bed.

And now it is almost ten in the morning and raining but not so hard. Heck Nanmadol must mean all bark but no bite, and not even that windy, a flesh wound, as they say in Monty Python Holy Grail speak. But Cassey is still asleep and I have managed to fight off my worry about her waking for these last few hours by writing this. And I calm myself with their silly cockney voice: A flesh wound...I've had worse. Much worse...

Sent
Subject

Saturday, December 4, 2004 1:00 am
silence like a cancer grows...

Begin today with Ma if I may. She is here every morning now long before Cassey rises, hoping as I do, to be there for the awakening. She and I usually sit in silence, but lately she has taken to try and talk to me in Taiwanese and I say uh huh, uh huh as if I understand and every few words I do. But she grows weary of this after a bit as sometimes I am typing and sometimes staring too hard at her, so she is outside now chatting with her new Hospice hall friend who has one of those pinched faces that seem to hurt if they would ever smile and who always wears the same red and black speckled knit top, or so it seems, everyday. It took a few days of passing each other in the kitchen and the corridors, and then the first Nee-hou and now they are fast and furious. I saw them and the lady who mops the kitchen beginning their courtship the other day and Ma pointed to her chest in response to what must have been what does your daughter have, and the thin severe woman who has some relative with just as awful a malady and the washer woman both shook their heads as if to say, oh that is bad. Very bad. And they have been in conversation, when Ba has left and Cassey has been resting, ever since. And she chats with the other mothers and wives in the kitchen as they stir, chop, and wash up.

I have even seen Ma peek in someone else's pot to see what they are preparing, if it is something

she concurs with. Like Julia Child, use to do, rest her soul. It must be agony not to be in her kitchen more, her concert hall, cooking for her daughter who used to gripe but eat whatever she made. Now it is catch as catch can, sometimes she will eat a nibble but so much is thrown away. And I think of how even when Cassey got a little plump, as plump as Cassey ever did which was like most of us with water weight, she would worry about whether she was eating or not, eating was life, not money, but food. And how it must grieve her to see her daughter so thin now. And still unable to eat. She asks all the time, too much. Hovers about and now it is reduced to drink the mushroom water, not just the plain water, or to clean the water cups more often, and use the boiled water, and maybe some fruits, or some tofu, alright then cake again, how about cake?

But this morning she was outside and Cassey and I sat in a long silence as she gathered her strength, and I thought of Deb just last night saying how much she loved silence, wanting to teach a class in it, it's profoundness, and how Gwendolyn already had, and how silences used to terrify me, and there we were, her Simon to my Garfunkel, smack in the middle of the sound of one. And the first thing she said for the day after a very long time was "Lee, I need you." And she motioned that it was to raise her up in the bed, and then as her voice found even more of itself, "am I at 4 or 4 and a half?" (Her oxygen level) "Make it 4, okay?" And the luxury of those words and that voice and since

it was a 4, not a 4 and a half kind of day, I adjusted both her and her air, and went out and stole Ma from her taught friend to feed Cassey. How could I let her miss this chance? Like letting a gambler miss the Derby.

Oh, the best laid plans... After a brief moment of joy at seeing her daughter's eyes open, she slowly worked her way into the room, testing it with her voice before her feet. How about this? No. This? No? I have this? And Cassey said louder than I knew her voice could still work, "enough Ma, enough!" And there I was saying it's okay, she's just being Ma and not a minute earlier I wanted to say the same thing when Ma suggested I didn't use hot enough water

to rinse Cassey's spit and rinse cup after she brushed her teeth. But now I am deflecting for her, running defense like those sports where you have to swap and play on both sides, no time for special teams. And she pulls out her secret weapon, something Cassey tells me later because of the consistency is called chicken tofu, and she knows it is Cassey's favorite, and the game is over, Cassey eats. Ma has won this match. Just yesterday we had battled over the screen door like the Katzenjammer Kids or Moe and Curly. She would open it, Cassey would get cold, and I would shut it. She would wait until I wasn't looking and open it, her daughter needed the fresh air to get well. And I would see Cassey pull up the covers and shut it. Open, shut. Why I oughta...Open shut, all

afternoon long, nyuck,nyuck,nyuck...we did the screen door dance.

But now she was feeding her daughter and there was an unspoken roomful of mothering as Cassey ate. And Ma who usually has a sort of muttering dialogue with herself sometimes for minutes on end, is not making a sound. Her Ling-Ling is eating and the hospice hall conversation, and her self debate- all sound in the world needs to have stopped. I go to the window and notice the screen is opened the tiniest bit and outside the typhoon wind and the rain have even obeyed. Mother nature concurred, she understood as well.

Sent Saturday, December 4, 2004 8:07 am
Subject Second husband, once removed

And here I thought there might not be any need to write tonight. The day settled into a routine. Cassey resting, Ling-Long rubbing, the rain and wind ending. Remi's office got flooded or she would be here, but she was probably drying off some very expensive editing equipment. Katherine sent me information about the name of the typhoon trying to take at least that unknown away from my list of whys. Here is what she said:

It is called Nanmadol, not a Chinese name, because it is named by the people of the Federal State of Micronesia at the rim of the Pacific Ocean. That's the way typhoons are named--each country on the rim takes turns and names them. Nanmadol

probably means something like "the ruins" in Micronesian.

And that and the changing of the pinched face friend of Ma's top to another red one, and Cassey standing for a brief moment again and then getting dizzy and sleeping the rest of the afternoon, a little more uncomfortably because for an hour the air conditioning went out, was about all the news from the green chair world.

And then Ba came hurriedly into the room and asked to speak to Ling-Long and I. Out in the hall in the ugly brown dual reclining and eating chairs that can be wheeled into the room of those less sick than Cassey that want to sit up and get out of bed but for now are stranded doing hall duty and Ma and the red shirt woman chat in them, sitting in those were he and I with Ling-Long hovering and translating as he told me that he visited the Temple and a fortuneteller asked him what was wrong, to write down just one word- now mind you, Ling-Long had not translated a word of this to me yet and I already knew by the way Ba was speaking and gesturing that we were in Kreskin or Diane Warwick or David Blaine territory- and the weirdness of knowing without needing to fully understand was that psychic? No, it was just too many clichéd movies and tales from the other side books, and you are getting this from a man who read all of the Seth books and Shirley McLaine's and still tries to honestly believe there is much more than this reality, but all I could think of was: here we go

again. Again!!!! And then as Ling-Long relayed: Ba had written one character- Cassey's Ling. The man then (and this was the gesture that gave Ba away) wrote immediately lung. Ba hitting his hand as if the word was written there- I only wrote Ling- he knew lung. I didn't say this but I did wonder if the character for Ling was one letter- no part of the symbol- away from lung like it is in English. You know if you angle the side of the character up it is Ling down it is lung. But I am sure in Mandarin it is not the same. Anyway, he knew lung, that it was her lung. And then Ba frantically gesturing- he said that it was a God, her husband- not you -Ling-Long reassured me, though I knew I was no deity, lesser or greater, her husband-God wanted her back and was taking her. Now I must confess, I did like this explanation- it justified the royalty I always felt Madame carried with her, and she was special enough to be a goddess to me, or wife of a God if this was a sexist plane of existence, and God's could order their wives back home whenever they deemed fit but did not grant them goddess powers, and I liked knowing that her death might in some way be a coming home to a hopefully not jerky and very lonely benevolent, though he wasn't being very kind these days, husband. Didn't feel jealous about that, strange...

But then Ba said the fortune teller did something that both he and Ling-Long could only describe to me as moving their hands like a child does when he wants to mess up the playing cards and can't shuffle, wiping both hands violently in front of him.

And after doing this swirling movement, he said to Ba, I have made the God reconsider, and go away. She must eat nothing only drink juice for three days and she will come out of it. She will get better. I tried not to scream. Three to five days, Ba added. I almost did scream. "Oh, now it is 3 to 5 days, that's a big difference. Hell, she could be dead after 3 we might never get to five. And no food only juice, have you tried that when you are well? Pretty damn tough to fast when well, try it when you are emaciated. And what about the IV of vitamins, does that count?" I didn't say any of this, just raged inside. I did ask about the IV and Ba said "no, no that is fine just the food." Not a very discerning Husband I thought. He then told Ling-Long one last detail. It had to be about 1000 ccs of juice in three hours twice a day. This fortuneteller would put Jack Lalane to shame and there is no way that Cassey could drink that probably even well. Ling-Long even realized this and told Ba and Ba said maybe we could use a feeding tube and that is when I politely got up and left but not before saying to Ling-Long that it not be my place to say anything more and I do not want Ba to be upset with me, and I hope he is right, but if Cassey cannot and does not want to do this, Ba must not insist. And then I went in to sit with her. And to wait for scene two of the Crucible.

Okay, let me just say that it wasn't a very thrilling second scene, really rather dull. Now maybe that was because after Ba left to go get the juice without talking to Cassey first and Remi showed up,

I deflated any real dramatic possibilities by saying to Cassey that Ba would come back and ask you to try something. Don't be angry with him just listen and then make up your own mind. It is no big deal I just didn't- and she said "what? Again?"- and I said "Exactly, I just didn't want you to say: again!! And get all frustrated." She asked "what is it?" and I said "it would feel like lying to him for me to say more, but "what it is" is not the upsetting thing, that it "is", that he is asking again is the difficulty and that you already know and can settle with. And Ba came back with the juice and spoke animatedly and Remi did a much better job of translating the final questions- the juice was the temple man's idea for Cassey to get strength not the God husband's demand. And the God husband has been driven away by a more powerful God that has heard the fortuneteller and Ba's concern and intervened. Doesn't say much for the Husband God's standing in this other realm I thought. I sure hope my wife didn't marry a dud. And I asked Cassey if she was okay with all of this and she said fine, the juice tasted good and she was tired of trying to eat anyway. And I thought, maybe it is a gift from some God or another...to ease her final meals, and she said "and now Ma won't be upset when I don't eat. I only hope I can drink enough. How about 300 cc's an hour"- and there she was negotiating with her fate again.

And I said "does it give you any hope, or strength" and she just half smirked and did that little roll of her eyes, which says "I hope so, but it's doubtful,

though it never hurts to hedge your bets." And sipped away at her juice. And that is the sadly undramatic end of the evening.

We put on another cinematic gift from Remi- the number one movie in Japan about how the first seeing-eye dog there was comedically discovered- a sort of feel good Old Yeller meets Benji. But it was subtitled in Chinese only, thank whatever God's apply-this is a Christian hospice and they were singing carols at today's Sat. afternoon buffet so forgive the confusion, so the family watched and I got some work done. And Ling-Long returned with a rolling cart to better store some of Cassey's things and to put her water on so she could reach it easier. And then started to straighten my things and added a stationary holder for the pens. But mid movie and make-over all were banished as Cassey said, enough I'm tired. And it is back to her and I and the Japanese Old Yeller. And I promise you my friends, if my wife gets well, I have made my peace that I will have to light incense at this temple and to this God for allowing me to share her for the rest of our lives and then he may have her back again. A sort of eternal swingers arrangement. And that would be just dandy with me.

WEEK FIVE - DECEMBER 5-11

Sent Sunday, December 5, 2004 0:58 am
Subject Deliverance

One thing more about Cassey's and my wedding, the sadly earthly plane civil ceremony. She reminded me the other day that she told no one in her family about it until afterwards, and I had forgotten the ballsiness and huge ceremonial and filial slight that constituted and was again in a state of shock. "How could you have done that?", I thought. And the fact they are even speaking to us at all let alone frying me an egg. And then it dawned on me hours later, when my mother reminded me of it- I did not even remember (Freud would have a field day)- that I had done exactly the same thing. And they too will still make breakfast for me. Families are strange, resilient, tough prehistoric creatures, like crocodiles. They find ways to survive. And I am deeply proud to be a part of both of my families, and I am so sorry that our silly spontaneity was hurtful to both, as I am sure it was. And while I am listing regrets, add that our parents never met, though glad it didn't happen at the time. What a challenge it would have been to translate as they threw plates at each other. And Cassey never knew my father, who died many years before I knew her. Pieces that remain forever missing. And I think of all the future students, friends, new relatives, that will only know of my wife with an

"oh, I am terribly sorry" for a first impression. I will make them all some eggs.

Ba starts the day this morning instead of Ma. Tzow, he says, good morning, with his new born-again zeal. Probably him because he makes the juice, and she feels so left out with no food to minister. He sees she is still sleeping, but as he opens the refrigerator, he lets out a squeal of regret seeing the 3/4 of a bottle of juice still remaining. Now, mind you, I thought Cassey did great to finish one whole bottle and a little of the second last night from 7oclock on. But I knew it was going to be trouble, so at 6 this morning when she was restless, I asked if she wanted a bit of juice. "Was she thirsty?" She whispered, "no, too early." And now this look from Ba like I am killing his daughter by failing to force feed her if need be. He motions like just pour it down her, and I get up and walk to the door and stretch myself against it so that I will not walk out in my underwear or turn and scream at him. Just let the anger transfer into the door. He then tells me as if I don't know, that she must drink the two bottles he has brought, and moves to throw out the old one, and I take it and put it back as if to say she will drink all three. Just give her time. And that is our exchange, and he leaves. And I sit here in the green chair and wonder if I should just drink the damn juices myself the next time or pour them in the sink like some child trying to hide the Brussels sprouts under the table at dinner. What a fucked up wave of emotions to body surf at 8am on a Sunday morning...

And then I remember Remi's late night call last night to tell me that today will be Ma's birthday and not to tell Cassey because it will only upset her. "But she will know" I said- of course she will know. Cassey always remembers dates. I'm the one who forgets. "No it is a lunar calendar date (and I think of how long it took me to learn Cassey's birthday, years, because the Chinese have a true lunar calendar day that changes and our Western fixed calendar date that remains constant) and she will have forgotten that." And I thought, "Then why tell me? I have no secrets from her, promised her no secrets, to tell her everything"- and said: "why not tell her and let me get something for us to honor her." "No, Ma will be too upset and cry." "But won't she be upset if she thinks we did nothing?" "Lee, it is best this way." And then she went on to ask me not to speak of Cassey's ceremony anymore that it is upsetting her, and I thought of all the things that must be being said in Mandarin that I am not knowing. And how I wish I had a language of my own to escape into. And why did Cassey not say this to me? And she is still sleeping, and I have a red dot on my chest that is probably a mole, but it was just a small pinprick and now it looks like a dot from a brownish red flair pen that has bled a bit into the paper. I will have whomever de-carbuncles me look at that too. So I will have to find something else to transfer my worry to. And outside a ceremonial band of some sort is playing either because it is Sunday or a holiday or Ma's birthday, or the election and there are fireworks

and it is only almost 10 on a Sunday and there is a great deal of noise. Like the TV programs, everything feels too noisy here, a confrontationally loud place sometimes and coming from a New Yorker that is saying a lot. And the fireworks are very loud and fast now and then just like that, they are gone. And the band or pre-recorded festival is moving away. And it is calm again until the next garbage truck arrives.

I didn't say amidst everything else, that Ling-Long said the Chinese doctor is coming again this morning. Everyone has their curatives, clinging to them like a current that is too strong to let go of, and I am just rafting through with dear Cassey hoping we don't overturn or get too swept away. I asked her if this is okay, seeing him again, and she said fine, and I wonder how much more of this can she endure. This not being able to find her way of letting go without fear of disappointing. And then Ba reappears and says Ling-Long is here, and I wonder if he has been waiting in the lobby all this time. He must have been, sick with worry that she wasn't sipping juice yet, and he snaps on the overhead light because she has just opened her eyes and there will be no moment of silence this morning to collect ourselves. And I know as she reaches for water and clears the sleep from her throat, it is only a moment before he asks her why she didn't try even harder.

I have showered to remove myself from the frustration of not being able to understand as the

Chinese doctor explains and examines. Ling-Long is not making an effort to try and translate, and Remi is not here, and of course Cassey cannot. And the family crowds around him and listens to his every word, and Cassey sits and stoically holds her eyes shut, and Ling-Long is writing something down. Probably herbs or notes or a combination of both, and he is still here even after my shower. And would it be rude to just clear the room? Like Jesus in the Temple, could we just evict all the charlatans? And even as I type that, he gets up to leave, and Ling-Long says "come on, let's go the clinic" and I say "wait, I would like to know what just happened, please." And Cassey tries to tell me that he will add a simple herb to her mushroom water for her head, that is all.

But as I am driving to the clinic with Ba and Ling-Long, she says that the Chinese doctor has also said that Cassey cannot just drink juice. She needs to eat something. And she promises to tell Ba this and I think "here we go again." Like the dueling banjos scene in Deliverance, just juice, more food, just juice, more food-da de de da de da de da. Da de de dad de da do.

Now why the clinic? Ling-Long says she knows a good place- she has take Asia there and the doctor will be able to do the surgery faster and easier. And we get there, and he examines me, and lances the area, and drains more out, after the other doctor said there was no more infection. And he then says no need for surgery, the cyst will

maybe get infected every so often but only if it does all the time, should I have it removed. And I tell him what the other doctor says and he still says no need, he sees this all the time. And I realize I have dueling doctors of my own. He says to only do the surgery if I have to, and the stress I am under and the different bacteria here in Taiwan are factors, and he prescribes different antibiotics and a IV shot of a kind of penicillin to jump start the healing of the infection. And they bring out a needle like the clowns use in the circus that fill up with fake blood, huge, and the next patient, a little boy is already in with the doctor and he is screaming in fear, and I am glad he is doing the screaming for me. Loudly.

We are back now and Cassey is resting, she is dizzy and nauseous every time she moves because her head hurts. I rub her feet until she rests. The family, Asia and the nephews, and the sisters and Ma and Ba are eating lunch in the lobby. We stopped off and brought it from home on the way back. Ma had been busy this morning preparing it, even though it was her day. It is Sunday after all and the family had promised to gather. And they are all eating and trying to mark the day. It is Ma's birthday, and it kills me not to tell Cassey. Da de da, de da de da dee...Asia has come in to take a nap on my sofa/bed/plinth. And niece and auntie are resting. And I am taking my pills and have vowed to rest my immune system too.

Ling-Long has removed the Chi-gong prayer that is laminated like a credit card and that she has taped to the top of Cassey's bed and is sitting at her feet, silently reciting it. And over her head rests the simple dark brown wooden cross about sixteen inches in length that is on the wall of every room here.

Do not get angry with me my Hebrew family and friends, and do not get your hopes up my Christian family and friends, but I look at that cross every now and then, and after I got over my anger of it being there, every now and then it gives me a moment of peace. Not for what it stands for literally, because when I think of the suffering of a prophet ala Passion of Mel Gibson I find no solace at all, it repulses me. Like looking at a torture device. And there is no miniature Jesus hanging from it. No it is the simplicity of the symbol, the artistic beauty of it, that feels very right. I don't like the red-cross symbol, the fat puffy cross, but the long vertical and short horizontal one, appeals to me. Like a god graphic design. And not when I see it in gold hanging from someone's neck, but here in wood on the wall, I really have no other idea why. And truth be told, I actually prefer it to the Star of David which has always looked a bit busy to me sort of like the Olympic flag or one of those math trick-quiz problems- how many sides does it take, etc. I am proud of what the Star stands for, but the symbol is not soothing to me. More emblematic. And this brings up so many thoughts of Christian envy I had growing up, that obviously

many American Jews have or Adam Sandler and Jerry Sienfeld would not have careers. But, come on, seven days of presents should rock, but it always seems to pale to the big birthday. And dredels and potato pancakes versus stockings and mashed potatoes? Not even close. And dredel isn't even in spell check... And I could go on and on, including my deep seeded fear of yarmulkes and how goofy they make even hunky Jews look.

I will stop now because I have probably lost all relatives on all three sides of the promised land now, and enough of the dueling realities that abound. Remi is here and has offered to take me out and I am going to break my rule since Cassey is fast asleep and go for a ride that is not to a clinic. I need to get out of the backwoods.

Sent Sunday, December 5, 2004 8:15 am
Subject Separation Issues

So many people, so many orchids, so much jade. Surreal to go right from our hospice hermitage to one of the most bustling markets in Taipei- the jade market, but Remi's boyfriend Sean needed some powdered incense and this is one of the best places to buy it and I am hoping to buy Ma something for her birthday. And the oddest thing is this is reality, full of health and wealth and it feels so unreal. The market is under a long stretch of expressway and is only open on the weekend. It stretches for a length equivalent to 20 New York blocks and half of it is cut flowers, plants, and

orchids, the other half is jade, jewelry, and curios. It is always crowded and honestly you have never seen so many orchids. And they average about 3 dollars a plant. What a lily costs in the states. Taiwan is the leading exporter of orchids, Remi tells me, and it is easy to see why. And there are plants and flowers, and fountains and pots; my sister would be in heaven. And she wouldn't be too upset in the jade area either. How can the stuff be considered rare and valuable with so much of it on hand?

Of course I can't enjoy myself. Everything reminds me of shopping for Cassey and with her, and I worry that she needs me back at (I was going to say home- pathetic). Remi asked me what was wrong and I tried to explain my worry that I may only have so many afternoons with Cassey and I have the rest of my life to market, but I also know that if I refuel by letting go some, I can be even more present for her. I get it, I really do, but that would be too rational. These are not rational times. I call Ling-Long three times in an hour and a half. And it kills me to know that Cassey has woken up and I am not there. (I find out later that she is fine she is watching Toy Story with Asia who woke up too.) But here I am and I will just make the best of it. I cannot ask them my family to leave. All I see is a ring there she would love and I can't bring her flowers because of the oxygen. Remi says not to buy Mom anything it will make her cry. And this jewelry is not her taste. Trust her. On the way home, we stop at McDonalds for French fries at my

request- you can tell I was not at my best, and when we got home, (there I go again) all was okay. But I did wonder what I missed, three years from now, would I sit and weep for this afternoon that I had and gave up.

And tonight I asked Cassey if I could tell her something that I knew and was told not to say, but it was killing me to have a secret from her, and that it had nothing to do with her health, directly, and she said please, you can always tell me anything. And I told her that this had been her mother's birthday and she shook her head softly, sat a bit, took a sip of water, and then clicked on another episode of Sex and the City and we watched together - again believe it or not- an episode called Hot Child in the City about a someone who lived with their mother and had separation issues.

Sent **Monday, December 6, 2004 0:12 am**
Subject **Too much sun will make you fall**

Cassey is in this weird holding pattern right now. Before you could see the subtle and not so subtle signs of symptoms worsening each day, but the last two or three, have been petty much the same. I worry that for her though there is a new quiver of this pain, it gets a little harder to do this thing, sit up or swallow, or breathe. But these are invisible only to her signs. Outwardly though, a sad routine is setting in. I am not complaining mind you; it just is like the part of the book where you are wondering what is coming next.

I wish I could say I thought this is when the story takes an upswing and the world rights itself. A little gratuitous market researched Disneyesque happy ending would be just fine with me. No need for those lousy didactic old-school myths of flight and daring and tragic ends of getting too close to the sun. Today, even will take the studio re-cut where the wax-wings hold up. And I think of the woman in the self-help cancer video, that a dear woman in Phoenix lent us. The woman in the video cured herself from a near fatal, and I am talking about lying inches from death case of breast cancer, with graphic before pictures of a elephant-woman tumor the size of a small carry-on suitcase, and here she is now on VHS for a small fee- cancer free and with too big hair and too much eye shadow and a too shrill of high pitched voice speaking from her patio in California or some such sunny place about how through natural juicing, raw foods and Christ, she cured her cancer and you can to. And watching that then and certainly now, I was humbled by what a fine line it is between snake oil and actual miracle- how would any boy ever know how high to fly? And I remember Cassey had taken great strength from the early parts of this video, the how to change your health part, didn't even mind the preaching sections, had a "well if it worked for her attitude" about it, but the sections about don't ever do chemo or radiation, that could most certainly kill you, and how she would not even take an antibiotic she distrusts western medicine so much now-Oh, and I forgot to tell you that this

woman was a MD, used to head of a prestigious children's clinic in San Francisco before she got sick- those sections were devastating to Cassey. I spent a whole day excavating her from a deep depression and sobs of regret, she had fallen very far, like that little girl that tumbled into that well and was trapped. "Did I kill myself with the radiation? Do you think I did?" This was days after completing her full brain radiotherapy (a paradox if I ever saw one) and she was suffocating from what they call- but never tell you about because they worry you won't go though it- radiation hangover. And who knows (and I tried to console her with this at the time but knew it wasn't a very big bandage) maybe if you hadn't taken the treatment, you would be in so much pain now or possibly dead. But that is little solace when you can't stand your blood hurts too much. But the video lady was sitting in her patio set and bringing her mother out who was also juicing and raw fooding now as well and looked fifty instead of seventy and cured her arthritis and the video woman had come back from the brink of death and that was fifteen years ago and she was still cancer free!!!

And the doctor here said he has seen it done before, 60% up to her, and Ling-Long said the Chinese doctor told her of a woman worse than Cassey that is now five years out, and the fortune teller said three to five days and she would be better, and I look at her lying there still sleeping and wondering if she could, oh if only she could. We could have this kick ass party and play her music

she selected and laugh knowing what it was meant for and all the nice things of hers we already gave away, she could insist, as her friends tried to give them back, that they keep them knowing that life is so much more than things and we could go shopping to replace them all and spend money like there was a tomorrow, and the girls at the Guggenheim could dust off her work area that they so beautifully have refused to change, they too believing just a bit, that she might be back, and she would be! And we could make a video of our own with much better hair and a New York set overlooking the park about how there is a way and we found it.

And the nurses have woken her up this morning to give her the morphine and Ma and Ba are here and wondering why I am still in bed and the bustling shatters my last to re-hop on the bandwagon of hopefulness.

As Ba leaves with the laundry and to go make more juice, Ma sits with Cassey and notices the leftover bites of bakery pastry that Remi snuck in last night as Cassey, trying to walk the fine line of both the doctor and her fortuneteller's wishes, sent for. As she ate it, heated a bit in the microwave, she had such a look of girlish glee, how could it not be a major sin and a minor victory rolled (as it were) in one. But now discovered bed-side, there is a white lie washed and I am sure it was that I or Remi left it there, and it is neatly Ma'ed into a plastic bag and placed in the refrigerator and

Cassey asks to be pushed over to the sunny window but declines to go outside. We have parallel parked the bed in different angles by the window to give her sun on each part of her body- slight turn and angle here, back up, slight angle there- like a Buick parking where a Mini should. Each place parked a bit at a time. But she is sitting in the window and she did smile last night with her late night hand in the cookie jar treat, and maybe we are not ready to shoot a patio video, but we are not back down in the well either.

And then Cassey says very simply to her mother hovering nearby: Sheun Rlurh, Qui Lah, Happy Birthday, and betrays me, but bathes her mother in an exquisitely understated wish both in the same moment. Then as Ma closes her eyes for the briefest blink, and I think sits, to let it wash over her and smiles, it dawns on me that she thinks that Cassey remembered but got the day wrong. Perfectly played out. She says to Cassey, "thank you, but it was actually yesterday, but thank you. Today is Lee-yin's birthday though." (Ling-Long's husband, who two years ago fought with her and they separated for awhile but love of daughter Asia brought them back slowly together, and to his credit all throughout never stopped being a great father). Cassey tells me and I call Remi and ask if she can pick up a copy of Strictly Ballroom with Chinese subtitles for him as a present. And I remind myself to ask Sylvia to bring it back from her contraband DVD for a dollar Shanghai video speakeasy, that we

visited and I was like a kid in a candy store, if we can't get it here. And to ask Ling-Long if she has tangoed with her husband who loves ballroom-in my never ending quest to have folks mesh their desires and dreams. And as I type I ask Cassey how to say Happy Birthday in Chinese again, one of the countless phrases I have learned as most students for the midterm, forgotten by the final. And Cassey scolds me for my ten phrases of Mandarin in ten years and I realize how guilty I am for not dancing with her- yet again. I will have Brian sit and teach me a bit each day that he is able. That would be fun for both of us.

And then she says: "there is blood in my urine, look," and we are not down the well, but slipping near the edge. The nurse and doctor examine and will take a urine test to make sure it is not an infection just an irritation from the catheter. And then she asked to pull a bit back from the window, it is too hot now, and sits holding her head. She is sensitive to slight changes in temperature- and how agonizing that was in Phoenix leaving the air conditioning and going out to 100-degree heat. She had even tried to tough it out to tour Taliesin West, Frank Lloyd Wright's stunning desert school literally in the middle of the mesa, but the heat and headaches got the best of Madame, so this celebrity VIP visitor from the Guggenheim (Lloyd Wright East) made her apologies and cut the tour short just before the sleeping quarters. She would get a kind of very brief but very intense migraine. Described it as too much light in her head. And

though not as bad as then, she gets mini ones now, and even as I type that she says: Lee, I am feeling dizzy, push me back and we are bed to the wall again.

And Ma gets up and goes into the kitchen and is comforted by the hospice hall friend and another mother/spouse and they chat while stirring a large pot that simmers.

The doctor and this time ten interns crowd in and talk about her dizziness and head pain and while the Mandarin is being batted back and forth I think of all the love and support from all over, the Guggenheim girls who have done so much, the entire museum's graciousness, my colleagues who have made this difficult transition so easy and continue to hold me up, my dear family that never stops telling me how much they love both of us, her family that has always been, even though left for a time miles away, who never has not been there for her, my spinners most of whom do not know her, her friends, her many, many dear friends on both sides of the pond, some near, some far but all not able to be with her anymore: Martha who has typed long into the night how she feels about every Paul album, volumes of information on each song, trying to ease her friend and hug and share one last time with their mutual love of McCartney, Sylvia scouring Shanghai for more videos even though sick, Roberta who hacked her way uptown to help out when she had barely recovered from pneumonia herself and we know would be the first

over here if allowed, Concetta as she struggles with her ailing father to pick up mail and fed-ex dresses, Dennis who daily delivers the mail and who gave his gift of music, my sister-in-law who broke her unspoken rule of not often reaching out to both sides of the family by doing so more than ever and including her mother who has now become a major supplier of long distance love and poems even though I met her once and she has never met Cassey, dear Deb who fends off the fear that all this talk of death and disease will be a bad omen for her, and writes with the most exquisite eloquence, compassion, and clarity, Sue and her wit and infinite wisdom (if only she would turn it on herself as much), Jeremy and the priceless gift of many years and the White Album, Jim whom we couldn't stop from hopping the pond previously planned and will soon sit with us, Katherine, Jerry, Jennifer oldest friends who broke the rule and came anyway, Janet, Winifred, Crystal, JouJou, Tai-Lee and all the others who did visit and now have so impatiently stayed away but not in spirit—

All of this love and so much more being sent our way, and it humbles me and I know comforts her as the doctor examines and then says why not try breathing without the oxygen. This will help the dry nose and throat. The lungs have such a small capacity now that maybe the room air will be enough. (Does this translate to things are so bad we don't need to- "overkill" I was going to say but that would be so inappropriate- over do it. My hope starts to plummet.) He will look into her pupils

to see if the pressure had gotten greater but her eyes are too dilated from the sun. We will have to wait until the afternoon. "Please close the curtains, too much sun. When she has rested a bit more, let's try just the room air."

All this love and all these prayers, all these Gods, two husbands, all the doctors, and treatments, and we are down to will it be enough air? And I think of that girl at the bottom of that dark void and how often as she tumbled she must have wondered the same thing.

Sent Monday, December 6, 2004 6:41 am
Subject A bad color on her

Towel Head. That derogatory term would never be the same as I woke from a brief nap and saw that Ba or Ma had placed a large cloth on top of Cassey to keep her head from getting cold. It was biblically striped, could have been a prayer shawl and there she was resting like a Taiwanese prophet or Lawrence of Asia. She agreed to a sedative this afternoon to try and outsleep her latest headache. Of course they waited until after the sedative kicked in to try and dilate her pupils. It was pathetic and so funny at the same time as they tried to keep her eye open long enough to shine that light to read the back of her head. Come on sweetheart, can you hear me? Keep your eye open, open. No open. Finally they saw enough to tell the cranial pressure was not severe, but that didn't stop the fact that her pain was. When the

room was in complete darkness and the only light was a pin-spot on her eye, it was like seeing through a keyhole straight into her being. She shone bright and still very much alive, even through the nebutol or whatever they shot her up with. I wanted to stay in that light for a long time. With just her eyes...but it was only seconds before the lids slammed shut. So now it is rest and hopefully dreams of racing in a camel to outplay Omar Sharif in a game of bridge.

I went earlier for my first pizza this trip in Taipei, the place is famous for orchids and pizza-not!- to a place near the rapid transit I discovered called Napoli Pizza. They say it like the word Pisa here, like the leaning tower of Pisa. And in this place, nowhere near Napoli I promise, a kind of Pisa Hut, though they have those here as well-all over, just not it in this area, was a man that again embodied such a generosity of spirit it left me breathless. As I was trying to order a plain pizza, no such thing here, pineapple is big, meats, or seafood yes, plain- no such thing- as I was trying to explain by pointing at a picture and saying no, no and no-funny, but no one here, family or strangers ever seems agitated at my lack of Chinese (other than my wife.) On the contrary, they all seem apologetic for not remembering enough of their childhood English, and I think of our impatience with immigrants who can't speak- none of that here. This man, total stranger, stepped in and translated for me. He must have been in his sixties, white hair, and reed thin, could have huffed and

puffed and blown him away in his soft squash colored polo shirt and knit pants up to his mid-chest. But he exuded kindness, smiled with the softest eyes and helped me order and then after his pisa was ready turned and said "Goodbye" to me as though we'd known each other for twenty years and I would have kissed him rather than just thanked him, if custom and the others staring would have allowed.

As I walked back there was a huge old blue truck open on the sides except for some plexiglas and in it were hundreds and hundreds of oranges unpacked, just piled up, and this large old squeezing machine. And a man was selling fresh juice a liter for 100NT (about three dollars) and it tasted wonderful. No sign of the corn man, I'll look for him later.

It is still very sunny as I get my lunch, and when I get back I shared it with Ma, who probably thought the pizza was naked with only just cheese but not wishing to insult, ate a piece anyway.

When I got back from my late afternoon walk, Ma and Ba had left and Remi was here and they were bathing Cassey and this is just why I dread leaving. I know how she likes to be held so she won't breath too difficultly, and in my haste to dive in and do my part, I drop her treat for tonight that I was going to pretend to the parents was mine. It just kisses the floor, but I know I will have to go back for another. As we all finish her bath and Remi buttons the new

sleeping robe she has bought for her and has worried will be too yellow covered with Monkichi (a Japanese monkey cartoon character cousin to Hello Kitty that Cassey has loved since childhood and calls Chippi and has all over our house in NY), Cassey looks at it and as they are slipping it on her says- too yellow. But she knows this curry colored gift was from Remi, and though she says she isn't crazy about it, she will wear it. And it is a bad color on her, yellow on yellow, and it swallows what little color my yellow woman does have. And I will never forget the first time Cassey referred to herself as yellow, and I had honestly never thought of her skin as having been a different race, I knew that her eyes were different and that she was Asian, but the whole yellow thing, the race card as it were, had not been in my consciousness, But the robe is very cute, and I say so, yet Madame knows better. And after sitting up in bed, and Remi rubbing her feet, and eating her bakery dinner that I've run out and replaced and drinking her juice, only about forty minutes later, she softly asks Remi to switch to the other pajamas. The girl from Glamour says the color is hurting her eyes, and Remi unlike me, does not care at all- I'd be crushed- "I'll get the Hello Kitty, much better color," she offers and Madame is resting better.

I put the rest of the pastry away, so there won't have to be another round of the blame game and notice the scarf I bought for Ma for her birthday on that late afternoon walk, a cashmere rust brown shawl with a very subtle pattern of leaves woven

through it, not bad for this po-dunk burgh, is still sitting in the bag where I tossed it to quickly help with the bath already in session. It will have to wait until tomorrow. And I know she won't mind at all. She is in her kitchen now, I can sense, making six courses even if it is only for her and Ba. She is used to that, has gotten used to it since Cassey moved away, and knows somewhere in her heart, she will have to get used to it all over again.

Lee

Sent **Monday, December 6, 2004 7:28 pm**
Subject **Season's snickers**

Sent to me by one of my favorite spinners and thought I would share it with you all. (Nancy sorry for the no joke deposit, no return recycling.) She wrote:

First Christmas joke of the season.

Three men died on Christmas Eve and were met by Saint Peter at the pearly gates.

"In honor of this holy season," Saint Peter said, "you must each possess something that symbolizes Christmas to get into heaven."

The first man fumbled through his pockets and pulled out a lighter. He flicked it on. It represents a candle, he said. You may pass through the pearly gates Saint Peter said.

The second man reached into his pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He shook them and said, "They're bells". Saint Peter said you may pass through the pearly gates.

The third man started searching desperately through his pockets and finally pulled out a pair of women's panties. St. Peter looked at the man with a raised eyebrow and asked, "And just what do those symbolize?" The man replied, "They're Carols".

Sent Monday, December 6, 2004 11:52 pm
Subject A little big rain

There has been a wonderfully soothing sheet of rain all day, but it has not been an easy one for Madame. Tubes changed, morphine ports switched to opposite arms, blood pressure, oxygen readings, it was like a non-stop medical pit stop. Her chest was feeling even heavier, and it must feel at times like she is resting under a pile of bricks. But the blessed drug begins to soothe and she can sit up a bit and now Ling-Long is rubbing her arms, shoulders, and neck. Cassey did not like the

massage volunteer, but she seems to like Ling-Long's hands. Perhaps it's a blood thing.

I spoke to Remi over the weekend, and I asked that one of the sisters be with Cassey every day, could they take turns, that she seems to be lifted by their care and presence. And honestly I wondered why, if these were going to be her last days, they didn't want to be here with her anyway. I know how many things would have to be juggled, jobs and children, and I know it would mean I might have to fade back a little and let go, but it seemed the right thing for everyone. I also prefaced with an apology if I was again overstepping my bounds. It is different to have her sisters here than Ma and Ba, it is somehow more intimate and tender. Less desperate. We have a schedule worked out, and I think it is giving Cassey some real solace to be surrounded by simple acts of sisterly love. Remi sitting with her till she fell asleep last night, Ling-Long overseeing the changing of the sheets and now her never-tiring magic fingers. Jia made Ma some cake for her birthday, most of you know what a great baker she is, and there is a large tupperware bin full of it now here for me (and Cassey when no parents are looking).

The corn man was out, even in the rain, and Ling-Long brought some for Ma and her and I, and Ma made me some pasta, Taiwanese Italian that she is. It really is comforting to know that new laundry appears without asking, food is brought in if I want,

juice is down the street and often just delivered to me, it would feel spoiling if my dear wife was not so, so sick. It is like how the other half meets how we most fear to live.

But after reading some of your replies that did ignore my stubborn auto-reply: there are two things that I would like to say to everyone: first, I am sorry that you get that damn auto-reply every time you write me. I cannot control the who gets it and why, and it needs to be there for my job, but please think of it as a big digital hug from me right before you delete it: damn that Lee, oh, that was nice, now delete. And the other thing is to have a wonderful holiday season and do not let my emails and Cassey pull you into funky town. She has said over and over that her greatest wish is that no one feel sorry for her. Her soul's path is what it is and on whatever journey for it is, for reason's we may never know, but it will, and, on some level, already does. She wants you to laugh, frolic, (I would say f*ck) she would say make a little love, and remember to live this moment, these holidays, as the tired but true t-shirt that suddenly fits says: as though they were your last.

Enough carpe, we await Jim and Jerry this afternoon, if Jim landed all right in this rain. I wondered that earlier and she gave me that look and that smirk, like Lee, you are such a jerk, it is only weather, only a little rain, it's not a typhoon, stop worrying about it. And back home when this tape played, I used to say, "we don't have typhoons

here," and she'd say (forgetting I grew up in Florida, lived through many a storm, we just called them hurricanes) she'd say "that's just your problem, my dear. live through a few typhoons, and it all becomes just a little rain."

So bake some cookies and throw out the fruitcake for us.

Sent **Tuesday, December 7, 2004 10:20 am**
Subject **remote control**

She is sleeping now holding the remote control of the bed, clinging to it like a little girl would her rag doll. She makes slight adjustments to the bed help her breathing, sometimes without opening her eyes. Up a few degrees then down. Feet up a bit, then down. And even in sound sleep she keeps a hold of it.

And by the end of the afternoon, she has even more control. I promised her when she was still in great pain, that I would help her by asking for the self-controlled pain relief, and the attending nurse and the younger doctor that replaced the oncologist I loved but was only here for a month, decided it was time, As they were showing her how it works, I thought they don't know she is an expert, having used this after her lungs were drained. They continue to explain needlessly: It beeps as the morphine is released, and there is an assigned threshold, so there is no danger of overmedication, but now you can control the medicine yourself.

And I can see the salesmen at the medical convention showing the latest model for the patient that craves control, and wouldn't we all like a little bit more control in our life?

She sets the white push button in her pajama pocket, the one that holds her lip balm and she seems calmer for the moment. But she keeps hold of the bed remote. Finally lets it go to eat. Today it was a bit of chicken tofu, I guess either the three to five days are up or Ma and Ba have turned a blind eye. And then she asked for a piece of the cake Jia made and I, like the fat one, Spanky in Our Gang, had eaten it all. When I get worried, don't put any cake near me, and Ma's birthday cake tasted like it had no sugar in it at all, so how bad could it be for you? The Taiwanese like all of their sweets not so sweet. I mean they eat tomatoes as fruit and red bean soup like ice cream. And she had been sleeping all day, I thought the last thing she'd want is cake today, and now I felt so petty, why not at least have saved one piece for her? Ling-Long ran out to get her some, stopping me as I rushed to put on my socks and shoes, "I'm dressed let me go." "Let her go," Cassey said as I argued. And I apologized and told her how sorry I was, and she said "how could you have known," and then as she collected her breath, I knew why she wanted me there- "what do I do, Lee. What do I do? I can't even breathe." I said "do what you can, my love, What you can". Again: "What do I do?" I said "what do you want me to say? If I asked you that question what would you say?"

And then the words she has said before but I most dread. I would say "help me. Help me to go peacefully." (No matter that the her being me was not being played correctly- the scene wouldn't make sense and make perfect sense no matter how it was played) and I said "my dear, how can I do more than I have done? I got you the morphine that you can control, and short of breaking into the nurse's station and stealing something what can I do?" And I thought of that scene is Cuckoo's nest and her asking me weeks ago to help in New York, lying in bed, she had asked, and unlike Chief I hadn't the strength. Oh, to understand the complexities, the moralities of such an issue on the spot, to even begin to grab hold of them and know what to do...I hedge my bet the best I know how, thinking of my friends who have said there are some things even you can't do, Lee. You can't heal her and you can't help her in that way, and I thought at the time, we should, why not? I did for my beloved Garbo. And I know that Cassey is no pet, but that logic works both ways, if I wouldn't want even my dog to feel any more pain, why would I want my wife? But I hedge my bets, and say "let's talk to the doctor, let's see what he is willing to do. I don't know what else I can do." And she says "I know. I know." And then she says something so insightful it still hurts and may forever, not because I think she means me, but because it is profoundly true: "someone doesn't want to let me go."

And that very second Ling-Long came back with the cake, and there was silence in the room. After it was eaten Cassey said something in Taiwanese to Ling-Long who started sobbing and I held her and Cassey gave her tissues and I kept saying "what did you say? Cassey you can't ask her that"- thinking she asked Ling-Long what she asked me to do, to help her die, and Cassey said "I asked her to let go, let me go." And Ling-Long kept saying "I can't, don't ask me, I can't." And I realized to her this was like being asked to smother her sister with a pillow, no different, And they talked for a bit more, and I asked what was said, is it too private, and Ling-Long said "no, of course not, you know everything," and I said "she feels like there are so many that won't let her go, can we not give her that gift, can we not help her?". And Ling-Long kept shaking her head no. and I understood why Cassey was so worried and unable to take those final steps. How badly she wanted some control.

And then with the exquisite timing that only life can bring, that can't be found in any work of fiction, when life is being traveled as if it can only be lived this one way, at one speed, in one direction, as if the inevitable was present and walked into the room, the Doctor, the nurse, the head nurse and an intern, much less crew than usual, came in.

Ling-Long hurriedly wiped away her tears, and everyone rightened themselves to receive him. He sensed the air more grave than usual and began to talk with Cassey with the obligatory caveat to

me that he would speak his mother tongue and translate for me after, But I knew the head nurse would play her role and help too. And as he talked with Cassey, the nurse told me that he was explaining the need for the self-controlled morphine so that she would not be worried, and I waited until there was a pause, then apologized, but let him know that she had wanted this and had used it before after her lungs, and that on the contrary that was not what she was worried about. He then asked what we were worried about, and deflecting the we, with not we, she, I said "if I may ask, and please understand if it is not appropriate tell me, but Cassey wanted to know how long this might take. Her greatest worry is this will go on and on and on, and she just-" "She would like it to be over soon, tonight if she could," he said interrupting. "Is that what you want?" asked with a trace of a taunt in his voice, as if daring her to say, no, not tonight- and Cassey said "yes. Yes, it is." "We can stop the medication for the swelling of the head, and we can slowly monitor and strengthen the pain medications and that will mean a gradual loss of consciousness, and that is what I would do, if this were my family that is what I would have done." Then in either his awkward English or because he believed this, which I hope is not the case, he said, "you will feel no pain and be able hear and sense us, but we will not recognize it as you, will not be able to make direct contact with you." (Oh, how Pedro Almadovar and Deb Margolin would argue) "But you will be at peace." And I said "I am not worried about us, I am worried

about her, and she is worried about how long she will be like this. Can we know how long?" "Your heart is strong, your liver is strong, I cannot make the liver and the heart shut down. I can make the brain close down to not feel, but the liver and the heart, the rest must follow." And I said, "please, doctor she understands this, but it is the time waiting that is agony for her. You have seen other cases like this, why can't you-" "We are not God, but if you are asking us-" "A month two months, a week?" "We cannot be certain." "I know that but, in English we say in the ballpark, the best estimate?" "Two weeks, two to three weeks. She will be asleep-" And there it is, he has said it. Never wanting to, but you can sense the relief from him. But not from Cassey. The thought of laying unconscious for that long is devastating to her. And I thought, dear Lord, I never should have asked, should I? She'd be better off not knowing...And then before I could help myself I said, "Doctor, forgive me, but is there anything more we can do for her? Before you came in, she said she could not bear letting this drag on and I know that weeks and weeks-" "You are talking about Mercy killing, that is what you are asking, that would be the only alternative. And that is not- we have no avenue for that here." And I can see Cassey understanding that we've tried our best. "Can I just go home then?" she asks and I know why she is asking, and the Doctor says "yes, I can discharge you, or you can go home with the pain medication but it will be harder to help you there." "And we will not be able to do what you want there, sweetheart, and

you know it," I said. "Don't make yourself uncomfortable for no good reason. No one in your family will be able to do it." And the doctor says something to her in Mandarin and then to me that was astonishing: "My own wife has breast cancer, this is true, and I tell everyone, my colleagues, my students, if my wife where to get to this stage, and she most probably will, I do not care about me- take me to the night market, the old "snake" night market in the center of town and give me a corner on that street to live, and I will eat the leftovers from the cans, I don't need my house, my car, I don't need anything, let me live in that corner of the street," and there are tears forming in his eyes "this is what my wife means to me, how little my life would be without her--" And I can't help myself, I say "I understand, believe me I understand, but if it was your wife, and I hope she will never be lying here, but if it was, this is your beloved wife and she has just said to you, help me, let me go faster, please, what would you do? And he hesitated- "What would you do?" And his eyes watered even more, "there she is, doctor your wife and she is begging you- what do you do?"

And he struggled with the question like those arm wrestling matches where they are straining against each other and no one is winning and there is no time limit, but one is about to give in, and he forfeits the struggle by saying- it is my fault to bring up my wife, it makes me too emotional, and I mustn't- and try as I might, I let go because what could he say? "You want me to go against

everything I worked for and stood for and do what I know in my heart but can't in my head accept." No, this gentle man could not and should not be made to do this tonight, very soon he may have to do it for himself.

He says that he can stop all medications, except for pain, this is ethically acceptable like "taking a different off-ramp, is this the correct word? A different ramp but perfectly acceptable, we are on the same road-" and then Cassey says full voiced, as if to draw the thickest and firmest line ever drawn- "the family must all agree and then the medications stop, and when I need it the pain medications are increased. But only if and when I need them."

"Is that your decision, can you live with that? I say (unfortunate verbiage not recognized in the moment) and she says "yes, that is what I want." And as the medical team stands to leave, I realize I can't stand, and I say from my seat on my too hard bed/sofa, "Doctor, I just want you to know how much I respect you, we both respect you, and what you do, the difficulty of this work, your chosen life's work." And I could have stopped there but I couldn't "And if it comes to it, and I pray that it doesn't, but if you find yourself here, stay out of the night market. Do not go there. You do not belong there, you must never go." And he takes my hand and realizes how I am crying and he holds my hand for a bit and promises that he understands

and even though I thought I knew what I was saying, I am not sure I entirely did myself.

Chien-te has come in and heard the tale end of this and Ling-Long is telling him and Remi is called and when she arrives, she is filled in and each sibling goes through their moment of denial. "Is this just a bad day? What if this is just a bad day?" Remi asks and as Cassey shakes her head no I remind her the doctor said this is what he would do and recommends to do, his only concern is that the family will not understand. "And that is Cassey's greatest worry, can you help her with that?" "With what?" "Help her to believe you understand, that it is all right." And she turns to her sister not believing- "is that what you need, do you need that?" And Cassey lets her off the hook shakes her head no, and I feel betrayed. No. But some minutes later Remi is sitting and crying with her and in their own way, they find that understanding, and then Chein-te, who I was most worried about- has been trying not to cry even as I say "go ahead, it's okay, cry," and minutes earlier distracted himself by doing some business, filling out some accounting or tax forms, suddenly he sits next to his sister and sobs. And all of his weeks of being on guard, it is all dropped and his love pours out and they sit with it for the longest time and Cassey hands him some tissues and then whispers something in Taiwanese and I realize he has crossed over too. And she takes the white push button out of her pocket and presses it and he glares at it, hating it, but allowing it to bleep. So now it is up to Ba and Ma and it is

decided by the family present that they will be talked to tomorrow, and I beg the sisters to not do it over the phone, but I am not sure I have won. And Jia will be told as well. That conversation is not going to be any easier,

Cassey asks to watch a little television before she sleeps, and remembers that Sam has made a copy of the Terminal for her. I cannot bare the irony and since she wants to watch, I think of how I am going to be able to stand it. I think of how the doctor had just recently tried to describe a cancer patient's condition not as terminal but like an airport, and the unfortunate allegory in the film of being trapped in a nightmarish mall-like purgatory, and that my poor wife's possibly last movie is going to be this and not one of her favorites like Splendor in the Grass. But I'll be damned if I am not going to watch it with her if that is what she wants, and five minutes in, real life rescues us again. She cannot see well out of her left eye, and so she asks for it to be stopped. And I think of Jim, too jet lagged to come by this afternoon, and how fortunate that was because of all that unfolded. And it is agreed according to Madame that Jerry, and Jim, Janet, and Jennifer already scheduled and possible Katherine and then that is it. No more friends after tomorrow. She will try to send out a few emails. Then she makes us swear, please no more, and after she is asleep, no one is allowed in the room to stare and sit and make her feel like she is on view. No dog show. And then she takes her anti-anxiety pill to get some sleep. And Ba walks in to deliver

the night's herb and everyone pretends that the crying is nothing new, just the usual feeling bad about Cassey, but not the new deeper despair about her. And he looks at us funny, like one of those cuckolds in a Moliere play, and then says goodnight, unaware of the true sorrow that will greet him tomorrow. Oh, how I hate deception in any of its manifestations, and I think of all my lies in my life, so petty...And as Cassey drifts to sleep, I notice that she is still holding the remote tightly and I will let her for as long as she wants to and is able.

Sent **Wednesday, December 8, 2004 5:16 am**
Subject **Broken vows**

Such a very busy start to the day with Cassey being bathed again and many visitors, but I worry that the most important thing, the conversation with Ma and Ba has not happened yet. Cassey and I even had an uncomfortable exchange this morning about it. When she awoke, after ten, Ma and Jia were here already and moving in for the morning. I had not showered and the bed/sofa was still in bed mode, I don't like to make noise and put the heavy cushions back on the plinth until Cassey is awake. And I don't shower until someone has come by to sit with her, just in case. But so quickly, food was being brought in and the nurse came in and asked me if the IV bottle of steroid should be hung, meaning had the family decided yet, and I didn't even know if Jia had been told. So I called Remi and asked her and she said that she thought Ling-Long had talked to Jia and that Jia was going

to talk to Ma and Ba, and in the middle of the whirlpool, I asked Remi "do you have any idea when?" And Cassey got irritated thinking I was pressuring her sister when I just wanted to let the nurse know, and frankly was just trying to advocate her wishes, and she said "Lee, just be patient." And embarrassed again in front of Remi, and feeling a bit like Dr. Death, I told the nurse to go ahead and hang the IV; it was going to be later in the day.

And I sat with my frustration and tried to remember it was her pain and fear scolding me, not her. And decided it was time for me to really let go. I promised myself it was up to others now, and Cassey herself. As she was being bathed I watched her as the water bubbled around her, and wondered if she like being bathed as a girl, and then if I did as a little boy. Can't remember. We had this picture of my brother, sister and I, I think, all in the same tub, or was it just at the beach, we are all only a year apart- what was my mother thinking. And I remembered our baths together in our old iron claw tub and how even it was too small for me, but we made the best of it. And then as they lowered her back in the automated blue tubosphere so she could relax, I wondered if this was her last bath and that was too odd, that thought, and so I left it behind as I went to get shampoo from our room because she has just a little bit of fine baby hair now, just enough to shampoo.

And Jim and Janet and Katherine were waiting for Madame Clean, and each had their time with her, and Janet laughed at how long she took getting ready this morning, picking out the perfect thing that she thought Cassey would approve of, and I thought of me in my jeans and baseball undershirt, and then Jim confessed that even he had worried about that as well.

As Cassey slept a bit, worn out from the whole scrub down, and the chit-chat, we ran out to get lunch with Jim and Janet and I. Janet insisted on buying for all, including Ma and Jia- Dumplings, some soup, fried rice, tofu, and some meat dishes were brought back and Ma was happy to have Janet to chat with. And the nurse asked me again still no word? I had vowed not to get involved this time, and said not yet, but then Cassey awoke with pain, and asked me to do something, it really hurts, and I said what? And she said, "can I have a sedative," and I said "a little one, just for a few hours?" and she said, "call Remi and see what has happened." So much for staying out of it. Remi said she would talk to Jia and get back to me and that is where we are now. Cassey sleeping with a mild sedative, Ma and Ba and Jia talking outside, and when I ask how it is going Jia saying they don't want to give up yet, Jim waiting in the lobby, and me wondering what in the hell is my role in all this.

So thoughtful of Jim to allow me to kvetch as I did while we both munched on some corn, like some urban Hatfield Hospice family hoedown. He is a

very good listener and I, starved for a native speaker, was a very good talker, but mostly I realized how shattered my trust was in the family, how betrayed, I told him. They had agreed already, but now they were pulling out of the deal- or so it felt, until I realized, and this gave me hope, that it would take care of itself, every part of this had. There would be a solution; it would work out, just wait.

I was sitting with Jennifer now, probably still kvetching, and she was telling me about her father's illness and how hard their family dynamic was during his death, and I see so clearly why Cassey loved her so, such a kind woman, when Remi calls to say that Ma and Ba, sitting not fifteen feet from me in the lobby now still with Jia, have agreed. I have no idea what fierce negotiations had taken place, or if it was just a matter of them sitting with it for a while, but forgive me if I still don't quite trust that we are ready to allow her to go. I feel like there will be some more God commandments, or herb hurdles to leap but Remi says Jia spoke to the nurse and it will begin tomorrow. And I realize that except for the bath, Cassey has slept most of the day today and it is almost six now and is this the beginning of when her body says sleep my dear, it is much better to just sleep.

Sent
Subject

Wednesday, December 8, 2004 8:35 am
Funny in Chinese

Just as I finished the last email, and hit send, she woke for a bit and ate some fruits (She always adds an s, says "that is how we say it in Taiwan and it is actually, my dear more correct.") She is the best proof reader I ever slept with, loves the book *Eats Shoots and Leaves*, can catch an English error on paper better than most professors, but she said to me the other day, "one of my great regrets- and I thought "uh oh," gearing myself for the worst- marrying an out of work actor- but she said "I lived in New York almost fifteen years and my English is for shit." I have often asked her to just speak Chinese for me to marvel at her ability to love Tom Stoppard and then speak and write the most complex Mandarin and Taiwanese. She translated many an article. Wrote and was paid to in both languages. And you haven't lived 'til you hear her tell a joke in Chinese. "I'm funny in Chinese," she would always say. "No really I am. I was the class clown." And she was, and still is. Ask Janet with her fried chicken. After fruits, she wanted a yam, which is usually easy to get, right outside is a vendor, but tonight, no potatoes. Neither Ba or I could find a yam man, so an hour later Ba brings one from home. It is too late, by then, she has asked for a sedative and is asleep again.

Before that she said to me, when all the bustling had ended and Ba left to bake a yam, and we were alone for a bit- she looked at me for a

moment and then: I love you. And I, very quickly, "I love you, more than I can say." And then after a nice silence that even I could enjoy, and so I wouldn't regret forever, "was I wrong to ask Remi this morning? You were so angry at me?" "I don't remember, was I?" "And last night, when I tried to get her to understand, to let you go, you said you didn't need it. She said to you is that what you need? And you said no." "Did I? Why did I say that? I'm sorry." And then forlornly: "I can't even watch Sex and the City, I can't even see." And then, instantly spunky, "I've got it, we could play it in the computer." And we set it up, and I swore I would forgo the updates forever and knew you all would as well, some of the weary would scream Hallelujah, if she was able to watch, and it lasted about an episode – the one wondering if soulmates really do exist or is the idea there just to torment us- and then her headache and the nausea and the sedative and the sleep.

And that was our day. She was awake for about three or four hours or so, her body exhausted from, under these circumstances, such a superb effort. And I'll take three or four any day. And I thought of dear Jim, who reassured me, as I struggled with the families waffling, by telling me that Jerry said that cancer is a big taboo in Taiwan, people are afraid to talk about it, he was surprised that Cassey did so openly. And that it embarrasses families, and they try to keep it very private. (Sounds a lot like the states to me, but then I remembered all the walk-a-thons, yellow wristbands, and breast cancer

ribbons and I realized there are probably no walk-a-thons here.) And he also said even though it is shunned, it is the number one plot point in every soap opera (and Taiwan is big on soap operas, there are many of them day and night) and that in almost every turgid story there is a moment where there is a miracle and the person gets out of bed, cured. One minute in bed and everyone crying over them, and the next up and kissing and all is fine and the ratings soar. This information was offered as a possible explanation for why the family might not want to let go and feels Cassey should hang on. And I thought, great we are having to go up against years of poor plot devices, and badly-acted clinches.

But the family has come around and the soap opera seems to be over. The nurse explained that they can't just stop the medication for her swelling all at once, they will do it gradually, and couple it with an increase in the pain medication, and Ba was right there in the room when they talked about it. Now I know where Cassey gets her spunk, her tenacity, and her wisdom and bravery all rolled into one. She even looks a lot like Ba, have I said that?

The pinched face hall friend of Ma's wore the nicest white shirt today, no red, and when Ma was chatting with her, it was as if someone untied the knot and let her face unravel into the biggest most beautiful smile. I love that moment when you become aware of someone's true beauty, their

spirit comes into clear focus, and you see them as their lover does. I hope that just next door in her room, her relative or spouse, how sad that I do not even know which, is at peace and not in pain and sleeping soundly.

Sent **Wednesday, December 8, 2004 5:40 pm**
Subject **Reply to all**

Middle of the night and got up to help Cassey sip some water and then to watch her as she went back to sleep. I will go back there with her, but wanted to share three emails that I just got and replied to. Please forgive but it was good for the environment to recycle- it allowed me to correct some of the many errors in the originals including the spelling of liaison in my e-signature which has apparently been sent all over the world and wrongly for four years. Please forgive the intrusion those that sent them, but I felt that what was said needed to be shared because I know that we all feel the same way, or that I wanted my replies to be to all and I am too lazy to type to each of you, and cut and pasting seems so unoriginal and phony, as though I said it only to you...So now my replies to all:

This is from a book layout designer, who I used to wait on when managing a video store, and years later coincidently bumped into going into her piano lesson with the same teacher as Cassey. Their teacher, Dennis, lives next door to us in our building. All are now friends:

----- Original Message -----

From: "B., Francesca"

Date: Wednesday, December 8, 2004 9:53 am

Subject: RE: Funny in Chinese

> Dear Lee,

>

> Last night was my piano lesson, and Dennis and I spoke of you and Cassey so fondly, so moved by your updates and everything that is going on over there.

> And I remembered how Cassey and I would jokingly argue about which of us was Dennis's worst student (that would definitely be me!)

> Sending much love to you and dear Cassey,

>

xxFrancesca

Re:

Subject Practice makes imperfect

While I can't weigh in on the reverse superlative competition, which

brings to mind those early episode awful car wrecks of the hit show,

sort of an American Idol for classical musicians, because I am not

sitting there hearing you both play, and even then, with my tin ear...

but I do know this, you are definitely his worst from now on, and at the same time, she has you beat.

Like M. Monroe or Tiny Tim as a better example, she

will not get the chance to improve. You my dear, have symphonies to play. So go practice, which she hated to do, and go play them, which she always dreamed of doing.

Lee

And this sent from the mother of Oliver, and Cassey's former boss at NYU design now at Rockefeller University

----- Original Message -----

From: Patricia Childers

Date: Wednesday, December 8, 2004 10:56 am

Subject: Re: remote control

> Lee,

>

There have been so many who love Cassey. I can't remember the name of the boy that worked at NYU and replaced her kitchen floor, does Cassey remember his name? In most cases tiling would seem a chore but I remember the person feeling proud and honored to be allowed to do it, so enthusiastic that we all volunteered to help. Anything to be in her light.

>

Being stuck in NY means accepting that I will not speak with her again, but through your emails Cassey is still Cassey. I really laughed at the yellow dressing gown story and told a friend about it last night, such a great description of her spirit.

>

I can't imagine what you're going through, your future time with her so uncertain. For all I know your stories could be a compassionate fiction, written to allow the rest of the world to still hope. In reality I know when you do return Cassey will finally have her peace. I look forward to seeing you when you in NY, and again to help you in any way.

>

Anything to be in Cassey's light.

>

> Patricia

Reply:

Subject I had forgotten the tile boy but I think it was because she thought he was cute

Thank you Patricia. I do have a pretty cool wife. I will be grateful for that (as I am, and was), every day that we had (and still have.) The tenses are tough when someone is close to being a past but is still very present. (Forgive me if you read that again later, I want to share it with others, it is oddly true and sad.)

I read your email to Madame, and she was deeply touched, as will I read this one. Cassey had impeccable taste in people, still does, as she relates to the medical staff, even the woman who comes in and sweeps. She responds to decency, honesty, the ability to give and exude love,

integrity, (and good taste.) And it is an honor to have been allowed to share with her, those people she allowed to be her friends. She did not make friends often, though she made them more often than I, and upon reflection I realize if she wanted someone, she could make a friend so quickly and easily, and when she found them, they were around for good. I know you embody all of those things, and your Oliver is very lucky indeed.

Lee

And finally from the loudest grunting, most enthusiastic of my spin clients (some of you don't know I teach a spin class-an exercise bike to music-at the Westside YMCA. How corny does that get?)

----- Original Message -----

Date: Wednesday, December 8, 2004 12:05 pm

> Dear Lee-

I am just so, so sad for you, Cassey, the world today. It's just all too fucking confusing, awful.

>

I cannot bear the thought of you traveling back home alone. You

know I worry a lot--all the time. I can't quite figure out if anyone in your family is with you. If you think of it, could you let us know in one of your journals if

a brother, sister--anyone will be returning home with you.

>

> With love-Eve (please forgive me if I ever say anything . . . I know

> you are not so good with adoration)

>

Reply:

My first impulse was to say hey, wait a minute, I am fine with adoration, down with it, and try to make a joke about it, but the truth is, I am not. I do not want folks to waste time praising, even though as an artist I crave recognition for my work, I do not hunger for compliments, once I know that someone respects me or what I do. Cassey used to comment about that all the time. Learn to take a compliment Lee, let it land, acknowledge it gratefully, but I am better at giving than receiving. She was always better at receiving than giving...So when you got one from her, you either knew she meant it, or wondered what was up.

But Eve, can you please promise me something? Can you try and work on your worry and angst. I do not want to see any more of us ill, and these things turn into illness. We must, must work on happiness. All your wonderful work in the gym, all your goodness to others, it means nothing if you don't love and respect yourself enough to be happy.

I am going to have family and friends with me at the airport, they don't know it yet, or maybe they do, and hopefully with me for a few days when I return. I will begin the process of asking for that when I know the timing. But I am also impatient and private by nature, though you wouldn't know it by all this regurgitation of intimate details, and there is a side of me anxious to get on with the process of being lonely. But I won't rush that. I'll have enough time to feel that. Though when one slowly loses a partner, there is a point when, even as you still cling to what you have, the loneliness, like that mist you see in bad horror movies, starts to creep in under the cracks of your life, in the voids that have begun from what is slipping from you.

I look forward to spinning again. I do miss it.

Lee

And now back to sleep.

Sent **Wednesday, December 8, 2004 9:32 pm**
Subject **writing on the wall**

I woke up this morning, only one hour after the last update, from my first nightmare in Taiwan. Not very creative, or freudianly imaginative. Pretty damn literal. I was adjusting Cassey's oxygen and noticed a spark, a smell, something wrong (like in the microwave in real life the other day as I heated her pastry in a wax paper bowl and it almost caught on fire, crackled and puffed and lit up the inside of

the microwave) and the oxygen tube was attached to a wire of some kind for a light or something, and the black electrical tape covering it was burned or burning, sparking, and I remember thinking should I just let it go, but I didn't want to chance it, so I yanked it off to stop it from catching on fire, and it melted in my hand, and was gone and there was nothing to attach it back, and I thought where is the other oxygen, there must be another, a back up, and next thing I know she was holding her head and in pain, and she said the pot roast, you burned the pot roast, and I was looking at her head, checking it for signs of damage, if I had burned her, and I was so worried- and I woke up.

A few seconds later without opening her eyes she adjusted the bed, reached for and sipped a sip of water, beeped in a bit of morphine, picked up the clock to check the time, and so she wouldn't have to open her eyes, I whispered 7:30. I then went to her to kiss her head relieved that the pot roast (where did that come from, I'm a vegetarian, have been for years, and never like pot-roast, and they don't even know what it is in Asia so I doubt she has ever said the words) had not been burned. And as I kissed her newly baby fine head lightly over and over, she whispered back "please, don't wake me."

As I heard the first election loudspeaker of the morning, yes, my friends, my informant was wrong, the election is this weekend, and the omnipresent

voices calling to us, with music, and fireworks are still there. I was thinking the other day, that while I would like to but don't really have faith in angels, though like the 92% percent or what ever surprisingly high figure of Americans who do believe they exist, I find them very calming, like the thought of them, wished I could meet one, I had the thought that maybe there was no election since it never seems to occur, and that maybe these were voices calling to her, helping her, wanting her to join them. Possibly her tacky husband of a God? But my over-romanticism was ruined on a walk yesterday when I saw one of the sources of the voices, and was surprised that something that loud and powerful, that could reach for miles, was not even coming from a truck or mini-van but from one lone man on a fancy painted scooter with a flag on it like they used to hang on the back of those hi-rise bikes with the banana seats that were so popular in the seventies- the Orange Krate was the name of one. Here was this scooter with a flag with a number and a grinning face and wrapped to the back of that and to the handle bars for better stereo separation were the two loud speakers that did look like they were ripped of the pole from MASH or Hogan's Heroes.

On another walk, with Jim, we laughed at the thousands of campaign posters and flags all over, and their lack of graphic design skill. Jim said that when they take them down it would be as sad, as naked seeming, as when they remove the

Christmas decorations. But as we were looking at them, I also thought, the numbers on them, different characters but uniform in size by some regulation, and always stamped inside the same circle, 12, then 11, lots of 7, now 24. Maybe the numbers are part of the angelic code; you have to read them with the voices, a sort of democratic Celestine prophecy.

Superstition is just a short hop skip from rapture isn't it? One nun's life's work, one's beatitude worthy of sainthood is another bagman's lunatic ramblings. I mean my favorite saint, Francis, was a crazed former rich boy who strutted about naked and petted sparrows. And what are Rabbit's feet for anyway? What a callous kind of luck is that? If some rabbit snapped it off and left it in the trap but was fortunate enough to live, it should be good enough to help us not fall into one, keep the bloody thing in your pocket and stroke it from time to time?

And I think of how much I envy those paranormalists or whatever you call those who have certainty, have been visited or seen or abducted, have none of the doubt I have too much of, the one's that have seen the truth. Cassey once said to me long before she was sick, over cereal, or something equally mundane, that she believed in ghosts. I laughed, and she said- "no, it is very common at home, everyone has seen one, been watched over by one. And I asked if she had. And she said she thought so, when she was

little girl. And I said that is different, I saw gorillas in every shadow when I was boy (too early a viewing of King Kong, I have attributed it to, not a simian guardian ancestor) I want to know if you've seen one since. Did you ever see anyone that counted? (Like I had wished for, like my father or Garbo? I thought of Ruth and her beloved beagle that she sees long after death from time to time, and the hundreds of other stories and movies, and the articles- that as many that believe in angels and heaven, believe in ghosts- and all those Goth kids and how I wished I had proof, and I asked if she had ever seen Jessie? And I thought I had overstepped my bounds, she was quiet for the longest time thinking, wondering. And then she said simply, though you couldn't cut through the regret if you tried, "No. Never." Then she said "I will watch over you if I go first. Honest. And trying to break the too truthful air, I said "with my luck you'll haunt me." And she said, no I would guard you, make sure you were okay, but don't worry, I won't interfere." And never mind the lack of logic in a guardian that can't interfere, I was deeply moved by that and told her so. I hold it to me often as we go through this, and it is much better and less brutal than a rabbit's foot.

And now Jia is here and unmaking my bed for me and the nurses are attending, and Ma is here and so is Tang mama, Jia's mother, and there is blood to pressure, and tubes to empty, and I know that Cassey is thinking please don't wake me.

There are other sounds that seems omnipresent as well. Our room is away from the nurses station but across from the kitchen, and the crushing of the plastic containers each morning one by one that seem to go on forever, what sign is that? As the air is forced out of them and the plastic gives way with the sound that seems like metabolic anger. One by one, and each morning there seem to be more. No longer one or two. And then a bleep of her morphine. And the nurses all have voices in that high-pitched whisper associated with the submissive Asian idea of perfection in a "wife." Cultivated here as a sign of attractiveness, no Kathleen Turner's allowed. And they lean and whisper with the slightest sound of voice in a language I cannot speak, is it code? And she blips another drip of morphine. And Jia brought more of her cake and should it be eaten or not? Can it ever be eaten? And why was there no Yam man? I often say to myself things like if there is a yam man, she will be okay, like a few days ago with the corn man, when he wasn't where he usually was and I went looking for him and I thought if I find him then- and I did- though I didn't know the neighborhood and could have gotten lost, I found him and he was there, but yesterday no Yam man.

Do others have such silly thoughts? I am sure or else there wouldn't be horoscopes, or lotto, or fortunetellers at the temple. I think it was DaVinci who said show me a theory and I'll show you a bestseller. And the oxygen gurgles on the wall, not with the sound of a brook or a fountain, but of air

being sucked over water, and there are thankfully no hospital pagers or doctor's being summoned or a cacophony of other medical bleeps, but that can work against you as well, because when there is a sound it is deafening, there she goes again, another ding of morphine, and I know that is the code I will most have to decipher or learn to accept as one of those signs of the unknowable that must be lived with.

Sent Thursday, December 9, 2004 0:42 am
Subject Two trains

Earlier today when we were alone, she repeated the question: "what do I do?" and try as I might for a better answer I gave the same reply "you don't need to do a thing anymore. It is all being done for you. If want to sleep. Then sleep and if you need me to get you some help, I will. If you want to wake up, go ahead. If you want to eat, eat. If not, don't. Everyone has let go now. No one is holding you back. Isn't that what you wanted?" "Yes." "And everyone has agreed, they only want what you want, for you to rest. Isn't that beautiful?" "Yes." "Then it is all up to you now. Are you able to let go?" "Yes."

Ling-Long is so beautiful, not just her physical beauty which is obvious, but her Ling-Longability to find the organization amidst the chaos. I told her how much I adored this in her when she came back with a small shelf-unit and a small rug for outside the bathroom door. The shelf unit is perfect

for the food Ma still brings and for our bread and cake runs, and for the purses, and the magazines from our house that Jim has brought with him. Some New Yorks and New Yorkers and the too thick to have bothered Vogue. Cassey has said she will try and look at the pictures in that if I hold it and turn the pages, I know she wants to, but her eyesight is so fuzzy now. I told her I would read to her but she doesn't really want to focus on things, so I save the little bit I know she will for your emails.

The cover of one of the New York magazines is "Why Haven't They Hit Us Again," and I think of the terror we have all gotten used to or not, and how meaningless it is over here, even with China huffing and puffing. And the world's problems, rent, my class grades, will I still know how to balance our bank statements, it all seem as foggy as the television, as all life is, now for her. Bank statements, bills- the running of our life is something that the Alpha in Cassey took over long ago, and the Zed in me was glad to let go off. Funny how I will run from a responsibility faster than a vegetable dinner, and yet in some areas I am fearless. "Face it Lee, Cassey would say, if the house needed a repair, you'd put it off, but if a play of yours needed fixing, you'd be up all night with it.

And when I would misplace things or forget them, and after the already Alzheimer jokes, sometimes from me, sometimes her, she would walk over and find the it or remind me to not. She was so smart, she spent some time a few month ago going over

all the financial websites, and files, and making sure I knew what was which. And two days before we left, she took out a journal that she had been writing in, knowing I would value and keep it, and turned it over to the back, where it was blank, and wrote down all the passwords to everything. And said – put it where you won't lose it. I won't help you find it. Not won't be able to, won't. And I know where I put it, I think.

She has taken a sedative and then the doctors filed in, which is always the least productive (or is it) order. First, the younger crew. Telling us what we already knew: decreasing the steroids and increasing the morphine, gradually with both. Like trains in opposite directions that meet, stay at the same speed, and then move father and farther away. That moment when you can see into the other train, the other person reading, or eating, or staring at you, is there a word for that: Train Warp? A friend of mine once fell in love (or so he said) with a girl that he saw in a train warp and I said, that's tricky, going to need another one of those with exactly the same conditions and coincidences to ever find her again. And I wonder if he did. We are told Dr.Li has an emergency and will be here this afternoon. I hope he won't wake her, but I also hope if he has any questions she is awake to answer them.

And then just as she is about to drift off, about twenty minutes later, he comes in with the head nurse in her red vest to mark her status, and he

says. "I was told you wanted to see me?" "She just took an adivant, she is groggy now. She just wanted you to know that she is ready, and that we have all talked it over." "I know I have read all her charts." "Is there anything else you wanted to ask the doctor sweetheart?" She shook her head no. Off script, he said gently touching her hand: "I have written everything down and we have sped everything up as fast as we can. It is because you are in such a place of understanding, so ready of where you are, that we can do this. It will go much faster now." And then he turned to me, "I am sorry but I have to leave--"

"I understand," I say, to reassure him there was no need to apologize, "we didn't think we would see you until later, if at all."

"If you need to ask me anything, write it down or talk to the nurse here that is"-and he asked how you say head nurse- "ah yes, my head nurse and she will find me, no matter where I am." And I said "did you hear that Cassey?" and she shook her head yes. "Thank you," I said. And they left, and I kissed her head again "does that make you feel better?" and she shook her head yes and then lightly, I kissed her lips.

And Ma and Ling-Long had already gone to lunch, before the doctors and will bring me back something, so for now I sit here with my wife and look at her lying in bed and wonder how fast she is moving and how soon we will all be left behind.

Sent
Subject

Thursday, December 9, 2004 7:33 am
grasping

The lobby was being decorated for Christmas, as I went out to talk with Jim and Jerry. They knew that Cassey wanted no more visitors but they came by to make sure I was all right. We had a very nice talk of wonderful and painful memories about Cassey. Jerry poignantly reminded me of the pacts that he, Jessie and Cassey used to make in their early twenties as brash newly graduated adults that it was better to die young, who wants to live past forty anyway. It was sad for him to realize that he was going to be the last of this trio of live hard die young foolish artists. Jim reminded me that we need to talk to the family about the stages of this process that might not be so peaceful, if she awakens and is in real pain, or if she doesn't know where she is or says something odd or hurtful. I will try to speak to everyone about this, and good to remember how tough the next few weeks or days might be.

They are putting up a plastic Xmas tree, and hanging wreaths and it is always kind of sad to see celebration being unpacked and dusted off, rather than already up and buoyant and bright. But the candy stripers and nurses are all in a good mood, and I see the husband or son that passes me in the hall and always says hello with a smile and nod but no words, as if to say I know, I am in the same place as you. I see that the relative in the bed is about the same age as him so it is probably

his wife, maybe sister. But I had been wondering. How many young people are there here? I see the older folks and it is no easier for them, I know. But are there any others like Cassey, who didn't want old age until she knew it might not be hers? She fought for it then, very hard, and often talked with me of her new found respect for the beauty of life once she got ill. Even just before. She was happiest at forty and that irony was never lost on her.

I looked outside from the lobby and visible over the garden is a huge green campaign poster, number 17, I think. It is right outside the hospital, but it looks down over the garden with a hand raised as if a wave, watching over us all inside.

And over the piano in the lobby is a very poorly painted picture of Jesus as a shepherd with about thirty or forty sheep, all in pastel colors, the painting not the sheep, and some of them are drinking from a pool of water, and some are looking up at him adoringly, and some are just staring straight ahead, dully, sheeplike. And Jesus has a poorly drawn profile of an angle to his head, even though his body is three quarter front, as if the artist couldn't draw anything but a profile. And he has one arm outstretched and holding up his hand as if to say it is time, let us go forth sheep. I have been here almost three weeks and this painting is very large and I have just noticed it now.

And as I say goodbye to Jerry and Jim, off to Jerry's opening night of an avant-garde show he is

costuming and walk back down the hallway to our room, I notice they have decked the hall with some tinsel and small wreaths and some gold, I don't know, angel rings or garland around the light fixtures, the exit signs, and taped to the wall. I am sure the families appreciate it, and probably some of the patients. I am not sure what Cassey would think. She does love a good holiday decoration, took great pride in designing our Christmas cards (in fact I think it was executing it one year when she said "not bad huh, I guess I am a designer now.") And more than one year we even had a tree, and often Christmas lights around the top of our living room. And along the four walls.

She slept most of the day after the doctors left. Woke only to sip water, and I told her that I would be here if she needed anything. Just to let me know. And she nodded okay, and then I said "is it good to sleep, is that what you want, more sleep?" and she nodded again yes. And she had the remote control for the bed in one hand and the clicker for her pain in the other, but still fell fast asleep.

Earlier while she was a bit more alert, I watched, after being reassured it was alright to stay- "we are speaking Mandarin anyway"- as Ling-Long and her sister had a very moving conversation, Ling-Long doing the talking and Cassey nodding. I had no idea what the words were, but through her tears, I knew Ling-Long was saying some of the most important things she has ever said.

Afterwards, again in the lobby as the decoration boxes were just being delivered from their storage and unpacked to see what should go where, Ling-Long and I had the most tender of brother sister conversations. Her English, though strained was stronger than it ever was; she wanted to be understood. And she told me what she had said to Cassey, trusted me enough and we both started crying again. I only say it here because I have heard from a small number of you that you were not sure of the way these last few decisions may have occurred, why hadn't we tried a bit more, or take a slightly more aggressive course of intervention. Please know that I recognize your concern, and so does Cassey and she feels it and must be allowed to feel instead your trust in her final decisions. There is no more time for doubt. I hope that you will see like Ling-Long that Cassey is best served by giving her the gift of understanding. Ling-Long who just a day before could not agree to let her sister "go", now said to her: "I love you, I love you so much, and I want you to be resting. If you go to a restful place, and feel no more of this, I understand. And I will not worry for you, I promise. I want you there. I will never worry again if you are in that peaceful place." And Cassey gave a nod of thanks and recognition and then turned her head and just looked at Ling-Long, and she had let go of the remote control, and she was holding her sister's hand.

Sent
Subject

Thursday, December 9, 2004 9:21 pm
A little balm

Last night there was a wonderful hour, maybe hour and a half, about 9:00pm, with Cassey awake and even eating a piece of Jia's cake. Remi and Chien-te were here, and back in NY, Jeremy, who has been the most worried about her wanting to be allowed to let go, disobeyed her wish to send gifts, sent a huge bouquet of flowers that arrived. I am glad she was awake to see them, they were very lovely and she said "beautiful" when we brought them close for her to see and smell. Very large assortment, artfully arranged, orchids, lilies, some sunflowers, and a strange kind of multi-colored candy corn looking thing off to one side. They snuck in and spent the night in her room, but her vision is poor now and she probably can't see them so well, but can smell them. Though with oxygen they probably can't stay in the room very long, and she doesn't want her room to "look like a funeral" which is how she feels too many flowers and plants and gifts look.

Someone else asked what they could send, or do, for Cassey and so I will repeat Madame's wishes: go to a great fancy dinner, buy yourself that thing you've always wanted and won't, do it now, know while you are doing it, she is smiling. That is what you can do for her and that is the charity she most wants to give. That is her wish.

I feel bad that I can't be there with Jeremy to help him understand. His grief is so strong and he feels so far away. He was her first partner, the man that grew up literally with her as her only other serious romantic relationship and first love. His wife, is expecting a baby, and he has so many reasons to be joyful, but this must be so hard, how can you be feel both? But Cassey was eating and sitting up, and I am sure Remi who arrived as she opened her eyes and the flowers came, was probably thinking, she is not very different than yesterday.

But it was a very difficult day and an even more difficult night. Twice when she awoke to sip water to stop the dryness in her throat and mouth, she lost her breath and panicked. She regained herself and relaxed, but each time, I know she is thinking this is it; is this it? We have tried talking about that anxiety and letting it just be, walking toward rather than running from, but when you are gasping for air-I am sure that let it be sounds even more overly simplistic than when healthy. There was a quiet moment after the second attack, later in the early morning, around four, when she said to me, "I'm okay. And I said, "love, are you sure?" And she nodded. And I added: "I'm right here you know, I'm not going anywhere." And I took her hand and began to rub it because I am sure clinching the remote for hours is tiring and I realized her dainty hands, that used to slip almost through my "paws" where now puffy and doughy feeling, as though she had become a laborer or farmer these last few

days, but as I rubbed them, she calmed and went back to sleep.

There is another loudspeaker calling from nowhere, and the sun is brightly shining. I know, because as Ba came to drop off the laundry and let me shower, I also snuck out to the lobby to eat a bowl of cereal. I know my chewing is too loud for her. The light was streaming in, which it can't do most of the day in the room. The curtains are closed so she will rest easier even though I begged her to let some sun in thinking it would help her, and sometimes Ma being Ma does it anyway. But for a few minutes as she slept, I sat in the sun, in the alcove near the garden. And every once in awhile, the rounded big glass panels would pop. Loudly. Either expansion from the heat, or invisible- because there was no splatter pattern- kamikaze bugs, or garden nymphs, I know not for sure why, but it happened at least five times while I sat there fifteen minutes, a loud pop, and I thought of the knocking in Shakespeare, always a signal of death.

Remi is due today and we await her arrival, and the hall lady is back to the red and black knit top, and I realized that I am the hall American, and I am wearing the same four outfits rotated by the washing and she is wondering the same about me. I washed Cassey's face gently, her hands, and neck, and placed a cloth on her forehead to stop the pounding. And then because I promised her lips would never be dry, a little of the balm. And the morphine buzzer, like on a game show, white

and with a push button, does not sound once but three short beeps- beep,beep,beep every time she presses it. And there is one more sound that has been added to the mix, especially before and after her moments of distress, but thankfully not in her deepest sleep, and that is the wheeze like a small squeeze toy and the character in Toy Story. This happened before when her lungs where at their worst before her procedure in New York to drain them. It is faint enough not to keep her awake, but loud enough to hear, and any other time this wheeze would be used for comedic effect, but now it sounds like sorrow itself.

Sent **Friday, December 10, 2004 2:41 am**
Subject **repetition**

I worried a bit that these emails were becoming repetitive, as the days become outwardly so similar. But I know that if you are inside them, they are remarkably distinct and full of their own tangible and intangible variations. So I continue to record.

No sign of Remi and it is almost noon. Ma and Ba came back and though Cassey isn't asleep she is in that place of wishing she was, so she is not quite awake either. Every once and awhile she adjusts her tube or burps loudly. But mostly she is still.

Did I tell you that to help her with the gas and uncomfortably recently I taught her how to burp on cue? An actor thing or class clown trick, which

lame performers sometimes even write on their resume as a special skill- I guess for beer commercials or some such thing. I showed her, and would have given a large sum of money for the video, how you puff out your cheeks like those frogs in the Disney wildlife swamp film they used to show in school, puff them up and then swallow the air, puff, swallow, repeat, and once you have enough air in you, it is easier to belch. It took her a while to learn to swallow the air, understandable under the give circumstances, but now when she needs to, she can burp with the best of them.

Ma and Ba were hovering, Ba checking the vitamin IV, good it is fine, Ma just straightening things and I noticed that I was sitting close to Cassey on the stool, and had been most of the night. So forgive the director in me, he hasn't gotten out for awhile, but I motioned for Ma to sit where I had been, knowing it would be better, and then because she was just sitting there helplessly, I took her hand and led it to Cassey's and she took hold of it and fighting her tears kissed it and then held on. Cassey never opened her eyes but she seemed to know, and Ma wanted to speak, to say hundreds of Ma things, but she knew it was time to be silent, and this went on for about five minutes, which is an eternity for Ma to be still, is for me too.

And the moment worthy of the oldest, most artful painting was broken because Ma couldn't stand it anymore, Cassey's nose tube had slipped a touch and it needed to be fixed, so as she let go, and

with the other hand Cassey reached up and beat her to it. The two perfectionists had sensed the same disarray and the younger was still the quicker.

Ma got up shortly after that and left the room, and I followed and she wanted to cry, was already tearing I could tell. But the Hall Lady was speaking to some doctors and she didn't want to interrupt her friend, so I led her into the kitchen, of all places, and then held her up from behind as she let go of so much more of her steadily mounting grief. And I know the image is unfortunate but I thought of the Cassey's catheter bag and how we have to empty it over and over, and here was Ma, who I know full well is crying herself to sleep every night, and still there are not enough tears. And finally she collected herself and patted my arm, and I went back in, and Ba was adjusting her sleeve making sure she wasn't cold, and his tears were lighter but no less weighted down. He asked me if I was hungry, both in Taiwanese and in sign language, he holds imaginary chop sticks and brings them back and forth to his mouth. I said later and pointed to the clock and said yi or san. One or two. And he said, "Okay, Okay," he knows this word, more than I know in his tongue, and always repeats it twice, and they left to go get lunch. And it is almost one and still no sign of Remi.

Janet also disobeyed and showed up with lunch and juice to bribe her way in. She understood that I had to honor Cassey's wishes, and I sat with her in the lobby, or sat watching her as she chatted with

Ma who had returned. I thought of our conversation yesterday, Jim, Jerry and I about how I hate funerals. I say how the impatient me, who doesn't even like weddings, and then to have to have fun at some ceremonies like some cultures require you to, I have never gotten it. And Jim said he always felt the same way but he has come to respect that funerals are for the living-- And I interrupted proving my point of impatience, and said "exactly, all these people pretending they are there to respect the deceased and what they are doing is releasing their own grief or guilt and then there is the pressure to feel, to out cry, out mourn, out flower, stay the longest. And after I vented, Jim calmly finished his thought, "and what I have learned is that they are a very potent way for us to postpone our most important grief until we are able to feel it, can process it. Busy ourselves with the arrangements, get through that, let that even exhaust us, and then, when most tired, or most open, we can get on with the real work." And as I watched Janet talk to Ma I realized that is what she and Ma were doing, feeling a bit for each other, helping each other, getting through this day until the real work could be done.

And I thank Janet for the help later, when she talked with me, for distracting Ma so sweetly. And she said, are you kidding, "I am happy to be around her. She is the real mother that I never had." And just earlier she had told Ma how proud she was of being such a good mother to her daughters, and I had said "please, you're talking to

the uber Ma, super Ma, and if there was a T-shirt that said it, I would buy it for her." And Ma said thank you to both of us, tough she probably had no idea what uber meant, and Ba tag teamed with her so he could go run some errands. I was left listening as Janet told me of the disfunction in her family, the inability of her mother to love and the so sad examples. I thought of how strong she must be to have not turned into a monster. And brave. And I told her how proud I was of her. And I realized again what good taste my wife has in friends, not a rotten egg amongst them, on the contrary such beauty and heart. And how lucky Cassey and I have been with our families, small speed bumps that might be there notwithstanding. And after Janet and I felt closer, another important step in helping us both get to "the work ahead," I told her to come by and chat whenever she wanted, but to please understand that I had to honor Cassey's wish.

She acknowledged and I left her reflecting in the lobby and walked headfirst into a bad panic attack in the room and Ma was overwhelmed and Cassey was worried. And I told her to "slow her breathing down, please, it was okay" and I rang for the nurse and a sedative, and as we were waiting, I said, "it's okay, you're okay. Everyone is with you. Ma is here and she held your hand earlier did you feel it?" And surprisingly, she shook her head no. "She held your hand for a long time and told you it was okay. It was all right." And so I took matters in hand, as it were, again. "Ma," and I motioned her

to come to Cassey to rerun the scene. Ma knew her part and she took Cassey's other hand and as Cassey fought against the air, and it seemed to help. And the sedative finally came, and as she began to drift back to sleep, Ma kept waking her up by futzing with her gown and her fingernail, and the tissue box, and the remote control wire needing straightening, so I whispered "let's let her sleep now." And I made the signal. Hands cupped by your head leaning and eyes closed, the international sign for sleep.

And that is where we are now. Ba having returned and Ma explaining how frightened she was. And now Jia and her husband Jia -fu (husband of elder sister) who is back from a long business trip in Vietnam. And the men sit on my sofa/bed staring at her as she sleeps, and ma is repeating the panic attack story for Jia just outside. And still no sign of Remi.

And the men leave and Jia comes in and Cassey is still too awake and the nurse gives her more drugs, and I motion for Jia to stop standing, and sit on the stool. Please. And she like Ma just sits. So I hand Cassey to her, stunned by the symmetry of all this, and then the tears and the connection and this time Cassey's eyes open, and Jia tells her many things. And Cassey adjusts the tube in her nose and listens. And Jia-fu is brought in and he speaks to her and I'm not sure if it is right for him to take her hand, so I just watch. And Jia takes the hand herself and then her husband does too. And I think

she is almost asleep, or she is trying now to sleep. And the room clears. And I pray that Remi will come, please come, and will do this too. Anything to help my dear wife finally let go, not to have to live this again and again.

Sent Friday, December 10, 2004 6:32 am
Subject

On my hall-walk workout which believe me is like when I had to do pull-ups for the Standardized Physical Fitness Test in high school (do they still have those, an all day grueling US govt. test of who is a nerd and who isn't) and I could only do one. Hardly a workout but we do what we can. And on my walk, I notice that the other side of the hospice is almost all double and some triple rooms, and I cannot begin to fathom this most private of events, the end of your life, having to go through that with complete strangers reacquainting themselves to their souls on the other side of the curtain. I understand if you are having a surgery or a face lift, but this? And I remember Ling-Long saying that if you don't have a private room the national insurance pays for it, but a private room costs about 50-75 dollars a day. And to think that most of these good people make this ultimate decision based on income just breaks my heart.

And the other young husband passes me and says in perfect English hello and I say hello back and I know the next time we pass we will exchange names.

And I will probably not leave the room any more because upon returning she was again in so much pain trying to catch her breath. They have switched her to an oxygen mask now, and she has more sedatives. And they will increase the morphine. Her oxygen level is better but her blood pressure is very high. This may be the last time she is awake, and I have told her how much everyone loves her, that I love her, that is all right to just let go and I will let them finish working over her, and go back and just hold her hand. I hope this is a bad patch but then again for her maybe it is best not to hope that. We love you all and I will speak your names to her over and over and let her know you are with her too.

Lee

Sent **Friday, December 10, 2004**
Subject **another day**

Cassey made it through a difficult night, though once we understood the level of sedation for her; it was probably harder for the family and I. I will go into greater detail when appropriate, and when I am not a member of the hour here, thirty minutes there, sleep club. Suffice it to say I have had my first five minutes alone with her now and have to worry that she shouldn't be woken again from her sleep as so many have. No one is being purposefully hurtful; there just are too many ways to

handle a most difficult situation, and very little consultation with me as to how to carry things out.

The blood family is in the lobby, meeting to discuss a change of burial site that they feel would be more appropriate than resting with dear Jessie. The wish is to create a sort of family resting spot that all can be in. Though it is understood that elder sister would, when the time comes rest with her family, so custom here has it's flexibility and still so traditional boundaries. The only hitch is Cassey is unable to respond to this last minute plan and I must make the decision to honor the family and obey. I sit with that and know it is what I will do, but regret that there is any part of her that might not want this change. Jim was very helpful late last night, as was Jerry, (so glad to have them) in coming to the realization that she would most want her family honored, she proved this by coming back here to make her peace, she knew it wouldn't be outwardly "easier" but ultimately for her family and her soul it would be.

I am going back to her now. And have told her how much all of you are with her, holding her, and me.

Lee

Sent Friday, December 10, 2004 10:41 pm
Subject no such thing as rhetorical

I know these emails have slowly turned into much more than "here is what is happening" and please forgive me for that. And for any disrespect to anyone's privacy or feelings. My sharing with you has been more than helpful, it has allowed me to endure.

The head nurse today, I am sure puzzled at this man who sits and types and says so little and never seems to be without this silver tablet, who is this man, asked me what I was writing and I told her I was letting all of my wife's friends at her other home know how she was, and how much she loved them, but that was only part of the truth. I was trying to understand. Through you. There is so much here that is not understandable and yet we try.

Why, why, why take someone as special as Cassey? And why make her suffer? Why? Why have the family deny right up to the end, so she is not given weeks of peace, of respect of her wishes, only these last few unconscious hours? And then why even then while half awake at best, struggling for breath, ask her where she would like to rest for all time? Why?

Why does it take death for any of us to truly begin to understand life, why? I read somewhere or maybe just need to believe I did, that there are is

no such thing as a rhetorical question. Every need to question begs for a need to be answered. If not by others, by ourselves.

I finally learned the name of the nurse that we like so much, our favorite I tell her, and that is saying a lot because we like so many here, though I am not sure she understands my compliment. Her name is Duh Hweih, and she is the sort of awkward shaped one, much taller than the others. The other night, the last fairly calm night, I felt the need to tell her whom she was caring for. But a panic episode settled in and it was forgotten somehow. And the next day one of the day nurses, also a dear, got the brunt of that need. She asked if there was anything else she could do after we bathed Cassey to stop infection, after this nurse had poured warm water from an old fashioned kettle and scrubbed between my wife's legs, and we changed her now disposable panties, I showed her the pictures of dear Cassey healthy, the few I have, the wonderful shots of her in the Guggenheim gift book that was made for her. And Gregory Peck and her on the bike. I am not sure she knew why Cassey was riding with such a handsome man, or wearing a bustier in another, there was no time to explain photo-shop and goofy office love, but I wanted her to know my wife, and I said so, and I told her what she was missing, and how funny and kind and opinionated this woman in the bed was. And she understood somewhat. I think. She tried. But I never got to show Duh Hweih, why?

And last night when I left my wife's side so as not to fill the room with a poisonous fight, as too many relatives began filing in and staring, just as she begged me not to let happen, and then the nieces and nephews came in, again a wish violated that she begged us all to honor- So I left the room, and sat in the hall asking why, and the nurse assigned to us that evening, whom I honestly don't recall ever seeing before last night, sat with me and touched my arm as I told her why I was not "all right" in response to her tender question of are you? And as I sobbed and explained and sobbed and explained, and she tried to reassure by re-explaining the already too clear cultural differences, I thought why must we accept traditions that are hurtful and selfish. I think of all the injustice in the world, the treatment of women, even in this culture, the hoarding of wealth while others have nothing, and the death in the name of honoring of deities, and all of our wants to do what we feel is right even as we know it isn't and I thought why? And why did someone, whose name I did not even know, this stranger like out of a too real run through of the final scene from "Streetcar," why were they placed there to comfort me when I had family right in the same building? And so I sit typing as Cassey gulps for air, though her spirit is sleeping, still she gulps, and just now she moaned, and I know that there will be no answers. Ever. Folks will offer their opinions, and philosophers will live their lives theorizing, and artists will examine, and the best we can hope for is "well maybe this." But

no certainty. That only comes for those like my beautiful wife. When they let go. And that is the only "why" that matters any more. And I know she will have her answer when she is ready. But when will that be and why? Why, my love, why?

Sent **Saturday, December 11, 2004 6:34 am**
Subject **talk to her**

I broke my vows. I promised Cassey that I would not let people watch over her. And now I am. I promised Cassey that I would not let the nieces and nephews in the room, and I did. I didn't promise but witnessed the arrangement that she would be with Jessie, and I am going to let that not happen. And I reread what was written on the pad and she did write: "it's not important but that would be nice." That is not an absolute request, like the other two vows that I have already broken. But she did not say put me where you want to either, or I want to be close to my family. Which she could have said if that was her wish. But it wasn't important, and I had made it. And I was weeping just a moment ago talking to Jerry and Jim that I felt in some way that I was failing her, but that I had realized the most important failure was dishonoring the family. And somehow I was dishonoring the family still by being so angry with them. So I was sitting with her and not because the doctor had come by this morning and said how important it was to remember to talk as though she could hear in the room, because she could and can. And no

one in the family had told me this, or the doctor, it happened in the hall, but Katherine snuck into the room long enough to update me. Yet we knew that already, Cassey and I, had been chatting though out the night. So there I was with her and asking "what is the way out? Cassey?" I was conferring with her Almodavar style, just wanting her advice again, and apologizing for letting her down, even as Woody was playing in the room with one of my Incredibles toys, somewhat oblivious to my tears. "What do I do? You always ask me that, what do I do? And forgive me for even troubling you, for being troubled, I am supposed to be helping you. Am I the one being selfish, by caring too much?"

A moment earlier, I made the mistake of breaking another vow, and leaving the room to talk to Jim and Jerry and Katherine who said they would be there for me if I needed them. I did not want to leave Cassey, but the room was too full of my resentment and I needed to try and talk some out. Chien-te had bolted into the room and he tried to wake his sister, mistaking her moan for conversation, He shook her shoulder and tried to sit her up, and I said please, please, don't wake her. Then knowing he was hurt and probably furious, I handed the water cup and large q-tip we wet the gauze covering her mouth, which is there to both keep her mouth moistened, and to block some of the room air so the oxygen in the nose tube will be more effective. I got the nurse to switch back to the nose tube once she was asleep, and her level

stabilized, and I am sure she is more comfortable than with the hateful and overly negotiated how to make it fit face mask. I wanted to let him know that I wanted him to be with his sister, just not wake her to more pain. But this seemed to depress Chien-te this watering of his sisters bandaged mouth, and he left.

Then Ma tried to open the curtain and I said, "Ma, please don't let in the light, she needs to sleep now." Remember I was the one four days ago begging her to go into the sun and shifting the room for her to get as much as possible. I so didn't want to comment, I know it was like the screen door all over again, but the opening of the curtain to let in light when someone needed to sleep just seemed so unnecessary. But again everyone trying to help and me being the one to advocate. So I left the room and went to talk. Figuring talking to some conscious folks might be the right way to handle this. And that was a mistake. Not because I was breaking another of my promises, but because the talking quickly turned to blaming. It was obvious after a few moments into the discussion that Jerry and Jim were sure that I was over reacting to a situation that I had no right to 1.) expect would be any different given the fact that I was an outsider and was dealing with a big culture gap, and 2.) was obviously spiraling down a deep pit I think Jim said, because of my grief and inability to see what I was doing or feeling. Gone was the listening and understanding of just last night, it was clear in their eyes I was, or my expectations of, was

the problem. The first round of what turned into a argument rather than a healing exchange ended with Jerry saying my behavior might be killing Cassey. Now, trust me, that did feel like being tossed down into a pit, but not by my behavior but by my stupidity in thinking this discussion would help.

But I came back for round two, because I couldn't let Jerry feel like that was the last thing said before Cassey died, I knew that would be too upsetting, and because I wanted them to know, and this was so hard to say and was causing me to shake with emotion- that I am painfully aware that I have been navigating a very slippery slope here, yes because of cultural differences, but I had held Ma and Ba's hand even yesterday afternoon, and I have cried with Ling-Long and what changed everything was not my behavior but these new demands and shows of lack of respect and they came during ground zero, when the world had shifted, and Cassey's end was near, and it was not me changing them, only reacting to those changes. And then I said that all it would take is a show of respect for me and for Cassey. To understand that the room in the morning is not just hers, it is also ours, where I am sleeping with my wife. And that when huge decisions are being made that it might be proper to include me, include me, not inform me. Jim argued that I was asking for the impossible and I said that I don't want to live in a world where that decency and respect are impossible, and that even the

Taiwanese nurse, a native that held my hand, understood past her cultural difference. And I said when is it ever going to be seen as selfish? Not a cultural right? That sometimes we act with what we feel is best but it is best for us not her, and their response hurt me to no end, he and Jerry both said, "what do you think you are doing?" You are being selfish." And I let it land and knock the wind out of me and then I said, "I left my life, I came here and fed her pills when I knew she was too sick to swallow to honor her father, and had refused pills in NY, I sat in a room with children and people staring, and I am going to let her be buried wherever the family wants, how am I being selfish?" "You don't see that your anger and frustration are selfish, and I said I am working on letting it go Jim it just happened this takes time. And he said, "you're not, look at you. You are shaking." I said "my writing my emails is selfish. She wanted me to keep things more private and I said it helps me and it helps your friends, (and I am not sure which mattered to her or is more true to me) but she said she understood. Just keep them short. And I am being selfish to write what I need. That I can see. Even through my grief. And mind you right now, that is about all I should be focusing on, my grief and Cassey's death. But I said, I am not being selfish to expect that I am to be given just a bit of understanding." "You don't see that you are"- again the paradox, the culture can't give you, but is giving you, you just don't see- and I said "Jim I am not talking about Ma and Ba, I know they won't see, I am talking about my brothers and

sisters, I am talking about Remi, she lived with us, and now she can't look me in the eye"- and that's when it dawned on me- and Jim said "no one is not talking to you, they are respecting in their own way"- and I said "This is not about fried rice, I am talking about being there to explain a doctor's decision, I am talking about including me as if I wasn't a guest, and a member of the family," and then somehow-so difficult to recount the emotions were huge- oh yes, because I said "I am not just grieving here I am living, deeply and profoundly, and I have never felt more alive through this process", and Jim said you have no idea how you are really feeling or something that was truly trying to be concerned but it was reduced to defining me- and this was his word- as paranoid, that I was sounding deeply paranoid. Jim looked even more concerned at my reaction- but he had it so wrong, no I had it so wrong- I wasn't deeply troubled on my own, it had dawned on me how to pull myself out, talk to her, not them. And I excused myself by saying thank you, I know you wanted only to help, but this is not helping, and they said how can we help? That is all we want to do, and I thought you have no idea how you aren't and how you have, both thoughts, but not by blaming me- talk to her.

So I went down the hall and first held Jia who was crying and said are you okay, and she said yes, and with Tang Mama and Ma and Remi and Wenning I said I need to talk to you. And Remi started to, I think, go, thinking I meant them and she could still avoid, and I said "Remi please, I need to talk

with you is that okay?" and then as I was shaking from grief that outside my wife's deathbed, I had to explain myself and my desire to honor her wishes above all else, but that to hurt my sister and my family was not acceptable, as I took the blame to try and release the tension, we finally began to talk and talk and Remi did say she was sorry and said she told me about the burial when she knew, and I said Remi it is not that, I believe you, I don't think you withheld, I think you didn't understand or couldn't advocate for me and your sister's wishes to be better included. And I told her all of the ways that I felt slighted and apologized for, all of the ways that I had lashed out because of those slights, and told her to please apologize to any of the family and she said she would, and those outside seemed to understand and the beauty of communication was finally allowed to unfurl and to rescue us all. And I said, both out in the hallway and then back inside, to Cassey, holding her hand and before in the hall to her spirit if about, that I was sorry for any pain that I brought to her when she should be feeling so free, terribly sorry and I only was trying to honor and obey her wishes- so, so sorry.

And Woody was still playing with my toys and Brian was staring at me talking to his Goo-goo and then I sat in the room with Remi and after we were alone with Cassey, I asked if she needed time with her sister, had she spoken to her. She said she had, told her what a weird but great sister she was, and how she had always looked up to her, and we were

sitting so close, and I said "have you told her she can go? That it is okay?" And she shook her head yes. And I said "good, because she was so worried that you didn't think she fought hard enough. Thank you for letting her know and not being afraid to." And a few minutes later Remi was sitting again with her, and I lay down to get some much need sleep.

I awoke only a half hour later, and Remi was sitting reading one of the brochures for the new burial grounds or for the funeral, I couldn't tell exactly which, glossy, so probably the burial site, and she said the family had wanted me to come look at it, and I said I'm not sure I am ready for that yet, (It still felt, though I didn't say it, a little too much like going out in the driveway and looking at the car that was bought and picked out without you and after the fact) but tell them thank you. And I meant it. I would try to when I could. And the most sad but amazing thing, Remi and I and the nurse gave Cassey a sponge bath and changed her gown drenched in sweat. Brother and sister, not able to look at each other earlier, taking turns cradling her, and cleaning, dressing and holding, making sure her head was being held.

And Cassey was still breathing with great laboring breaths. Remi (as Ba had earlier) asked me what I wanted for dinner, and I said please pick me up something, I don't want to leave her and Remi trying to be light said "it is not a sin," and I said "please understand it is my way," and she shook

her head okay. "And a juice please." And after she left, I went over to her, I wanted to spend a bit more time with my wife. Make sure she understood. And I did. To talk to her. While I still could.

Sent **Saturday, December 11, 2004 8:01 pm**
Subject **dawn**

There are good moans and then there are the ones that sound like gasping, groping, as if choking. Ling-Long and I have come to accept all of them, though the worst sounds still make us jump. And on the exhale, she often speaks a sound through her sigh. And it changes, but is not speech or a language that even seems like speech through a fog. Nothing as dramatic as that. Every once and awhile when I kiss her, I want to believe that good sigh is because she knows I am near. But even when I am sitting on my bed it comes. So this is about her dreams, and journey, not connecting to us anymore, or so it seems. Yesterday, Ma rushed in when everyone thought that Cassey was calling for her. They hadn't spent a night listening to the sounds, and like me wanted to believe. She is under steady sedation, no need for the remote control, and that was never explained to me or Ling-Long until late last night. No need for us to worry that she might wake up if we weren't diligent. It wasn't ever explained, though it must have been to somebody, just not me, that with this change of medication she won't be able to wake up. No need to scold Chien-te or for him to shake her and try. He wasn't told either. But it is clear now.

These muscle relaxers are very strong, she can struggle in her state of sleep, as she did at first while Remi and I and the nurse undressed her to wash. But after calming her reflexes or distant will, whichever it is, she was able to let us clean her, And her head grew very limp, Had to be held. But she was very calm
And bless Ling-Long for not wanting to leave even though the night was going to be rough. And even though again it was not discussed, I was glad to not be alone, and I understood the why stay, even asked Remi to please stay if she wanted. So Ling-Long and I took turns and caught some rest, and it is dawn, and she is sleeping, and dear Cassey is still with us, diminished thought her body is, her will is still here,

And I open the curtains to let some light into the room because Remi has asked that there be a difference between night and day for her. And so I can turn off the overhead display light. I don't fully understand the need to let her while she is sleeping have sunlight on her, and the air from outside that she thought smelled not so clean, but I can see a beauty in that, and it is Remi's wish and I accept it. And it allowed me to finally to switched off the harsh light that I had left on all night, that had not been my wish.

It was turned on because Ling-Long wanted to check on her sister through the night. I was switching on the yellow lamplight which had been on every night since we had been here and said

"we can make it very bright see?", and wouldn't that be enough. I wanted her to have rest and if she could sense light, this might not concern her. But I had waited until Ling-Long was in the bathroom. Not out of any plan, but because I was afraid that I shouldn't speak, but then remembered it was best to try. I said this to Remi, and she said "we talked about this, Lee. This is just what we talked about." And I said "we talked about talking, to reach understandings together. Please look at her, she looks like she is on display. It is midnight, can't we make it just a bit better?" "She can't see, Lee, and Ling-Long wants to." But we could move this light over, the softer one" But here came the blows. "You are never going to change are you? Never." "Remi, what isn't going to change is that I will have to do it your way. And here we are again, and I will let it be, so that we won't do this in front of her anymore, I can't bare it." And the light stayed on and Remi sat for another few minutes and said goodnight with the faintest air of taunt or apology or both. But the light was still on, and the tears were on my face, and I thought of how Cassey said please don't let me be "on view" and maybe it was irrational worry, but it was mine, and therefore just as valid as anyone else's wish to help, and so I said to Ling-Long, "please don't be upset with me, and maybe I am being irrational, but is there any way you can listen to me." And she said, "don't cry Lee, why are you crying?" And I told her what happened while she was in the bathroom, and she said how sorry she was and of course we could try another light, and then Chien-te came in

for another visit. And sat with her, so the light needed to wait, and then it became too much of a symbol of the need to just let go, so foolishly I let it stay on all night. She was like in a display case, and I decided it was because she was the most special and needed to be showed off, and I could live with that, as I held her and dipped the water to her gauze.

And Ling-Long had understood, so I was not losing my mind, or being paranoid, she understood that a husband could not want his wife to have too much light on what might be her last night on earth, and we cared for her throughout that night, and I opened the curtains for the dawn, and now the overhead light is off. And if this was a movie, the moaning would have stopped, and she would have sighed, and felt better, but this is not a movie and the noise does not stop. But to have argued so quickly right after bathing her, together, to have not seen the need to understand each other, how are we going to find that? How much letting go, is it going to take and still have me to be allowed to be here?

And right after typing that, Ma and Ba came in and Ba motioned to me to pack the DVD up so he could take it home. And I thought of how I said to Remi at some point last night that maybe we should take some of her clothes home, that we know she won't use, and so I understood the need to remove the things from the room that might not be needed, but it wasn't even nine, and we were

in pajamas, and I helped him unhook the player and he moved all of the toys and the books, and Ma was taking things out of the refrigerator that she had brought, and I thought how much? How much am I going to have to let go. This is packing up the room, and she is not gone yet. How much...?

And the room is full of sunlight and the nurse is taking her blood pressure and the results are announced in Mandarin, all react, and I think her poor heart has been racing for days, beating faster than a heart should bear, and I forget my worry and give it over to her and I think how much? How much letting go will it take? And I tell her, whatever she wants, whenever she wants, it is okay.

And Ling-Long tells me to get up and get dressed her heart is beating slowly now, not fast, and that the nurse says it may be anytime now, and I need to be dressed.

From Lee Gundersheimer <lg50@nyu.edu>
Sent Saturday, December 11, 2004 11:23 pm
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Subject

Cassey passed away peacefully with family
holding her today 12:15pm
Dec.12 Taiwan time.

WEEK SIX - DECEMBER 12-18

Sent Monday, December 13, 2004 10:12 am
Subject A spirit must not worry

How can I possibly convey to you the deep sadness of the last two days? The family is all, most better than I, trying to be strong for Cassey, to reassure her spirit that we are not worried. As I have said before she was more frightened of what her passing would do to all that loved her than the thought of death itself. She handled that final, and again emphasizing the finality for those who questioned- decision, to sleep rather than struggle for no gain, with such dignity and bravery that I carry that moment with me in my deepest despair. I had such a brave, decent, gorgeous wife.

May I ask that out of respect for Cassey's privacy, please do not forward this email, and do not read on if you do not wish to know the details of her passing and the early stages of her days of ceremony. But so that I have a record forever, and because I know Ba and Ma have shared these details with family and friends, and we have talked about them, I will do so with my family and those I know she would want to have had with her. Also so that I will not have to bore you with my weepy voice when I see you, the one that reminds me so much of my father after his second heart attack, he was so weepy, two words out then tears, two more than more tears. His voice sounded like perpetual crying for months and now I know why. I

cry when I speak sometimes from sadness, sometimes utter joy for the gifts I had all rolled into one. But this weepy voice makes for very slow storytelling so:

I will try to do justice to the beauty of the ceremonies so far. Yesterday in this email. Today in the next. I know that those of you that know me and my not so fondness for funerals or any public ritual, will understand how I thought I would be grappling with my emotions. And Cassey and I shared an equal measure of "the doesn't make sense to us" about traditions, witness our wedding, and it is one of the things that made us so wonderfully able to grow together. "They will make such a big deal of all this Lee, please help me to have them not go overboard." But it is through Remi, not me, her wishes are being conveyed, and I thanked her for that. The family is doing their best to trim many things and I am honoring any decision. I carry with me Cassey's infinite respect for her family, to honor and cherish them even if not always obey, and so I have thrown myself into every moment fully and in so many cases I have been deeply moved.

Her death unlike the two days of physical ordeal before, was so peaceful, once her body agreed that it had struggled enough, her passing was calm and measured. So strong of heart, she kept a pulse forty-five minutes after her last breath. There had been such a shuffle of family that morning, and I, when unsure they hovered and knew she hated

that- I encouraged each to sit with her, hold her hands, feet, touch her, and we all took turns talking of our love. Ma swore that she was proud of her and that she would not worry. Ba as well. We all did. It was odd that the actual moment, right as she stopped her labored breathing, Chien-te and I were holding her hands. Such a strong female presence, her sisters and Ma and Tang Mama but by coincidence and others leaving the room to rest their grief, my brother and I and Cassey were alone in the room as she stopped her breathing that had become fainter and fainter those last hours. As her heart slowly stopped others rushed in, poor Ling-Long who had slept there both nights only to leave for the time it took to pick up Asia because she had no one else available, came in right before the last beat. And with a bright sunny day streaming in on her, she was gone.

It is customary for the immediate family to sit with the deceased for at least four hours before she or he make their journey to the morgue/funeral home. This like so many other parts of the ceremony are to help her spirit adjust to this new place and feeling. To ease her fear. I loved the beauty of that concern. In Taiwan the basic needs are part of the socialized health system, and there are central county services but one can hire and lavishly provide many additional ceremonies and levels of care. So, except for Ma and Ba and Jia's family out of respect for the tradition of elders not seeing her until the ceremony, we all sat with her talking, the family made phone calls to her friends

to talk with her, holding the phone to her ear and reminding them that she can still hear and last wishes and remarks were made. Across the hall a more traditional service was taking place, lost of group chanting and wailing, and down the hall a more Christian service with carols and Amazing Grace. Remi said that they wanted to keep it simple for Cassey. Just us attending to her, making sure her lips had a nice shade of lipstick, always one of her stated worries, tenderly sisterly appeased. She was draped in a beautiful golden piece of silk with prayers written on it to help ease her fears. And a small black recorder was placed near her, playing a chant to help ease her worry over and over. I had said to Jim not two days earlier that the thought of sitting with her would be agony, that I dreaded the moment of death, and he said the stillness would be awesome. And he was right. Yes, it was agony emotionally, but it was also after so much struggle so calming.

I said to my sisters and they agreed, that Cassey had spent years preparing me for this. She slept almost every night that I knew her on her back. I know of few others except those nursing a lumbar injury, that find this position comfortable. I had often, once she was ill and had woken up in the middle of the night, thought I might have already lost her, until I saw a breath. She looked so much like that now. Getting a good rest. So when I could allow myself not to collapse from fatigue and pain of loss, I spent time talking with her about how brave she'd been and what a beautiful and

peaceful passing it was and how I hoped she would continue to be brave until she mastered this new phase. But somehow I also felt Cassey might already be hop skipping about the universe, checking in on everybody loving her new found freedom. There was an animated short I once saw called Jumping about a girl who woke up one day with the ability to leap up into the air from place to place, wherever she wanted, and as she got better and better she could jump not only from place to place but one point in time to another, backwards and forwards. This was the image I had of dear Cassey, so happy to be free of pain, and able to skip and be silly like she did sledding with Martha in the snow.

After 5:30 the priest and the helpers from the funeral home came and we all immediately stood and bowed our respect. He wrote her name on a sheet of yellow paper that was affixed to a small beautifully colored paper box that would hold her soul for the journey so her body could be cared for. The first-born son is supposed to hold this soul box, and if no children, the next in succession is her spouse. I was very touched that the family did not care that I was not of the faith, and said of course you should, is that all right? Thank you I said, it is more than all right. I'd be honored. A piece of incense was added to help guide her. Her name was also written on a large yellow ornate sign with a kite like tassel tails. This sign was affixed to a leafy bamboo shaft that resembles the palm used on Palm Sunday. This sign is held by the youngest to let

the spirit know where to go and who to follow, Remi was asked to hold that after the priest waved it beautifully over her for her spirit to see. There were soft chants and a bell accompanying to call her forth and assure her it is all right and two coins were thrown to see if the deceased agrees to follow. They must land in the right combination or we must ask what is troubling, and then throw again. It is considered a very good sign if the agreement comes quickly and Madame did not let us down. She didn't even mind that her brother tossed one coin under the sofa, it was quickly lifted, and the priest assured us she was ready after only one throw. There was a procession out the small chapel, Remi with her sign, then me with her soul, and the others following and into the van-like hearse waiting. Everyone rides with the deceased, and I was sitting right next to her, holding her soul box so she would not be alarmed to be not in her body. This was a little disconcerting, she is now wrapped, and right next to me, but it help when it was explained by Remi, that we must guide her now, ease her fear, help her know where we are going. It is like a dark tunnel at first for the spirits and they get worried and lost and this would bring her much more pain again. That's all you had to tell me. I chimed right in with everyone else, we are leaving the hospital now, and we are turning right, going over a bridge. We all took turns letting her know which way to go as we journeyed across the entire city to the county funeral home about a hours drive away. If we passed a big milestone, a bridge, getting on or off an expressway, the priest

would ring the bell once and announce and we would all repeat. Remi was very gracious to translate every single one of the priest's guideposts so I could join in.

We got to the funeral home which is about two New York blocks long, huge and it has about ten different chapels for ceremonies. Different sizes. Since it was Sunday and evening, we would be meeting with them the next day to decide on which chapel and the date. The date for the ceremony has to be a good numerological fit for the deceased to complete their journey. The date, birthdates of all of the family, many factors are weighed in to decide. But the soul box is given a berth so she may wait peacefully for that date, and her body is kept in the largest morgue one would ever want to hope to see. The soul box is led to the assigned berth (and just at this point there was light drizzle, so the box was held under an umbrella until inside) with food and two servants (small plastic figures one male and one female) to provide whatever the soul needs. There are literally hundreds of these soul boxes side by side and she is in number thirty-three, top row, the penthouse. Incense is lit again more chants and bowing of respect and we will be back soon, don't be afraid, you have servants, and food is left. Then the body is unloaded and placed in storage, there is more praying and she was reassured that she should stay outside now in her "box" as Remi said- don't go into the fridge, Chou Ling. Stay outside, we will be back for you. Walking though that large morgue

was when I thought I might faint. It was overwhelming, but I thought how Cassey would be so worried, and a little angry at the drama of that, so that held me up.

Now, we have eaten a very small hastily thrown together lunch and that is it all day, added to the emotional toll, and two nights of very little sleep, and I kept sobbing and then remembering that I shouldn't worry her but there is one final step. Money must be given the soul to spend on her journey. So large stacks of special funerary money are burned, and I kept saying "shop all you want dear, we know how you love to shop, so here is all you will ever need." It was a huge furnace and the heat was intense, but we scattered a great deal into the bank for her.

And that was the first night's ceremonies completed, and as we drove back to Ba and Ma's house in a taxi, I realized I had not been outside of the hospice area for almost a week. The drizzle had cleared and it was a beautiful night, and the city lights were everywhere, and I was surrounded by family, but felt utterly alone. And I thought of my wife back in that crowded holding area with all those other souls, and each with a recorder chanting, over and over. And I thought please don't be afraid. Please my dear. But I knew how she felt. I would be spending my first night without her and she without me.

Sent
Subject

Tuesday, December 14, 2004 7:56 pm
a bit of faith

I forgot to say in yesterday's email how grateful I am for all of the condolences and prayers. Forgive me for that and I will answer them more personally later today if time allows. I am always proud of that in my mother, her ability to let folks know, every single one of them, and I do try and be my mother's son. I don't get my over-worrying from nowhere. I also forgot to say that I spoke each of your names and shared each of your loves and a little tender memory with dear Cassey the morning of her death. Every single one of you. I knew family was with her, but her friends were family to her to and I wanted you to help reassure her to not be afraid. I want to believe, and as I have said over and over if only I knew for sure, that you were a big part of her breath beginning to ease.

But I am learning to live with my measured skepticism. I like that I can see the beauty in all traditions equally, and I am accepting that I can find a way to negotiate through great pain without a singular organized faith to hang my hope on. It would be so much easier to be on my knees like those across the hall from Cassey in the hospice chapel ringing bells and chanting. Or singing spirituals, or whatever prayer one says if one has "become" something, accepted a doctrine of faith. I see how comforting and blessed those that believe are. But I am learning that faith for some of us, will come only with ultimate knowledge, and

until then a life led well, and love spread, and right upheld, is our faith. It is all we chose to hang our hat on and for us it feels as holy as any other. I guess you can say all faiths are blindly trusting in what we will only know after, and for me the smaller the blind trust the better, enough for me to hope merely in an after.

I realized this as I could cry and cry in front of this paper soul box that I watched the priest unpack like you would a toy from the cracker jack and unfold and make into a box, and then decorate so beautifully with my dear one's name. And then place on a white tile shelf among so many others, and surround with two plastic dolls that represent her "servants" and how she hated servants, but loved a clean house, so we hired a cleaning woman and her sister who took over when she fell cleaning another's home, and they both now weep with me for her, and the sparrows fly in to where these soul boxes are stacked and eat the food that is left for our beloveds and that act of vandalism or pure opportunism gave me more solace than the incense and the tape recorder that held her looped chanting. Those sparrows were alive and free and eating, but even skeptical me, could sob and talk to her and want her to be in the box, and I knew then the beauty and power of idolatry and why so many act in its name no matter what the fashion of idol all over the world. I honored her and spoke with her, and loved her believing with all my heart, and I could easily become a member of this faith out of my need to

continue to want to love, and the sparrows were not eating from her plate.

All of this was racing through my mind as we drove to the hospice the very next morning. I had asked Ba if we could donated the only used on the Mount wheelchair to them as our way of honoring their brave work. He lept at the chance to say thank you and I did not expect to return so soon, but it was his zeal and want to include me that brought me back to where Cassey and I lived for those almost three weeks and where she had died. It was needless to say very odd to walk those halls, see those nurses, our room still empty, though it had been swept, mopped and cleaned within minutes of our departure. No shortage of struggle in the world and we must be ever ready.

I had written a brief letter to the head nurse thanking her and asking her to translate it for the staff and in it told them how honorable their work was, and how Cassey appreciated the tender care and their fearless attempts to ease her pain. We wanted to donate this chair to the patients to come, may they sit in the lovely garden and Cassey would be happy that she could comfort them even in this small way. Thank you, thank you, thank you. She was very moved and promised to translate it, and because I had weepy voice, asked if I was okay, and I did the Cassey air wave, fine fine. And I also asked her to tell Duh Wieh how much we appreciated her care. And we sat in the lobby because Remi called to coincidently meet

us there. She was getting the official death certificate, and one for me in English. So as Ba and I sat there, me with my juice and one last bakery run, the last nurse that attended Cassey, even at her death, came over and I thanked her, and she said not at all, and I took pictures of the pictures of all the nurses that hung in the lobby they have put there to give a more human face to them, and I also took a photo of the Jesus picture, and of Moses parting the Red Sea that I just noticed hanging over the massage chairs. And I wanted to take a picture of candidate 12, Cassey's guardian, overlooking the garden but he was gone. They had taken down the sign. And then it was off to see Cassey again, choose the date for her service, and then to the funeral service office to make the other arrangements.

I forgot to mention the night we were driving to the funeral home with Cassey next to me, the political loudspeakers where blaring again echoing our called out directions to guide her, and I said why is that happening the election was yesterday, it's over isn't it? And Remi said it was the thank you day. Cassey's death was on the day of thanks for the cult-like circle number chanting metallic voices from beyond. Thanking for being listened to and supported. And it has been quiet ever since.

Seeing her for the second time with the sparrows, was no easier than the night before. I still wept while talking with her, doing a somewhat lousy job of reassuring her not to worry, though I was trying

with all my might. We had left some wrapped food for her the night before, but on the first morning they bring her a hot meal of rice and spicy tofu and it sat there for her and I thought of how much she loved to eat, never met such a diminutive gal who could pack it away like she could, but for the last few months eating had been such a chore. I told her she could eat anything she wanted now, and we left her more money in the burn bank to buy all her new friends food as well. I hope you can tell I am fully embracing this process and trying to judge as little as possible. When I am participating, I erase the irony, and only cling a bit to it now because it hurts so. I had already been warned that her soul's journey could be disrupted or worse she could become lost, so I have taken my role and this process very seriously. And unlike before when I was deemed as in some way not "with the program", as advocate of her wishes first rather than theirs, there has been tremendous support and inclusion by the family. Except for an hour of agony that I will now recount.

We made our way to the office of the morgue, where the dates of the service are contracted. A large waiting area with many different lines, like the department of motor vehicles. But more like Off-Track Betting or the Amtrak arrivals table because there where dates on a huge black board and two hour time slots and blinking red lights for each time slot already taken and there where many many more red lights blinking than dates slots still unadorned and this board stretched for the whole

wall of this large room, blinking blinking, pulsing like a living machine. And the woman from the internment site, who would broker us through the process- if I haven't made this clear- there is a funeral service/large county morgue where we are, and there is the site where Cassey will rest, and that is on a mountain an hour away from here. And this woman works for what I find out later that day is a rather large corporation of folks that make up this particular site. There are many of these, not quite temples, not quite graveyards, but somehow both, and they are a big growth business here. People actually buy plots at a price and then can sell them later for profit. Ling-Long had invested in twelve plots in this site when Grandmother was buried there. But I find out later she sold all but four to friends that needed, for no profit she said. I had no idea this was the place that the family had decided but should have realized. And I knew we had seen the site from afar, Ba pointed it out as we drove to a real Buddhist temple nearby on a visit three years ago. A large white combination temple shaped on the top and high rise below sitting high up on a mountain, and he said that is where his mother is, and Cassey had whispered, kind of creepy huh. She told me Ling-Long bought many plots there, and that the Taiwanese invest in this, sort of like stocks, and I was shocked by that, and by the thought of a Condo of death sort of approach to the whole thing, but she was not sick at this point she was well, and I had no idea I would be needing it or this place would be more

than a tall grave from afar, and nowhere so near, so soon.

And this female broker from this place, that I don't know the name even now as I type a whole day after having been there and negotiated a place for my wife to stay, or by typing in their website- which I will include later in this email, she will handle all the arrangements, like a contractor negotiating the buildings department for permits, and she has an assistant that has holding the Book of Dates, a sort of part astrology by lunar calendar, part almanac, part rankings of best results, about the size and thickness of a pocket dictionary, a thesaurus of time. And the brothers and sisters, and this is beautiful they all take part, all concerned and now all having without question left their jobs, to see if they can determine and then secure a hall for the service for the best date for Cassey's soul to continue her journey. And every so often Remi comes over to me and tells me what is going on in the huddle, and then rushes back, and the first thing she says is the man suggests waiting until January, and even as I gasp- she says but we have told him this is not Cassey's wish, it must be sooner, and I say will this hurt her, will it be a problem for her? And Remi assures me that it won't there are degrees of problems and as long as the date is not a "bad one" she should be fine. And then back into the scrum. She reports next they are trying for the 21,22. And I think all right a week away poor thing in that refrigerator for a week, but if it means so will be safer, it must be, and then Remi says no

good, they are booked. All of those dates are booked, and I am thinking this his her soul and we are going by a catering schedule...But I have been told we can't change the location once we are here, very bad luck. The soul is not ready for that. And I wait another fifteen minutes and Remi comes out to go to the bathroom with Ling-Long as the man still thumbs through the book and looks at the board, and I say to Remi, please don't make it the 27th, my birthday, or the 30th, my mothers. And she says okay, and tells the family and when they return, she says they have found a date, the 28th and my heart sinks quickly with a thud. And I think she will sit in that refrigerator for over two weeks, almost three, and every year I will dread my already miserable because it is too close to Christmas birthday because the next day will be the anniversary of my wife's funeral. And she says is this all right with you? And I say does it have to be so close? Is there no other day? We tried for the 21st and 22nd Lee, but this is the best we can do. And I said then this is what it will have to be. And she could see I was crushed and she said, Lee- do you know what today is? Today is Bryan's birthday and he is honored I bet. Honored that his Goo-Goo left so close to his birthday. And I said simply, I am glad that he is, but I am not sure I can see it the same way. I will try Remi, but not all people are the same. But if this is best for Cassey, I will understand. And she left to go with Ling-Long to the bathroom and I told the family that I needed to go for a walk for a bit to process this. And as I walked the parking area and watched all the day's ceremonies taking

place, like a banquet hall in reverse, I couldn't help but feel lost again. Every time I try to accept my place in this, and give over, something hurts me, and then I must be asked to forgo that pain for her. And I try, because I love her more than I can say, and I try to think the rest of my birthdays will be about honoring myself the day before I honor her again, but it seems so sad, and then I think of her saying don't let them make a big deal about all this and she will be waiting so cold for so many weeks, and I try to let go, I try with all my heart, and it is as much pain as the weeks before, and it lasts for about forty-five minutes and I feel myself detaching farther and farther from the family I was re-connecting to- even as they are coming out to walk to me- and Remi says Chien-te talked to the man and it will be the 23rd. And immediately I asked, No Remi, is this change bad for her, I can find a way to live with it, we must do the best thing for her. It's fine Lee, the dates are pretty much the same thing. No better or worse, we didn't think we could get a hall that day, but Chien-te found a way, and I took his arm and said thank you so much, are you sure? And he smiled, like what is the big deal, like he had secured better seats for the game, relax, "it's okay" he said. And Remi said "we got the hall on the end, the quietest one. 10 o'clock in the morning for the family. It's good." And I felt better than when I received the letter inviting me into Uta's class to study with the teacher I had dreamed of studying with. I could not believe that a compromise that should have felt like too many days of waiting seemed a relief

and I apologized to Cassey, and said I advocated the best I could, and could she make it, should I do more? But I knew she would not want me to fight and this wait was the best we could do. I went around and saw her again, and we told her the date, and to please not worry, but to use the time to ready herself, and two things dawned on me then. One: she had no flowers like a few of the other sites and I thought I must get her some very pretty flowers, an orchid, how thoughtless of me, and two: I would now be here fourteen more days and returning right smack in the middle of the holidays. I stopped that worry immediately- told her I was glad for the time to be with her, which I was realizing even as I said it, and we left to continue the arrangements.

I will write about those negotiations as we head to Jesse's temple. Every day that I am here, a new drama unfolds. Yesterday we went to the new site, the Hi-rise and picked out plots. The decision was going to be between two different styles and prices, but that after many hours was all that was left to decide- but just now Ba (through Ling-Long on the phone) has decided he wants to visit Jessie's temple. He wants to see if that is better. I cannot begin to tell you how sad this all makes me, but I know it will all work out, and I understand how agonizing this must be for Ba. So I must ready myself for Jessie, and will write more as we travel the hour there, and send it later in the day when I can. I am seeing that I will spend the rest of my life catching up to these events and emotions so

forgive me the falling behind and the need to write so much. Good night/morning to you all.

Lee

Email of the site: www.goboservice.com.tw.

Click on the fifth and six Chinese words on the right for some other pictures. And I will send some digital photos I took later.

Sent **Wed., December 15, 2004 11:09 am**
Subject **Leap frog**

As hopefully irrelevant as time is to my wife as she leaps from moment to moment, allow me to jump from event to event to today to yesterday to tomorrow. First: after more phone calls from Ling-Long to Ba and because she wanted to be there when we are going to Jessie's site, it has been decided to wait until the afternoon. I did not find this until I was showered and dressed to accompany, so I will put off my run until tonight or tomorrow and meet with Jerry to try and begin our healing process. I hadn't gotten to the part of yesterday where I just picked up the cell-phone and called him knowing I must for Cassey and therefore myself. Because I am still on two yesterdays ago in my attempt to share with you and myself, I won't go in to details about that meeting yet. But driving with my family yesterday and sensing that it had to happen soon or poor Cassey would be so sad, I called Jerry that minute

and said we need to spend time with each other, and he understood and we are meeting. So I will continue after I talk with Jerry about the stupid and hurtful events of the day before Cassey died, the only time we have ever quarreled, and we have worked together and known each other for twelve years. So I leave now and will write more about two days ago later today.

The talk with Jerry was very helpful and I will return to it when I get to today probably in tomorrow's update. Cassey: this time hopping is fun! Back to two days ago, no wait- one more thing about today- no trip to Jessie's site. Ling-Long said that their youngest aunt, also a friend of the president of the hi-rise mortuary, spoke with him and got a further price reduction so Ling-Long is upgrading to four better plots, better than the ones she already has. And Ma has decided that her and Ba must wait. It is considered bad fortune to buy so soon after someone's death, that a soul may be coerced to following the relative too quickly and pass themselves. So no Ba and Ma next to the children. I will go into all this when I get to today, but not today. I just wanted you to see how labyrinthine these days are. We were going to Jessie's site first thing today, very painful to me after Cassey's "wish" refused, and then we weren't , and then we were later, and now we aren't. I will let you know when that changes again.

Four quick leap frogs to things I forgot to tell you- one: every time we visit Cassey's soul box, and

every time someone visits a place where there might be bad spirits as well as good, you must carry a few leaves from a certain kind of tree. I will try to find out what tree, but when you leave that place you must toss the leaves to the ground. I suppose the leaves trap the spirits and tossing them away means they can't go with you. It is very bad luck to forget to bring or toss the leaves.

Second thing- a few days before Cassey's death I was walking with Jim and Jerry, and out back of the Hospice they were holding an emergency drill. A what if SARS or terrorist attack or something, lots of men in those puffy white suits, and large tents or holding areas, and men with clip boards to record the results, and some looked as though they were in a state of emergency running their drill for all it was worth, and others, I guess those in places of importance, looked rather bored with the whole things, and one was smoking a cigarette. Let's get this crisis over with. All this fighting for life juxtaposed with the tedium right outside in the parking lot, and then the real drill just inside the automatic sliding doors.

Third thing, again at the hospice area, the chewing gum woman was out front again. I had mentioned this to Janet, I think, two days before, and she said it was because the woman was mentally challenged and probably was upset I had given her too much money. But the day after Cassey's death, I was with Remi, and Ba had gone for the car, and she was there again. And I asked Remi to

calmly go up to her and ask how much the Doublemint gum was. She did and the woman said 10NT and I gladly bought a pack, no screaming or tossing curses involved. A simple pack of gum bought and sold. I have it with me and intend to keep it the rest of my life.

Fourth: As we were guiding Cassey to the funeral home, and we were driving and the political thank you wishes were blaring outside, and the priest was ringing his bell and all of us echoing going under the bridge, exiting the expressway, and on the car CD player was a Taiwanese folk song about feeling calm and good, and on her lap was her chant box, all of these sounds going at once, add to that every so often must have been forty times, there would be a loud electric buzzer and then in Mandarin, an electronic woman's high pitched voice loudly saying attention, attention, there is a hidden camera ahead, you must slow down to (whatever the speed limit) or you will be in violation. And I thought all of this effort to create calm and not to alarm the spirit and we can't shut off the radar detector? Surely that is not helping her be at ease...

Back to the funeral arrangements for the first service. Again, if I haven't been clear there will be a big service at the morgue site lots of flowers and silk you will see, and then the cremation and then an internment service later in the afternoon at the hi-rise mortuary site on the mountain. We met at the central Taipei office of the hi-rise because they

have been contracted to handle all of the affairs. The saleslady, because we were friends of the president, handed us over to the manager of the office who would make the sale of the ceremonial events. The site would be decided tomorrow (now yesterday) He guided us through fourteen very complicated choices on a presentation computer around a conference table with tea served. Very civilized and I was honored to be consulted on every single choice. And unlike most staff meetings all of us- Ling-Long, Remi, Ba and I agreed to agree without stating it on every choice. There was no fighting at all. Anyone that has planned an event of any kind knows this in itself is a minor miracle. I will run down the 14 points, two others, her dress, the Prada, and her picture which is front and center usually framed but Ling-Long opted for no frame, is to be the one taken during her lecture in June. She is vibrant and smiling and I love the choice. But her are the 14 we decided and I will try to be quick but this was four hours of cordial discussion, and thank some god it started with the least volatile-swatches of carpet:

Carpet- the entire funeral hall or just main aisle that we rent is covered in one of eighteen shades of carpet that is thrown away after this use. The shades range from black to bright green, red or blue. We chose a flecked charcoal. Ling-Long insisted on wall to wall.

Flowers- there will be a sea of them all whites. She'd love that. So dramatic and peaceful.

Chairs- wrapped in an off-white fabric in rows rather than individually. To aid in spirit of family and community.

Backdrop cloth- drapes of the palest green, almost white, with emerald panels subtly peaking though every ten feet or so behind them. All raw silk. Once more Madame would love the drama but she would say as we picked out our sofa and both like the color but realized we have a lot of it in our apartment- she said- Green, again?

Urn- certainly the most important decision and one I dreaded because there were forty choices and many different prices. From black to purple, some round, square, one that looked like a Chinese temple meets cookie jar. Some no extra charge, some five to ten thousand US dollars more. It was down to three in no time, amazing, and then two, both the same style and color, one dark flaw in the jade was the deciding factor. So it wouldn't look cracked. It is the size of a very large jar and made from one piece of cut jade, but again the palest green possible without being white. It is slightly rounded and marbled as jade is, very elegant. Simple. No filigree or indents, just peace. Cassey would weep at the beauty I thought, and I did, and it was two thousand dollars extra. But Ba got the man to throw it in for nothing reminding him that we were VIP's.

The engraving/picture on the urn- I have to admit I was sad (though said nothing) to know that it had to be engraved. It was so simple and Cassey unadorned, but tradition always wins without Cassey to say this is what I want. It will be written in

real gold, and it will say her name in the center and her birth and death dates to the right, and beloved by friends and family on the left. The picture of her face from the photo from her lecture tour will be in a simple jade oval just above her name. I only wished it could not have information because no one ever really sees it, so why engrave it. In the sites we have chosen it is only visible for the time it takes to eulogize her at the internment site and then it is gone for all time behind an carved front piece with that information on it. Will explain more later when I talk about the grave sites. When I realized no one would see it after an hour I wondered why we had labored but I knew Cassey would love being in such a rich and elegant piece of stone, sort of like owning Frette sheets, no one sees them, they are for you.

Invitation- Guggenheim girls this one hurt the most, I wept, and I know you understand why. They have a generic silver embossed formula design and they all said fine. It is elegant if you squint and don't know better, and it is in Chinese so how could I, or any of you wonderful designers help anyway. And tradition says no pictures so Gregory Peck wasn't going anywhere.

Sign- again difficult of the already difficult because all I could think of is how much she agonized over the Las Vegas wall panels, and her taking me to Time Square to look at her huge building size billboard. And it had to be simple and 7, 12, 14 characters. I gladly deferred and since it Chinese no idea what it really says- something like Chou

Ling Ling will be honored here, or something like that. How far the artful must fall...

Food- not for us for her, a large amount of ceremonial food will be laid out for her and for some reason with no input from me it will be all vegetarian. I asked Ling-Long just now, I am typing at Remi's office two days later, and she said vegetarian looks better, meat is ugly, and Ma said she likes the color of vegetables; meat is just brown or brown or brown. I would have advocated for some calamari or much to my horror when first watching her suck on one, chicken feet, she loved those, but this is one time the vegi in me gladly shut the heck up.

Casket/Comforter- she will be placed in a raw silk blanket of white in a white casket and with a an embroidered top cloth piece to be chosen this week from embroidery pieces. She would love the simplicity and elegance.

Robes/Flower for each guest? Tradition states we all wear either these robes that look like the Ku klux Klan hooded things pale yellow gold, or simple black tunic like robes. Ling-Long and Remi already chose black days ago, Cassey's closet full of black had spoken loudly. Remi says she prefers simple yellow ribbons to a flower for each to wear on their left upper chest. I think of all those already ribbon causes but say nothing. Ribbons it is. But she then says she wants a white rose for each guest to give to Cassey in her casket. As long as they are de-thorned, I think, she would love that. Not to worry for her pain but to not rip the Prada dress.

Returning gift- This is what it was called but I guess they mean parting gift, no one is expecting a resurrection. Small elegant hand towels. Again a cultural thing. No idea why. I figure they can use them to cry on the way home.

Should Cassey rest partially in front behind a wall of flowers or in back as in most funerals behind the drapes. Part of the ceremony is friends and family processing in front of her to pay last respects. But I still hate to have her lying there the whole time on view and just bring this up. But Remi changes my mind very easily by saying, why hide her in the back, she would hate that, like she wasn't invited, or is too horrible to be in the same room with us. Front she will be.

Photographer/Album- again a custom, a book is shown to me with grieving photos, all in bad taste if you ask me, but then the ones of the procession in front of the casket and family or friends in their final moment of grief or goodbye, I say that is too much of an intrusion. I beg on Cassey's behalf to have only photos before the final goodbyes. But when the price of the album and photographer is discussed it quickly becomes a non-issue. We will take our own photos, and Remi assures me none while privacy is an issue and none of Cassey. Just the decorations.

And with that it was meeting adjourned. Contract signed. And four family members in perfect accord and as we drove home I asked Remi to call Wenning and see if I could help Bryan celebrate his birthday. What was anyone doing for his birthday?

And when I found out that he was in school and then night school until 9 and nothing was planned, I asked if we could play basketball at the university after that. She said sure, she would talk to Bryan. Later she called to say Bryan would be having dinner with us and skip his night class, so we could play ball earlier. I was so happy for him and wondered if I would be able to stand up.

Then dinner at home but some of the many aunts and uncles stopped by and Ba and Ma were weeping again but it was Bryan's birthday and so after an hour, he asked his Ba if he could still play and out the door we ran, feeling like soldiers going AWOL and dribbled to the university and it was a beautiful night, crystal clear, and we talked about his Goo-goo for a bit, and his love, but then he wanted to know if I like LeBron James. And could I dunk, and how tall was I. And we played for a bit in the dark because there are no lights on Monday he found out, but we played in the dark, and in between gasps of air just missing her so much, I taught him how to jump shoot, and then back we snuck through the short cut I showed him that Ba had showed me and we were home. And about midnight lying alone I thanked Cassey again for teaching me the importance of family and doing for others. And how much I missed her and then I don't know if it was the mosquito I did Barton Fink battle with or my want of her, or both, but I eliminated one literally against the white wall and the other soon after by some stolen sleep around three in the morning.

Sent Wed., December 15, 2004 11:18 pm
Subject in dreams

I had the first dream of Cassey last night and it came after hearing of so many others that you all have had and your belief in them as visits from her even as I said to some of you, I believe dreams are our need to visit, not hers. And then realized dreams are as different as the people that have them and maybe she is visiting in dreams to some and sitting right next to others like Asia claimed.

The day after her Aunties death she was taking an English test and she told her mother later she heard her aunt helping her, her voice sitting right next to her, and then when she finished she said take good care of your mother and be a good girl, okay? And Asia said she would and told her mother when asked if, that she wasn't afraid at all and she got a 95.5% grade on the test, the hardest one of the semester and her highest grade yet. I loved that story but a bit less after Ling-Long told me Asia still believes in Santa Claus, really believes, because it seems like there should be one, and Ling-Long said how can I argue with her when there should be. And Ling-Long said the first of the two nights we both were listening to Cassey gasping and we were catching bits of sleep, that she heard two men in the room, or dreamed them, nice men she said, kind, and they were talking about when they should escort her, take her away and they agreed

on 11 o'clock. So the next morning she was so worried at 11 and then at 11 the next night, and had wanted to wait until after 11 that morning to leave for Asia but couldn't. And that in Chinese when someone says 11 it means anywhere from 11-1 that block of time.

So I was comforted for them but a bit sad that I hadn't to my knowledge talked with her in my sleep yet, or met any husband gods, or messenger men, only me talking to her awake. So Katherine, your dream the night of her death arms spread, three times repeated, and Jerry yours, and Ruth all the way in Puerto Rico on the 12th wanting to marry you to your new man, I was jealous of those beautiful keepsakes. And wondered if just a bit if my skepticism or in some way letting her down was the problem. Just a bit, no anguished hours...

And then last night fighting another mosquito, and I was beginning to wonder if she controlled an army of those, they have been plaguing me each night so, last night's kamikaze even bit the ring finger of my other hand, right where a ring should be, and it swelled up as if to say don't you dare take that ring off and put it on the other hand (which I have not and wonder how far into the future I will feel like I should.) But I had not gotten much sleep, hard to under attack, and could not remember any of my dreams and woke with this one not fully intact but pieces of it clear.

I was with Remi and some of Cassey's friends, and I think she was with us, or it seemed like she was, but this part I can't swear, yes, because she said something like "over my dead body," but not quite- that would have been too perfect, but it was about my pants for the funeral. Now mind you, she and I packed all of her fine things for her family, so we knew the worst was more than probable, and I packed some nice clothes a black jacket and grey dress pants, but I own a very dark grey almost black suit and I did not pack it or think to ask those coming over to send it. Is that denial or just me being forgetful, or what? I remember thinking this jacket will work if it must, but a nice black jacket is not a suit, and this is Cassey and these things matter so to her. So after I found out I would be wearing a black tunic and wouldn't really need a whole suit I felt better, but I had the right jacket, not pants - or shirt really, brought a pale purplish blue, not plain white or as the Chinese prefer black (and I have many of those) - shoes I have, thankfully, those would have been next to impossible here, I have too big of feet- so Remi and I went pants shopping and the prices here are ridiculous, I am Jewish by birth and we are used to sales- but I found some nice pants and a black shirt, not Prada, even though they have a touch of non-natural fiber in them, but they won't embarrass her, and all is settled.

But last night, she and her friends and I were sitting around and must have been talking about my pants and she must have said, Lee, honestly, what

are you going to do with yourself- as she so often did- when in racing through the door came Roberta- and she apologized for being late- but had found the perfect pants for me- and she pulled them from the bag, and opened a box and they were red checkered pants. And she said "look, they have black in them, they'll go perfectly." And I liked them, and didn't get their inappropriateness right away (dream logic remember), until Cassey rolled her eyes and that is when I thought she said over my dead body or maybe just rolled her eyes, and Roberta looked crestfallen-- and I am going out today to buy nicer pants.

And this probably falls in the category of the "us needing" dreams not the actual visits but maybe not, maybe they are one and the same.

Lee

Sent Thursday, December 16, 2004 5:23 am
Subject a holy site

Again some hop skips before I get to two days ago:

When I went back to the Hospice to donate the wheelchair with Ba, I saw the husband that I had passed for days in the hall, always well dressed, no baseball t-shirts for him, looked like Leslie Cheung which is saying a lot trust me, and I still didn't know his name. And he looked at me, and we both

knew he knew, and he said "take care of yourself" in perfect English, and I said "you too, please, you too" and that was all either of us could manage. He went into his wife's room and a few minutes later they wheeled his wife back from some test or treatment, still able to sit up proudly in a wheelchair, and she had no hair but was very pretty, like Cassey. And she disappeared into her room, and I thought, why hadn't we reached out to each other more, or maybe that was enough, and why couldn't I help his wife before it was too late, and how many others all over the world at this exact point in time are bald and in pain, and being taken from us?

I have had so many loving tributes sent, and last wishes for, and remembrances of my dear wife, but if I may share one that still haunts me days later for the simplicity and beauty of it. The day Cassey died, Dennis our next door neighbor who has keys and is checking our mail, but is a dear friend and Cassey's piano teacher, he said, after some truly touching words of love and regret, simply and in a sentence all by itself:

I will play some Bach on her piano for her today.

And that image of him, sitting in our apartment playing her music in her other home to comfort her so it wouldn't feel so empty, is about as beautiful as it gets. He later commented on the richness of the tone, and the out of tuneness of the piano, which says even more about how good a teacher he is,

and I wrote back that a bit out of tune seemed perfectly appropriate, and that I will never forget his gesture.

And now to the day before yesterday. We drove the thirty minutes or so to the site, and another winding road up a mountain, and as it came into view, that is when it dawned on me that we had seen it from afar before, and had talked about it, and now it was center stage in both, no all, of our lives. Ba, Ma, Ling-Long, and I were on this trip to select the site. No Remi, and I understood no Chien-te, he is the most traditional when it comes to this, you don't use a "we" when you talk about anything to do with death, you don't plan ahead near someone else's death, you only deal with theirs or you wait and make plans when everyone is healthy. He is the one that yelled at Remi and Ling-Long about not discussing it further. And he is also the one who told me that I cannot cut my hair, or toe or finger nails, or shave before the ceremony. It is also bad luck for the spirit, not us. I had just cut my nails, in the hospice one night, and had even noted the irony of grooming at such a sad time. So no problem there. But I do need a haircut, and Remi had made me an appointment, but he reminded her, and told me for the first time of the tradition, so it will wait until NY. Shaving he said, "fine, if you want to shave, okay." I haven't and won't. And this reminds me of how many compromises I make, and which feel an imposition and which an honor. I know Cassey hates me to wait too long for a haircut, big hair she used to call

it, but I know she would understand. And she always liked me a little bearded and scruffy, so it is a fifty-fifty split here.

But I thought of the day before Cassey died, and Tang Mama was there, and she became a sort of elder midwife to them all, whispering things like, "oh, look at her breathing with her shoulders, this is not good, won't be long now," and when her shoulders stopped, "oh, this is not good, look, even less time now." But she whispered something to Remi as I was holding Cassey's hand and saying how much her friends loved her and wanted her to be out of pain, and I was crying, and Remi leaned over and said, "Tang Mama wants me to tell you there is a tradition that we don't let our tears fall on the one we are crying for, it will cause them too much grief." And so I stopped myself immediately from crying and then thought "Christ, now every time I need to cry I have to worry that it won't drip on her. They are even controlling how I grieve." And I let them for a day or so, because again I thought of the beauty behind the commandment. Don't be close enough to let your tears fall meant let your tears be out of sight and your joy and love in the room, and that, though somewhat anal, I could take hold of. But I dropped that worry when I saw Ma and Ba and the sisters sobbing all over her at times. Even by the book Chien-te. And Jia, who could have caught hell from her mother in law.

And then we pulled up to the burial site, and it was both magnificent and gaudy at the same time.

Many beautiful outside plots for families, but these I was told are the price of a fine home in the states. And it was another bright sunny day, like it is today, and Cassey would have loved to go to the park, and we went inside, passing some lazy dogs along the way, that must sleep with the dead and not care at all.

Inside there is a reception area, a contracts area, a lounge, a gift shop, and a rather large place for eating with some tables and chairs. It feels like an airport with a bit of ceremony because of a large reclining Buddha along one wall and a nun behind a counter with her head shaved, and nine dots in a perfectly symmetrical pattern, burned with incense I find out later, into the top of her head- and it is very fascinatingly pretty, that pattern, tribal. But there is airport feel to the other areas, or no, more "upscale but not tasteful" hotel lobby. And the woman from the other day is meeting with us to make the sale, but we have twenty minutes, we are early, so Ba decides to pay respects to his Ma. They show me the large Buddha centered in another huge room where the internment ceremonies are held, and the colors in that room are very subdued and very pretty. Almost Italianate Renaissance in feel. And it is a beautiful room, very intricately carved and ornate, but stopping just short of going over the top. Unlike the lobby, this room Cassey would love. We get into the elevator that does look right at home in an upscale hotel, lots of marble and wood paneling, Cassey would say "nice, details," and we get off

on the floor, bow to the stature of a god on that floor, and light incense for our Grandmother. And I thanked her for looking out for Cassey on the farm every summer when she'd go south to stay with them, and for having Ba, and raising such a good son now father. And we didn't go inside to actually see her site, because it was time now to meet in the lobby, and you need an attendant with a key to buzz you in.

Back sitting around the table and discussing the sites and getting the prices, I couldn't help but think of *Six Feet Under*, and how the funeral business supports so many and looking at this place, for some, it is a very lucrative business indeed. Cassey would love that she wasn't in a dump- she did love the fine things in life- and I often thought it almost snobbish of her, when so many had nothing. But she taught me it was not about price and labels for her, but design and taste, and esthetic, the leather was better quality, or the way it was crafted. In almost twelve years of marriage, she only bought a handful of things full price that I thought extravagant, and I was with her every time, saying "my dear if you want them and love them get them." And one was her piano. She would have a Steinway if she was going to learn, did not have to be new, and hers wasn't. Built in 1873 and not a baby grand, but a parlor upright grand. And she fell in love with it, and we bought it that day, and she never regretted it, even when it proved difficult to hold a tune. She polished it and took great pride in it and never let anyone mistreat

it. When Cassey owned something in never aged. Which explains why she never did. Her handbags looked as new as the day she bought them, and even Ling-Long says the family used to laugh and envy this, especially her. And she showed me her white Coach bag we bought her ("Ugh, Coach," Cassey said, "but she thinks it nice.") and it was a bit worn, but she uses it almost every day, and I said "Ling-Long everyone is different. You raise a daughter beautifully. Cassey never thought she could. She cares for her things like daughters. No need to judge which is better, for they are just differences, and that is the way it is." We were sitting at the MRT station on our way to see Cassey later that same day and having the most wonderfully brother/sister talk and I felt so close to her. And she told me things about the family that helped me understand why so much hurt happened, and I will always be grateful for that conversation. The conversation started because I began sobbing outside the station after Ba and Ma dropped us off. We had passed three stations, and there were many more along the way, but they chose the one right where the hospice was, where Cassey had died. And Ling-Long said "Lee, why are you crying?" And I said "this is as holy a ground to me as any temple, and will always be. This is the spot on earth where her soul left us and it will never be just a town, or stop on a train. It is as important as where she was born." And we sat and talked and even missed a train, and she never for a second misunderstood.

But now we were discussing spaces for the family to rest for all time. And depending on the floor and the location and the type of space there were amounts to consider. And none of it was cheap. I think the most economical for a single, no adornment, on a low floor, not eye level, and away from a window was 10,000 US dollars plus maintenance fee, that they call service fee. But Ling-Long had her four plots so she could trade up. But as the woman with the tight lips and sure salesmanship and clipped hair and suits and small Gucci shoulder bag that resembled a holder for a camera was jotting down the prices and calculations were being made, I thought of Cassey saying "please don't let them make a big deal of this," and saying to be near Jessie in the old fashioned much less posh Temple would be nice, and how, and this is what really makes me sadder than sad, how she never wanted her family, and especially her parents, to spend a dime on her, and agonized that they were spending their retirement money to help keep her alive. She said "I should be taking care of them. I have failed them as a daughter." And we were discussing degrees of over-priced amenities and my head was throbbing and this woman stopped her sale, this pre-grave robber gave me some green oil to soothe it. And I sat and listened and later we toured, and then toured again to be sure, and it was about three hours.

Here are the considerations and the reasons decided for or against below them:

Do we want multiple plots for the whole family or single plots for each next to one another or just for Cassey?

Price was always the decider, which Cassey would hate- but each floor was different and the ninth floor won out. I still don't know for sure why. There was a VIP floor, that is their name, not my comment. And you sign in on that floor, and there are nicer sitting and praying areas, and the sites are a bit larger, and the whole setting is a bit posher and actually very nice. But I am sure way out of our league, though not as much as the sites below outside. It is on this VIP floor they have armoire size plots that hold 27 family members with incense burners on the front of them that are very nice. I like that style the best, but Ling-Long said Cassey could not be in one of these, because she was married and once married, a daughter can only rest with the husband's family not hers, bad luck for all time for the family. So no more armoires which were probably too expensive anyway. Then why look at them I thought, like looking at the Mercedes before settling on the Volvo. Ling-Long insisted on no single plot for Cassey only. The sisters or the family and the sisters must be together. So the double plots were ruled out as well, but I must say I cried at those on each floor thinking if we were from the same culture or part of the world that would be the way it should be, but what of the rest of my life? And that is when it really hit me, I need to do some real acceptance of the rest of my life. And of course one does project over three years of an illness, and even with her we talked,

but talking and doing are two very different things as her death taught me oh so quickly. In good time, I thought, in good time. It is two days after her death. Just sit and mourn. And the family doesn't even think of us being together as an option. So let it go. So odd that the young that die have different concerns than the old...

When one dies the direction they face is a factor. The sisters and Chien-te should all face south, Ba and Ma are different, should be east.

When this happens, the Ba's spirit is always honored. If the family is to be together, it must be east, so six plots are reserved. If it is to be just the children, than it should be south, so six are reserved there as well. The reservations are for three days only. The family must decided then what it wants to do.

Do we want window or light view, placement not in rows like a library, but the sections sitting free in the middle of the room, eye height or higher or lower (cheaper) or do we want the sites that are a little larger and that have a living room glassed in front, for the spirit to entertain visitors.

Ling-Long likes the living room sites and at first I honestly wanted to laugh. Little doll like miniature settings, all the same Asian style furniture but you can add touches here and there to personalize them. The set designer in me was fascinated by it, and some were deeply moving you could tell the child's graves from the drinking old men, but to pay extra for this seemed so silly. But Ling-Long

loved them and so I looked at them through her eyes and began to see why. They invite visitation. They are warmer, a home rather than a plinth, and they allow for individuality that Ling-Long adores. You can arrange your arrangement. I began to love the idea and saw a glass piano in one and that is when I was sold. Cassey could have a wood piano for all time in her living room, like she wanted in hers, and a dog like this one, and maybe Tinteretto, her little sweet stuffed monkey she took everywhere and begged me to take from the hospital so not to see her suffer, could sit with her, and one of her designs, a small one could adorn a wall, like this person has a small painted screen against the wall. You cannot have photos, that is bad luck. But other than that, I don't think there are any rules. One had a small liquor cabinet, one a tea set, others small stuffed animals, little china dogs and cats, a bicycle, little real life sets of someone's eternal life. Stunning and silly at the same time and for all time. And I thought what if an earthquake, or fire, but then I realized that happens with graveyards too. They are bulldozed over and made into housing developments. So all time is relevant and the contract says forever, once you pay and keep up the service fee.

So the decisions that need to be made are which direction and if the family will remain together and honor Ba or separate and just be the children. A no brainer to me stay together and go east, but you haven't met Ma. The next day, and this is what prompted the need for a possible trip to Jessie's

sight, she decided that she was not interested in her site or Ba's, she had to do what was best for her children. Period. And so she hid behind the excuse that it is bad luck to buy a plot for her and Ba now, even though they discussed it for hours the day before equally bad luck, and the four children would have plots facing south. End of discussion. And that is where we are now. Ma having fought hard enough with Ba and Ling-Long to have won and money being money, Ling-Long having to trade up with her four and not being able to buy two more just in case. I offered to take out a loan and help, but she said the family would never allow that, and they would be facing in the wrong direction then anyway. Ma will not budge. So the family won't all be together, but may all end up in the same building one day. Not the best fortune, but not a bad one either. And Cassey might not be thrilled with all the angst and money or even the place, but content her family was honored. And it is a short hop-skip to Jessie.

So six plots were chosen by number, and they must be eye height, the only possible choice for Ling-Long, duh...And thank yous all around and date books were given with pictures of the place throughout, so all year long you could think of your loved one's grave, and she gave me seven or eight for Cassey's friends in NY. And one for my mother and sister. And we went outside, and it was so sunny, so bright, and the view was vast, and I sat and wept at how if this was a site we had visited on a trip, I'd be snapping a picture of Cassey right

now. She insisted on being in the pictures, "Lee get in the picture, if I want a postcard I can buy it, with you or I in the picture it is our memory." She never understood not being in the picture, and so I couldn't even think of taking one of this view.

And the dogs came over to say hello, and I thought of her playing with them for all time, and how her little room must be made perfect, and how I couldn't believe I was doing all this, and then it was off to the train station to sit with Ling-Long and then visit my wife's soul box again and tell her she would have another room with a view.

Sent Thursday, December 16, 2004 11:19 am
Subject material things

After saying hello to her again and telling her of the visit to her site, and how beautiful we are going to make it for her (and this is when I realized she needed flowers and fell in love with the orchid idea), we headed, Ling-Long, Remi and Chien-te and I, back to Remi's office in his truck, a big white macho affair. My brother loves his cars and trucks. He's had two jeeps, and three motorcycles (still has two) in the time I was married to Cassey, and now his truck, which helps him with his business, which is designing interiors of stores and exhibits. He used to have a jeans import and export business, then he owned a restaurant, but he finally found his niche in industrial interior design. Three designers in the same family. Remi runs a very successful digital special effect company-Pixlefly- and they recently

opened a small but very sexy (designed by Chein-te) recording studio. And she used to sleep til three when she lived with us and wonder what she was going to do after graduation from School of Visual Arts.

On the way, we stopped off at a large Reebok store that he did, to make a quick repair, and Ling-Long did some shopping on his discount. I bought Bryan an Iverson shirt for his birthday to go with his basketball. He loves Alan Iverson and LeBron James. (And just tonight I found out he likes Shaquille O'Neal.) And next door to the shop, while Ling-Long was trying on every workout suit in the place, was a Hagaan Daz so I bought a bar and sat in the sun and ate it, thinking of home and how far away I was and here was the same ice cream and clothing stores and shopping and no Cassey. And the ice cream tasted sweet, but it wasn't pleasurable, more like when you are dieting and cheating and so none of your treats taste good, because guilt doesn't taste good.

It was fun to see Remi's studio after only seeing it in her video of the opening. It has the oh so coolest front, I took a photo and will try and attach it. And when you walk in there is a silkscreen of the Abbey Road album cover with her as George and her three partners as the other Beatles (did you know I was thirty something before I realized the pun, I swear, nothing to brag about, but that proves how unobservant or how bad I spell, and I had all their albums, got caught shoplifting Let it Be as a

teenager but that's a whole nother story) Cassey loved the Beatles, and Paul was her favorite, and her friend Martha, the most passionate and militant Paul fan, wrote the most touching emails those last days sharing her reasons for loving his music, album by album, song by song and telling her adventures of stalking him on tour and trips to London. Cassey got such a kick out hearing them read, even though she said to her friends recently (but never Martha) I may finally be over the Beatles... was that part of her letting go? I will attach a picture of the Abbey Road, Remi version.

We went across the street from the design studio to get Cassey some flowers, and though I had my heart set on an orchid, Remi insisted on cut flowers, their orchids aren't fresh Lee, and I wanted to say let's get both then, but I bit my tongue and let Remi do what she wanted, and the flowers looked like a wedding bouquet from the deep south, too short and too puffy, but I knew if Cassey saw those she'd know they weren't from me, so I relaxed and looked up and told her I'd find her an orchid later, when the time was right.

That night we went to begin the black pants hunt at two malls here in town after Remi's boyfriend Sean, she and I had dinner. And the malls here have all the same stores as NY, so odd, and the prices are much, much higher. So home we went sans pants and I thought about what I would say at Cassey's service. How does one even begin to say enough and then there is the worry that I may

offend a tradition, so I will write a draft and show it to Remi and Katherine and see if it is acceptable. They will help me translate I hope, or Sylvia maybe, and then Remi can read in Mandarin while I speak in English. I did ask Remi if it is all right to speak directly to her at some point or should it be directed only to those attending, and she said why don't you keep it to them. So I will. I so dread this day coming, trying to talk with weepy voice and with my big hair and now grey beard, I can't tell you.

And when we were at the mall, I walked by all those stores Prada and Gucci and LV and I sat and wept a bit again, and Remi said "Lee, she's okay." And I know she is, and I know she isn't. I mean I know there is no more physical pain and that is the most important thing, but is there no more longing for our world and the over-priced but wonderfully designed things she used to cherish. Or the even more wonderfully designed us that meant even more? Has that changed for her in the richness of all eternity and all that mush gush? Or would she give anything to go play ball with Bryan and I? Or sit with her high school friends? Or have tea with Roberta and then lunch with Concetta, Christine and Marcia? Or take a group of all of us to Riverside Park and sit like we did that last Saturday? Or does she look at her things still packed away in those two big suitcases we bought just for that wretched purpose and want to hold them and use them and love them like children again. She did love to give away things she loved. I will never

forget when she found a red purse, Ferragamo, not cheap but of course on sale, "Time to let go of black," she said. "I need colors that aren't so negative." And she used it once and loved it so much, she went and bought one for her elder sister, and then she took both home with her on the next trip and gave hers to her mother. So mother and daughter could have matching bags. And they both still use them, and I have seen both on this trip on different days, and silently wept remembering.

Her brother asked me the other day if he could have her green eyeglasses, (I hope not to wear, though the frame is a man's style and I'd often wished I'd gotten a pair) the one's she wore up to a few days before she died and I thought that is odd. She had other pairs here and her cat's eye shaped will be burned with her as a way of seeing clearly in the next life. But I will give those to him. I have many other memories. And he won't want, or be able to use, any of the purses.

Sent **Friday, December 17, 2004 6:42am**
 (7:42pm sent from Remi's computer)
Subject **second sight**

Ba is driving to Cassey's burial site with Ling-Long and I, because she wants to look at what she is buying one more time before the deal is done. I am writing as we travel, so I can catch up with my feelings knowing I am still a day behind. And each day tells me there will be little chance for me to catch up. Ba was not supposed to go, so Ling-Long

can purchase four plots instead of the two she agreed last night to Ma and Ba. Why it is down to two, is not clear to me, but I am sure she will catch me up later. She motions very low so Ba will not see that she is buying four, and to shhh. I had no idea where we were even going she just said she would meet me at 10:30. I had planned to run. Still hasn't happened.

I asked Ling-Long what the building is called and in Chinese it is Bei Hi Fu Stzo and in English all she can translate is North Sea something something. We are driving right now by the hospice, and I just said I love you to Cassey. I spent all day at Ma and Ba's house yesterday in Guan Dou, which is about twenty to forty minutes from Taipei center given traffic. I did not visit Cassey yesterday, had no ride, so this chance to speak with her was unexpected so soon. I knew I would see her tonight when we say prayers at her soul-box place to mark the first seven days. We also have to say prayers the night before the service to make up for the seven weeks that we will not provide the soul to prepare. In very traditional Chinese funerals the wait time is 7 weeks or 49 days, so that the soul understands all and is most ready to journey. Our prayers that night before are forgiveness and a condensing of those seven weeks of prayer to let her know we wish her safe passage regardless.

We are climbing the mountain road now and soon the white building will be in view. Two days ago I had lunch with Jerry, and we both agreed to not

leave that meal without a clearer understanding of what happened and our love for each other intact. I cannot speak for him, and I will not go into a single detail of the most beautiful and intimate conversation, but I left feeling as though we both grew much closer, and we can move on. About all one can hope for after so sad an exchange days earlier. I trust Cassey is proud of both of us and relieved to have that pain behind her. I must do the same with Jim, and I hope he understands my need.

Later that night, I went with Remi to the night market to get some less than 200 dollar pants and to unwind. It is so hard to do anything here without Cassey, not that she loved night markets. I think I liked them more than she, but we did, on every visit, buy a pair of very nice eyeglasses from our favorite vendor there. He always has a tremendous selection of frames and for much cheaper than the states. I visited him with Remi the other night when we first got here, when Cassey was still at home. He remembered me and asked where she was and I said at home. And now we were going back and what would I say?

The North Sea is now in view, so I am going to stop and be in the moment a bit. More later.

Okay, second impressions, which I have often said are more important than firsts. First can fool you, often intuition is the truest judge, but sometimes she can trick you. Or trick you into thinking she said one

thing but in fact it was another. You need that second chance to make sure. The building is not white, only appears so from a distance. It is a beige or light cappuccino with a pale green rooftop. From the outside, no doubt about it, not very pretty in shape or feel, but very nice grounds. And the lobby is still very tacky. The gift shop even sells little ornaments for the living room sites but they look very cheap. Not right for Madame. Living room plots still seem both to me, sort of sad in their childishness, and sort of gleeful for the same reason. Like dolls can seem both eerie and darling depending on the light. Cassey, by the way, hated dolls, thought they looked like little trapped demons or dead children. But she loved a cute toy stuffed animal. And while Ling-Long is sealing the deal, Ba and I sit in the lounge. And he looks so youthful in his jeans, and he turns to me and starts to cry. And I think now him too. Ma sees me and starts to weep, and I know she loves me, and to have me to cook and care for brings joy, but I am also a too painful living reminder of her lost girl. But Ba is pointing to his sweater vest, grey cashmere, and very handsome, and he says Cassey. Cassey. And he is reminding me that she gave it to him, and I remember finding it at Century 21-dear god how am I ever going to go in there and not weep-didn't even know it existed and I'd lived in New York ten years before Cassey- and she and I lived in that store ever since- and it was a father's day gift, and Ba reaches for me and we sit like lovers in that lounge and hold each others hand and cry.

Ling-Long has bought two plots on the ninth floor, left side, facing south she tells Ba, and then like a child that has crossed her fingers when swearing she won't tell, she holds down four fingers for me to show that she has indeed upgraded all four. The family games continue.

Outside, I thank her for caring so much, and tell her "by the way, I think you are a wonderful sister." And I ask how much Cassey's plot has cost her and she says about seven thousand, and I promise her that when I can, I will send her the money, and after saying no many times as we head down the mountain, I finally get her to say yes.

Back to the night market and Remi. When we got to the eyeglasses shop, our friend was not there. Now mind you for the last eight years he was always there, every time we happened to go. No matter what time of year or which day. We asked where he was, and the new salesman said to Remi that he remembered me too, but the other guy has been transferred to their larger shop not in the market. Happened just a few days ago. We looked a bit and the frames we both liked, that we saw just days ago, were also gone. Sold them, he said. Remi said "Lee, don't worry, get something else." So I bought a frame that was brown because I don't really have seventy of those yet. And I like them. And we bought the not nice enough pants that I can wear tonight to the seven day prayers. And some CD's of music so my spinners can have new music for the New Year, and one song I heard

on the radio the day we went to the jade market. It is really a stupid pop song by an unfortunately named singer, big in Japan, called Sweetbox. And Miss Box is not shall we say musically complex, but this song struck a cord, as the best pop music can, even as you know it is silly and too simplistic, it burrows in you and won't let go. And while my wife was fighting for air and wondering how much time she still had, and while I was sick with worry for her, this song called "Life is cool" was given to me as a little bandage. "Life is so cool, when you look at it, from another point of view" I think it goes. "Yeah, life is so cool." And so I bought the CD and played it last night and wished I could have played it for her and it wouldn't have hurt. Because I know that is how she felt.

Sent **Saturday, December 18, 2004 1:17 am**
Subject **ordinary people**

Six days after her death and I went for a run. Sunny, warm, painfully beautiful day. Could have been May at home and it is mid December here. As I went through my shortcut which is very dark at night, I noticed the large make-shift community garden tucked out of sight on this road, that has been cut off from use because it is too close to the army base minutes from Ma and Ba's house. Security has dictated that it must never be used by cars or buildings, but locals have spoken that land is too valuable to waste by taking it back in what must be illegal but tolerated vegetable and fruit patches, and make shift huts to store supplies. And

playing my Sweetbox album as I walked on my ipod, I noticed that the song Life is Cool begins with Pachabel's Canon as a mixed intro, and though overused and overromanticized, it has always been one of my favorites, and Cassey's. One of the first pieces of music she learned, by request, on her piano.

And I remember very early in our kind of abbreviated courtship- we did everything too fast, didn't we- she mentioned as we heard it in an elevator or store or wherever it was being overplayed that it always made her think of Ordinary People, the Redford directed movie, and how much she loved that film and had a huge crush on Timothy Hutton- which never ended by the way, even though she'd have rather gone to the prom with Daniel Day Lewis. She was loyal with her crushes, like P. Decker, and she would root for Tim when his career seemed to almost resuscitate but resigned to cable detective. Anyway she loved Ordinary People, and so do I, but she said something about that movie that also helped give me great perspective through many of our fights, and almost break-ups, and that was that she hated to admit it but she identified with the Mary Tyler Moore mother in that film. Now that should have been reason to say, "check please" right there, but she was much cuter than Mary, and maybe I didn't believe her until I lived with her and saw her sock drawer. She went on to explain saying, "don't confuse identifying with admiration." She did share MTM's ability to withstand and to

seek order, but it also horrified her, greatly, and she knew she was the antagonist, like in the film, of most scenarios, by virtue of sharing these sensibilities, and the selfishness that it represented. But, and I loved this about her, she knew it, and never denied it. When we discussed children, besides my lack of time spent arting and inability to earn enough money for me let alone another she and me, and even before those reasons were placed on the table, she often said "Lee, you saw the movie, would you want me for a mother? I wouldn't. I know myself, I would mother any child to death." And even as I type that Ma has cooked me a big bowl of pasta and is napping, because she and Ba waited up for me when I returned from prayers at midnight last night.

Cassey would have been a great mother, she just didn't trust that she could have been, like she didn't trust that life was sweet until it was being snatched from her. Actually that's not fair, she just may have not wanted it. She did always know what she wanted and maybe forced into a role that wasn't right is why Mary in the movie is so sad...

As I got to the school for my run, a silky white egret walked right in front of me. Now I have never seen a white egret in Taipei, don't know if they are common or not. But this one flew ahead of me and seemed to want to mark my way for me, and I thought of all those "superstitions, writings on the wall" and said don't go there again, Lee, but it was

so Cassey-like, elegant and thin, and fluid and gorgeous, and I said "okay if this bird walks and then flies with me all the way to the track, I am going to move here and take up Daoism." But after one more little flight with me, it took off and headed back toward where I had come. So either it was her, and she didn't want me to move, or it was just a bit of her that can be found in all things, like that dog right here that was sunning and napping and she would have loved its lack of care and abandon, just stretched out right by the sidewalk sound asleep. Maybe the rest of my life there will be these ways of seeing the world and I will never get more than those for a sign, and I even had those signs when she was alive, in my trips to London I use to see things, hear things she'd love. So maybe its time to stop looking for signs and realizing its about my life having become our lives. And that is a good enough visitation. But I still wish the egret had flown up and said "life is so cool." Then I'd rest it forever.

I passed the basketball courts that Bryan and I went back and played on two nights ago and there were lights that night. And I taught him H.O.R.S.E. and let him win the first game and almost the second, so he wouldn't think I was letting him. And then I sat and held back the weeping, just sat, but he is so smart, Bryan, and maybe he was letting me let him win to allow me a moment of fatherhood, because, as he tried a hook shot, he said "are you sad for Goo-goo?" And I said "yes." And he said trying another shot, "that's okay." And

I looked over at the small group of adults who were using the far side of one of the courts for a class in Tai-chi or Chi-gong and thought of how Cassey had longed to learn that to heal herself, but by then she was too weak. A great regret of hers. And they were moving in such slow motion, so beautifully, trancelike, and Bryan was shooting from farther than he could reach, and there was another group playing volleyball, and the men were showing off, and the girls were giggling and allowing them, and the stars were out, and on the way home Bryan said "look how beautiful" and pointed right at Orion and the big dipper, and all I wanted was to be with her. And he made the noise I taught him: slapping the basketball, to scare off anything unseen as we headed down the dark road shortcut.

We are going to play again in a few minutes, a day earlier than our next date, always a good sign that someone likes you, when they call and move the next date even earlier, and I can't tell whether it is because he is bored, or because no one else likes basketball, or because he knows that I wish someone in the family cared enough to want to do something with me today. He was the only one that came out to find me the night I was anguishing in the hallway alone. The only one from the family that walked over to me. And here it is a beautiful sunny Saturday, and he is the only one who called to play. And we had already said we'd play Sunday.

I will write about the prayers for Cassey when I get back from playing. I ran earlier, wondering if I could last it, but it felt okay. To find my body again. Hurt at times, but I ignored it. And maybe I will get a bit more of it back, this afternoon with him.

WEEK SEVEN - DECEMBER 19-23

Sent Sunday, December 19, 2004 8:44 am
Subject three on three

Things change so rapidly from hour to hour. I did not get to play ball with Bryan today, and we are back on for tomorrow morning. This happened because Chien-te said as he dropped him off, that he was going to visit Cassey. Why he thought I'd rather play basketball, than visit my wife is beyond me, but I asked Bryan to ask him if he could wait an hour, so I could go with him. Just to clarify: Chien-te and Ma and Ba live in Guan Dou which is like saying Queens instead of Manhattan. And Cassey's soul box is the other side of Taipei sort of Staten Island distance. So we are talking forty five minutes if traffic is good which happens never, and there is no MRT stop near her. So it is relatively easy, two minutes from his house to mine, to ride with my brother, and pretty difficult for me to go alone. It is also by custom considered important to talk to the soul as much as possible to reassure it that should not worry, clean the site from ashes and make sure candles are lit and fresh food is laid out. The family had visited every day, and I had only missed one, because no one came to give me a ride. I didn't want to let Bryan down, but I wanted to honor her. Much more than playing a game. Chein-te said he was meeting Remi and Ling-long, he couldn't wait- and as I stood there wondering why they hadn't thought to ask me and looked at Bryan carrying his LeBron James basketball colored backpack we

got in NY and silently asked Cassey what do I do- and Bryan said it is okay, I understand. I asked Chien-te if we could play together after visiting her and he said okay, okay. So dressed to play basketball we all hopped in the truck to say hello to Cassey.

Last night we were there from 9 o'clock-11 praying over her. There was a small area off to the side of the funeral halls, a sort of lower price third tier area, where, if your main ceremony happens here, it is to save money, but these smaller rooms are where the seven days prayers are also held. They do double duty it seems, and our room had the flowers and an empty casket and the name over the door for tomorrow's ceremony. No wonder you have to guide the souls so they won't get confused. And off to the side a table was set up with a Buddha and some lotus flower shaped lights, fruits, and a small feast for Cassey. In front of that, was a small table and two cheap stools and one banquet chair. None of which matched. She'd have hated that. But her main table area looked very nice. Flowers on each side. The priest (ess?) was a woman, and she had two helpers, also women (found out later, that was requested, go girls). She led us to Cassey, #33, top tier and we bowed to her and just as we did before, we led her, me carrying, Remi holding the plastic servants because the male doll had her name banner rolled up and over his shoulder, and Chien-te holding the umbrella for her box to be under. I was told this is because the soul is sensitive to light, but

that must be the elements in general, because it was night outside and not raining.

We guided her, turning left going outside, asking her to come with us. And went into the hall that was set up for her prayers. The three priestesses, reminding me of the use of threes all over religion and the arts, and literature, the conjurers in Macbeth, Chekhov's famous three and my favorite play, the holy trinity- and when they began chanting their threeness seemed so right- their harmonies were effortless, and truly beautiful. And the youngest hit a small wooden frog shaped block, and the middle one, a sweeter sounding bell, and the head priestess had her larger bell with the timber of the one used the night Cassey died. And we lit incense and bowed and then the chants began and all in attendance had their name read, so she would know who was there. Ling long and Lee-yin. Chien-te, Wen-ning and Bryan, and Remi and Katherine, the only non-family, I assume because she asked to. And I was the only one wearing all black and I was asked to. Well, Ling-Long was wearing a black track suit with white stripes. But some were in jeans and I knew Cassey liked folks to be dressed. Oh well. Let go. At one point I was asked to toss the coins to see if she was here for us, and I realized the first priest, the night Cassey had died, had mistaken Chien-te for the husband and that is why he tossed the coins, but I guess there is no such thing as a do over, and now I was worried that I would not be focused enough, or a true enough vessel. Talk about

pressure, it was like rolling dice for all eternity. I told her how much I loved her and to let us know when she was ready but my fear might have been well-founded, because it took three tosses before they landed as if to say proceed, Cassey was here.

The first round of prayers lasted about a half hour with us standing with hands in prayer in front of our chest and bowing when the priestess bowed. The music of the chanting was very soothing, but the mosquitoes were problematic because each of the rooms are wide open no doors. But I focused on the priestesses and they never flinched, so neither would I. And when that section of prayers were over we were asked to take a break outside and water was served. And people started to make cell phone calls and I thought, couldn't those wait? And Ling-Long went back in and asked Cassey some questions, and tossed the coins again. I guess she figured while she had Cassey's undivided attention she was going to get some things straight.

The night before after she and Ma had quarreled over the grave sights, Ma was boiling eggs and one just popped and exploded all over the kitchen. Now this had happened to Cassey in Arizona, in the microwave, all over our expensive spa hotel kitchen, and we never thought it a sign, but apparently Ma and/or Ling-Long thought this stove boiled version must be. And Ling-Long asked Cassey is she made the egg pop because she wanted the arguing to end, and the coins said yes.

And that was discussed for the remainder of the break and calls to Ma were made to convey- parents cannot pray over the deceased until the service.

We were called back into the second round of prayers and I was thankful because too much talk about the eggs and the mosquitos were even worse outside, and the chanting began and we settled in, when Ling-Long got a vibrating cell call and ducked outside. I thought what could be so important- but maybe it was Asia, and she did come right back in, but two seconds later, Chiente got a call, not vibrating, loudly ringing, and I thought of all those plays and movies interrupted and how could he not have thought to turn off his phone, and when was any of this going to be sacred to them, instead of you have to do this and you have to do that, but you can take a call here or miss a prayer there. And then he just left the hall for about five minutes and talked on the phone, and that is when I just let go with all my might and said I am so sorry to Cassey, and this is their way, and I thought of all the loud talking and yelling in the room right over her and this really is their way, and how he drives so aggressively able to cut anyone off to get into the lane ahead, but will stop on a dime not to hit a dog, or to let a child cross in front. This is just the Tiawanese way- and later the next day, the day in basketball clothes, I noticed Cassey's next door neighbor's soul box was covered in ashes and no food and the candles had gone out and I asked Remi if we could clean it

and bring it food and Chien-te said no, no, sshh. And out side Remi said it's okay you didn't know, but he said it is the Tiawanese way to not look around and see what is on either side of you, just you, or their souls will think you are weak and try to go with you and I thought she will give them some of her food she will take care of them. And I said I am sorry and Remi, said it's okay, you didn't know. It is our way, and we were burning money for Cassey, a lot, but the family on the other side of the large fire urn was burning much much more, and the family waiting had a huge paper boat, intricately folded from paper money, must have been four feet long, and two large paper swans, and I had been telling her to share this money with all her new friends and now I didn't know if I should say that anymore...If it was right.

And Chein-te came back in from his phone call and the second half of the prayers went on for about twenty more minutes, and Remi would cry every so often, and Ling-Long and When-ing, but this time there were no tears for me. And I wondered if it was the language difference, I could never relate to the Hebrew prayers either, or the standing still for long periods, no I like that, and the music of the chanting, no I just couldn't feel my wife in all this yet. And it was time for the second break.

At the end of this break, I was asked if I wanted to sit, we'd have to be standing for another twenty minutes at least, and I said no, I was fine. The

priestesses did not put on their black robes for this first prayer. They all three had on black pants and white silk traditional blouses. This prayer was being chanted because we had no children to cry loudly for her. It was a prayer to let her know that she was missed and we would not forget her I guess or why else would we need sobbing progeny. It was a beautiful prayer and when it was over the three chanters put back on their black robes and led us through a few more. And then I was asked to toss the coins one more time to make sure she was ready and pleased and I thought of how much I loved her, kissed the air, and she said she was ready, the first time. Needless to say I was greatly relieved, Then we returned her the same way we brought her, put more money in the burn bank, and said good night. And Ma and Ba were waiting up for me, way past their bedtime, and I said thank you and that nigh, for the first time, I did no battle with the mosquitoes while I slept.

We just finished playing basketball, Bryan and I at 9am on Sunday so Ling-Long could take Ma and Ba and I out for brunch. On the way I looked for my white crane, but she was nowhere. And it was so telling that I searched and searched for her. And Bryan said, "look," and I snapped around, "so many dogs." And the dogs were here as lazy as before, but no bird. It was very crowded, like weekend mornings at the park in NY, primetime for pickup ball, so the games can be played and the family or wives still resting can be returned to and the afternoon still free and we had to shoot with

many others waiting to play in their games. And there were two young players on the other court that “had game” as it is said. They were very good, and they were, with their token ball handler friend, holding down a three-on three court for the entire hour and half we played. This happens in Riverside Park where I play too, and I am sure all over the world now. There is always one unbeatable squad, that holds court and everyone else tries to lose weight and not worry about being inferior. But they were magnificent to watch and I thought of how many excel at something all over in their little universe, kings and queens at what they do, for that day, in that spot, and Nicholas Cage was visiting Taipei, arrived the day before Cassey died, promoting his new movie National Treasure, and how some are kings in more places than others, but not everywhere, and some kids asked me if I wanted to play and I said I come with Bryan and they said fine and we played three on three for awhile and Bryan was having such a good time, but tired very soon. So we stopped. And at the end there was a girl playing with us, very tough, not like Cassey at all, but she’d cry out every once in awhile and her voice, the feminine sound of it stung and gave pleasure both at the same time, and as we were leaving another tall player who looked like he could take on the other two showed up and I thought even the kings will go down at some point; there is always someone else who can play. And Ma and Ba had walked over and so we all left and walked home together. And it felt like such a family but with one huge piece missing, the

glue, the reason we were all together. And Ba was teaching Ma "go home" in English because Bryan had said he was ready to. And she was saying with Ba "Go---home, go---home." And I asked Bryan how you said it in Chinese, and he said Whoowhey--- Geeyeah, and so I was echoing them, Whoowhey--Geeyeah but I was not getting the tone right, and so Brian kept pointing up, a rising tone, pointing to the sky, Whoowhey, go home, no, he'd say, and point up, and up again, to the sky, Whoooooowhey, and Ma had it now--go, home.

Sent Sunday, December 19, 2004 9:50 am
Subject house play

Driving to brunch there is now a light rain. And I have brought the laptop and it gives me a chance to catch up on some other things that I haven't mentioned. First, yesterday we passed the Teddy Bear store on the way to visiting Cassey. Asia loves bears, we have bought her many, and she proudly has over fifty now. I've lost exact count, but she knows, and named every one of them, and can tell you who gave them. And she only sleeps with three on her bed and two of the three came from Cassey. And Ling-Long asks me if I want to go there with Asia tomorrow and I say, what do you think? Of course. I love to shop for others, and my most significant other will not be shopped for ever again, so I leapt at the chance. Maybe there will be a meta-straight eye for the less tasteful queer guys, and I can be on that show. Anyway we are going

to the store after brunch, but I bring it up because, right after that very casually, Remi ask me if I knew the latest Asia story. And I said no, and she says Asia saw Cassey last night. In her room. And I said "really? No. Go on." And she said she was just a kind of white outline of Cassey and she was standing over her, and then when Asia woke up and saw her, she said don't be afraid," and Asia said "I'm not," and then she said "I have to go now." And vanished through the window. And Asia said the only thing that she didn't understand is how Cassey had longer hair so fast, it was a bob about shoulder length. Not how was she back from the dead, or vanished out a window, or seemed to just be a glow of light, but how did she have her hair so soon.

And I thought of why Cassey would go to her so easily, she loved Asia, and maybe children were just better soul seers, like Haley Joel, but I couldn't help also wondering if my skepticism was the blocker, or even worse, that she was upset with me, or didn't want to come. All of those thoughts passed quickly, and I promised not to worry about any of them, but if I am to be honest, they all were thought. Part of being an actor is coming up with a thought score for each moment onstage, and why would the character go from thought to thought. I have always loved that about being an actor, we learn to live in our thoughts and connect the pattern of them. Writers also do that to with their characters. And we must be honest with them...

I called Sylvia late last night because she is one of the only few who have Skype, and she was online, but I couldn't hear her, bad connection, so we were using the instant message feature of it. Now I will out myself right here, I am an Instant Messenger virgin, never done it before, but not anymore. I lost it last night, and ironically besides exchanging worries about each other, and being told that she would be at Cassey's service, the only thing said and rather casually was that Sylvia had found a journal of Cassey's that she had left in Shanghai and couldn't help herself and read it. Back and forth this information came- You found what?- a Journal she left- I couldn't help it I read it- and because I was too stunned and didn't write fast enough- I didn't have permission, I am sorry-okay, I understand- it was like having her alive again- and me stunned again- It is about her lecture and her trip here- me unable to type- I will bring it with me to her service. Got to go to a meeting now. Bye. And I cannot think of a more profound first exchange of instant messages, and how odd it is to have messages from Cassey, thoughts that were never discussed, and that will be shared only after she is ash.

We are eating brunch at the most traditionally Chinese restaurant we have eaten at in all of my years of visiting Taiwan. Décor is exactly as you would think an elegant Chinese restaurant should look. All reds and greens and golds lots of silk embroidered tablecloths, and the waiters and waitresses in traditional embroidered silk coats. We

are led upstairs to a private banquet style room with round tables and lazy susans in the middle. When Ling-Long and family arrive, ever the arranger, she asks to switch to the table next to where they placed us. Better she says, so we move. And the menu actually has English translations on it. Not the greatest idea I find out. I see monkey head stew on the menu, and hope it is like the mushroom on the next page also called monkey head because of its shape not content. I stop reading when I get to Fresh Jew's Ear next to what looks like a beet, something ear shaped. But the overt racism just floors me. And I promise to ask Remi when she gets here. And I think of the popular toothpaste here that still has a cartoon man in dark-face and used to be called Darkie but someone sued and now it is called Darlee. But the picture is still there, and it is the number one selling toothpaste here. They even have toothbrushes. Sad, so sad. And I will make sure we do not eat Jew's ear or I am leaving.

It was a vegetarian restaurant, so Monkey's head was always a metaphor, but Remi had no good explanation for Jew's ear. It is a fungus, and actually translated it is wood ear, and how that got to be a Hebraic slur, is up to the narrow-minded of the near past. Dishes are ordered and it starts slowly, and I actually wonder if Ba is going to have enough to eat, and then more food than you have ever seen starts to show up, and a very elaborate brass Shabu Shabu pot is brought out and Cassey would have so loved this. I tried to just let her be

here with us, watching, after all Asia was here, and her family was celebrating and she would love that, but it was still so bittersweet and there was an empty chair at the table and no one else seemed to realize.

And now we just tossed away the leaves that Mom picked because they were cleaner, as we left the funeral home having visited Cassey. Asia, Ba and Lee-yin are waiting for us at the bear store while, Remi, Ling-Long and Ma and I went to see her. This is the first time Ma has visited, and as long as she doesn't light incense it is considered all right. Needless to say, she got very sad, and cried, and I held her as the sisters cleaned the soul-box area and put out the food Ma had prepared. Then the youngest three of us lit incense and spoke with her, and I told her Ma was here, and we were all doing well, and actually Ma and Ba sat together last night and watched television and you could see that their life, though cracked and a bit shattered, will go on. They have each other and many children and grandchildren to hold them when they falter, and I told Cassey that. And that we were going to buy Asia a bear from her, and that I played ball with Bryan and thought I saw her as a white bird and, if it was her, thank you for visiting. And we burned more money, and as we did, there was a family that was burning 8 or 9 large red paper trunks full of money. I guess no matter when or where, there is always someone with more.

And now it is off to get Asia's bear. How sad is it to go from crying over someone's soul-box to giggling over too many choices of stuffed bears. I just sat and tried to make sense of it and smile at each of Asia's choices and we bought her too many things. She picked out a cute rabbit, because Cassey's Chinese zodiac sign was a rabbit, and a bear from me. And she got one from Remi and something from her Mom, and I thought all of this bounty for such a dear one, and so little for my dear one.

And then it was off to try and find some miniature furniture for Cassey's internment living room. As we headed to one place that we thought might have some, we stopped and bought some traditional Chinese shoe/slippers for Cassey to be cremated in. They must be brand new by tradition, as must her undergarments. She will also be carrying a purse, her green quilted everyday bag that she so loved, with a mirror (her favorite compact) and her glasses. Her wedding ring will be on, and so will the evil eye bracelet that the Rudins gave her when she was first diagnosed to keep her well that she wore throughout her struggle. Her head will be wrapped in her Hermes scarf, and Remi chose the beautiful red Chinese pattern silk jacket to wear over her simple Prada dress. She will look stunning. And so we pick out some beautiful black velvet slippers with red embroidered flowers. They would be a fortune in New York, they are about eighteen dollars at a store that specializes in them here. And when we aren't having luck with the furniture, Lin-

Long remembers where we can find some, and it is off in a cab before they close.

There is a museum that specializes in miniature rooms, of course, and they have a gift shop and it is perfect, filled with lots of choices and they even have a mahogany wooden piano. I am so relieved. I wanted her to have one for all time. It might be too large for her living area, so we buy a backup sort of tacky gold one much smaller. But either way, she'll have music. And then the sisters and I went a little crazy. Here is what we are going to try and if none of it looks good we will go back to the very traditional Asian furniture that is already there. We bought: a white silk armchair, two carpets, a side chair, a small end-table, a small wooden footstool, some lamps, a flower stand, a stereo, a typewriter (no computer was available) some fruit on a plate, and a tea service, a blue glass pitcher and glasses. And a cute dog. She should be set for an eternity of entertaining. And again, no fighting and lots of collaborating. It made me so happy and then profoundly sad. And as we left to go home, Remi said "I can hear her now, please!!! Stop it. So ridiculous."

We got back to Ma and Ba's and we packed all of Cassey's things she will have with her so Remi could take them to the funeral office tomorrow.

Unpacking the suitcases we brought to get a few things was very rough. Each of the exquisite garments, handbags, and shoes was a unique story for me. This one on that trip, I remember

buying this for her birthday, she found this on a great sale...And they were all so beautiful, such taste my wife had. But I let go, remembering they were just things, and none of them were worth a fraction of my wife's life and spirit. And they will be loved and cared for, if beaten up a bit more than she would have ever allowed, by her family and that would give her the most joy. And then as I was typing this, I remembered she had a journal here in this computer from her last days trying to heal in NY, and Remi had asked if she could have a copy of it and I said of course, and I began re-reading some of it and over and over she kept saying I want to be well. Be well, be well. And be strong, be strong. And she also wrote one very touching song, as she called it. Numb with pain she wanted to try writing a song. She even critiqued it after writing it, said it was a bit goofy, and wouldn't ever make a good song. But I loved it and always will. And I won't share it all, because she'd be so pissed. But forgive me dear, if I share just a bit. It doesn't have a title, but was about building herself a cloud house. It ends with the following lines:

Every room is what you shape it to be
For now or for tomorrow
No gravity
No pressure
Just soft and dreamy
How come no one ever thought of a cloud house?

Sent Sunday, December 19, 2004 9:35 pm
Subject Together

Ma and Ba got up this morning and went for their walk. That is a pretty simple sentence to write and read. Could be found in any Asian Dick and Jane reader. And I don't know enough Chinese to even say it, but what it represents is the real start of them putting their lives back in order. They love to walk together and have not gotten up and gone for a morning hike since we lost Cassey. They walked over to the University yesterday to pick up Bryan and I, but this is a real Ma and Ba pack up the tea, water, and fruits, and hope to see some friends affair. I am so happy for them and admire their strength.

Cassey, you were so worried that folks would be too upset and unable to deal with this, but yesterday watching Remi and Ling-Long pick out Asia's bears and even your furniture and laughing and Ma and Ba having brunch and Chien-te yelling at Bryan the day before, I realized all is going to be okay. And in a way, you being so far away from home all those years has helped them. You were not a day to day part of their lives, the actual living part, so the hole is there, but it is not gaping. Until Thursday, at your ceremony, when it will rip open again, but I see now it will heal once more.

Oh, my dear, I dread seeing you again, just lying there. Such a horrible tease. So sweet to see you,

and your beauty for the last time in the flesh, but oh, so painful that it is in the flesh and untouchable, unchangeable. And after some of the impossible work to try and hold my heart together had begun, I fear how damaged it will become again. Or that it won't hurt enough after all this ceremony.

And what of my life now. You were part of my day to day, minute to minute, and how long will it take, I was going to say before we go for a hike but I won't have a we and a together. To be single again, how badly does that suck. I can hear Cassey's friends that are saying, BIG TIME, and then NOT AT ALL, and then okay, sometimes, and buck up Lee you will learn and I know they will be there to give me lessons in how to do it again, but I do dread everything about it. To begin thinking of bills, budgeting alone, making plans, how to fix what in our home, that is back to being mine not ours. Is our, no my, home lethal, do I need to get the long ago patched over and cleaned mold spots inspected, do I need a roommate? Do I need to find a way to earn more money. I am almost fifty and can't afford a car.

And then there is the emotional need that will one day have to be dealt with, and when my dear, is that day appropriate? I so dread that my life has now become as trite as an episode of Sex and the City. The one about the widower and dos and don'ts of dating. And how will I ever let go of comparing anyone to you? And not asking you, if it will be okay. And at forty six, will there even be a

need to worry? Is it going to be like those forties screwball comedies, am I forever to be the character the gay scholars now call "closeted" the uncle or best friend-- well sometimes he wasn't gay, though witty and now thanks to his deceased wife too concerned with dress. Yes, my colleagues, he was a widower, but not a funny back-story, doesn't work in a screwball world.

And Ma and Ba are back from their walk mid discussion that sounds like an argument. Everyone sounds like they are fighting here but that is just the way they are, part of the aggression of the place, and I used to beg Cassey not to use that tone with me, it sounded like she was furious with me, but I see now where it comes, and they yell because they love. I'd give anything to have her scold right now. Anything.

Jennifer is due today because she can't be at the service, she will be leaving for LA tomorrow and the trip was planned weeks ago. She is coming by today to pay her respects to the family. She was so helpful the days there was no one there to translate for me and for Cassey when she couldn't and the doctors were trying to bring Ba and Ma and I together to make some decisions. I need to thank her for that and will.

Ling-Long is so Ling-Long. And she and I and Cassey share so many traits. I was worried that we needed to measure Cassey's living room site and see what the furniture looked like just in case, but

Remi didn't see the need. And I was surprised that Ling-Long didn't. But she called just now to say she worried about it last night, wanted to go tomorrow and would I go with her. Of course, I said. Let's make it the best we can for her. But I had already asked Ba if he and Ma would take me up to the mountain where we were with Cassey tomorrow morning. I wanted to say goodbye. He said if course. So now we will leave earlier and have the sunrise on the mountain, and I will dress for the cold and I know that Cassey will no longer mind if it is too windy. Oh how I hope she is floating along with it, breathing it in, I so hope. Like her and Martha riding the plastic sheet down the snowy hill that day, maybe Jessie and Cassey are holding onto each other and giggling like school girls they once were, and Jessie, having had more time to master, is showing her friend how it's done, how to ride the wind.

Sent **Monday, December 20, 2004 7:28 am**
Subject **solitude**

Well let's hope I have better luck in the morning with the mountain than I had with Mr. Doughnut. Stood in line with Jennifer as we talked for about an hour and we had only moved about twenty steps. She had to get back to her daughter and I waited another thirty alone before I realized this was not the way back to getting a life. After all I am supposed to be watching my sugar and carb intake, so why wait another hour at least to poison

myself. And I went across the street to the organic supermarket got some groceries and a pastry from their bakery. In and out in fifteen minutes and no time to feel guilty about the carbs. And I saved about thirty dollars on doughnuts. I would have had to buy for the whole family, because these Mr. D-nut things are the must have here. Oh, well, they are opening two more in the next month the family will have their chance, and probably when I come back there will be fifty or more. That's Taiwan. When I first visited 24 hour bowling was all the rage, and then all night shrimp fishing as a kind of gambling. Can count those on one hand now. These days it is overpriced dough.

Jennifer and I had a nice talk, but it is clear we are both weary. Her from too many houseguests and preparing for her trip with her mother, and now the loss of her oldest friend. And then she tells me of some health concerns, and I beg her to take care of herself. She says that I should try to come back and I say I know I will, I want to visit Cassey, but it seems so remote, and so odd to think about. How long will it take, I wonder. For me to return here... And what will the next fad be then? And gunmen are executing Iraqi men on the street simply for being voting officials and Bush is Person of the Year, and nothing makes much sense...Cassey, you deserve to live. And the rest of this shit is what we get.

Earlier I paid for my plane ticket that Remi arranged and thanked the travel agent, a friend of

Remi's through business, for getting us seats over and for being so caring for Cassey. She said if she could, she will try to come to the service. A long flight alone, and an even longer night when I get home. Going to try and drive with my sister and brother straight to Hartford for the holiday and then back on a train to sort things out either late Sunday or early Monday.

After the ticket, Jennifer went with us to visit Cassey and for her to say goodbye. Although respectful, she is not a believer of some of these customs, and does not think Cassey is in or near her body. She and I discussed her belief that the soul spends 49 days or so in a sort of hovering state waiting for its next life, and is able to travel about visiting. Interesting to note the overlap of the 49 day period, she is a Buddhist just not the same sect, and believes in the 7X7 period of time. And she is very respectful, while saying hello, she bows and speaks to her as if she is there. And quietly says her farewell. Ma, bless her, has bought some flowers for Cassey. I was worried that I was going to have to acquiesce to Remi's wish to not worry about flowers for the last few days. But Ma insisted and they are small groups of wild flowers very pretty in tiny bulb vases to keep them upright. They frame the soul-box marker on either side and look lovely. I know if she is there, they bring her a smile. Money burned in the bank and we are on our way. I look at the empty hall that will hold her service, paint peeling from the roof above the entryway, plastic chairs like you see in train stations bolted to the

floor, I know they will make it look lovely, but the actual place, the room is very old and very unattractive. And we all toss our leaves as we drive away.

I took a cab alone home from the supermarket, and then the train. And walked from the station back home. First time alone, except for my running. First time just living in the city alone. First time back to what it is going to be when I get to NY. I think the most beautiful thing in thousands of wonderful reasons to have a partner is the coming home. So wonderful to turn the key and know they are there, and safe, and they will make you feel the same. Lots to be said for time to be alone, but even though I hate parties, and large crowds, I do not crave solitude. Give me a little sure, to get work done, or reflect, but I much prefer company that I trust and love. Even if we are just reading together, or sharing the same space. Funny how social of animals most of us humans are. Can see us in our packs or units or whatever they would call our early groupings. So happy we are not lone predators by species. Well at least not the democrats amongst us.

And I thought of poor Cassey's neighbor right next door, the one we are not supposed to talk about. When incense is burned each time you visit, the red stick ends are left in the small urn in front of each soul-box, so it is very easy to tell who is popular and who isn't, which souls are loved, or at least visited, and which are just lonely. And

Cassey's to her left neighbor, has exactly two red sticks in the urn. The first two folks that prayed over him/her. A priest and one other person. And no one has returned since. I ache for that soul and say silent prayers for Cassey to share her food and our not as much money as some. And I notice that the, I assume, man catty corner to her and below has a small bottle of whiskey in front of his soul-box and the ends of the incense have cigarettes that have been stuck onto them burned down to the end with each piece of scent. And I notice quite a few of the plots have cigarettes adorning them. How ironic to take one's vices into the next world, and I remember the living room gravesite a few doors down from where Cassey will lie, that had a miniature roulette wheel. And another that had mini ma-jong. And maybe the Bush dynasty is what it is because that is the way it will always be, even on the other side. I just hope for me there are bakeries.

There are mountains to climb early in the morning, so I will watch some too loud TV and go to sleep.

Sent **Tuesday, December 21, 2004 6:34 am**
Subject **sprucing it up**

Just finished our climb of Yo Min San and picking up Ling-Long for our trip to North Sea, Blessed Rest. From one mountain to another. I found out from Katherine the something-something after North Sea is very poetic, traditional and has no perfect

translation into English, blessed rest or seat is the closest that can be attempted.

Mother Mountain was beautiful as she woke up this early morning. I knew it was going to be odd going back there, but I had no idea how emotional it was for me. I was deeply saddened and did not want to upset Ma and Ba, so I just let the deep breaths seem like I needed them to hike. I never felt a single step. The air was very cool and damp and there was a soft fog about almost like in Wuthering Heights. But it was still fairly visible. As we walked the same path-

We just drove past the hospice site. And I said a brief word to Cassey-

Walking where so recently we had lazily climbed and then hastily retreated, I couldn't help looking past the beauty all around to see if she would be there. And I understand that she is present in all beauty now, and maybe that is what nature is, all love manifested, but selfishly, in my still lingering longing, I wanted something more. "My dear," I whispered, "we will never have a better time than this for you to visit. Won't you at least say hello?" We made it to the clearing that had been so full of people before, and she had said, "too crowded let's go back." This is right before she realized she had no air left. It is a large open area with a pond and some stone sculptures, and some restrooms for the families that have made the trek. And standing guard as we approached, and there were no

other people around, only passed a few with a Zow, three or four hikers on the path, that's all, but watching us as we approached was an old fat three-legged dog. Two others fully intact, a white one, and a thin scruffy mongrel were off to the side, but peg-leg was in charge. You could just tell. And he moved with some effort but not as much as he should, and he was at the end of the handicap ramp that we had pushed Cassey along just weeks ago. And I thought of our first trip to Taipei over a decade ago and how there had been a three-legged dog that lived on the narrow road up to Ma and Ba's house. The road so narrow in places you have to pull over so someone coming in the other direction can pass, a constant game of chicken, who should move over and who shouldn't, and this three-legged dog would strut up and down this narrow street and never worry about the cars. Dogs here are like that. They are like the drivers, fearless. And obviously this dog had erred at some point, misjudged some driver, probably drunken, should have swerved but didn't, not the dogs fault, or else he would be whole. But that whole trip Cassey and I fell in love with that three-legged dog as I admired his spunk, and our next trip we both noticed he was gone. And we never saw him again. And I cannot for a second tell you what his color was, don't remember a thing about him except his three-leggedness, so I had no epiphany that this is that dog guarding this spot, living up here on this mountain, but he was standing on three feet instead of four, and his face was so wise and old, and calm. Judging. And he

lets us pass, and I take a picture of the clearing and just slightly I notice the wind pick up in this open air. There had been no wind as we climbed, odd, since before it had been so windy, especially the second time we tried. And we turned and headed back down, this time as calmly as we came.

About halfway back as Ba walked briskly ahead, I noticed Ma, who could usually match him step for step falling back a bit, so I waited for her, and realized she'd been crying. Holding her handkerchief, she tried to stuff it back into her backpack, not wanting to give herself away, but caused the bell she has tied to the pack to ring. I put my arm around her and she made the Cassey clean the air wave, I'm okay, okay, and I said "I am so sorry you are sad, Ma." And we had been walking single file up and down but I stayed by her side for the rest of the hike. When we got to the parking area, I remember anxiously hoping they had oxygen but it was now boarded shut, too early for assisting, and Ma and Ba wanted to use the restroom and so I waited out front and the wind started to pick up very frantically as I stood there. And I said, my dear I am alone on top of this mountain at sunrise, I can't think of a better place or time, but I trust you. If it's not possible or not right, I understand. And as the wind picked up harder and harder I kept thinking she might come, and a huge mist of fog moved in, you could not even see the restrooms and I was five feet from them, and I said "alright. I am here." And I stood in the middle

of that fog and misting damp as it enveloped me. Then I heard Ba clear his throat in that distinct Ba way, he is a smoker, still, and he flushed his urinal, and came out. Spell broken.

And I thought, "we had at least five minutes there, sweetheart, it would have been one for the ages," and I could hear myself speaking for her, "Lee, could you not feel that wind? And the mist, is not a mountain full of mist enough for you?" And as we drove down and Ba showed me another sight, a lake called Milk Lake because the minerals have turned the water milky, and it did look like some very delinquent child had left a large spill, as I looked back at where we had been, I noticed it wasn't just mist that we had been in the middle of. The entire top of the mountain was draped in a cloud. She had covered us in cloud.

We have just left the burial site and measured the room and tried her furniture. The sites are much smaller than we remembered, like NY apartments when hunting, that seemed so roomy, and then never are once you return. The attendant removed two faux pillars and zipped out two Phillips head screws and unplugged the little joiner that I thought was an alarm, and realized later was just to power the display lights, and we were in her room in two minutes. And it looks so imposing, a museum case that should not be impregnable. Lifting out her standard traditional furniture was so odd. Ling-Long started and I was glad she felt the need, because it seemed for a moment like grave-

robbing even though she was nowhere near yet. And my heart was thumping as we tried the piano, first placing it wrapped in its plastic case, no maybe too large, then Ling-Long looked at me like Lee we need to see if it fits, open it. We did and it slid into place perfectly. I was beyond relieved. Later as we were leaving, I said how happy I was about the piano fitting, like it was made for that space, and Ling-Long said, "Cassey wanted it, that is why it fit." She must not have wanted the white silk chair; it was too big. He small white cushioned Chippendale style music chairs did fit. As did the little table, with record player on it, the dog, the fruit, the lanterns, the other table for the typewriter, and the flowers.

I asked if I could take a picture of the unfinished room, and Ling-Long said please do, I want one too. Cassey is not here yet. So I have enclosed a picture for you all to see.

We are picking up Bryan who is not feeling well, running a fever, and we are taking him to the doctor. Then a quick lunch and back home to let him rest with Ma and Ba before Ling-Long and I exchange the furniture at the miniature museum.

We need to get a smaller lighter carpet, another chair, and return the lamp, silk chair, and larger rug. We also saw a small parasol in the lobby gift shop and we are going to get one of those for the corner. Cassey loved her parasols. I thought of what we had just done. It was one of the oddest

tech/dress rehearsals I will ever be involved in, and there was no arguing. No time wasted. With Ma and Ba and Ling-long and I all agreeing on each thing that was placed her room for all time, it was made-over faster than any of those TV shows and I can't think of any need more extreme than that. And so much love was being shown in such a simple child's play manner. I thought of all those afternoons spent make believing and was it all training of some kind, for this was very real and yet wasn't. Just as that playing was mere fantasy but for that day it was all too alive.

Sent **Tuesday, December 21, 2004 7:37 am**
Subject **Family affair**

If you could have seen Ling-Long in the museum gift shop choosing mini plants or flowers for Cassey's living room, you would know all you need to know about her. She tried every single combination they had, and it was vast, and finally settled on a small pond like arrangement of flowers over a bowl with the black and red type of goldfish. Obviously it is resin for water and the fish are not the feedable kind but it is very cute and very Asian and yet still Cassey. She would like it. A little bit of mini-zen to go with her ultra-zen. It will rest in the front right corner of the room. We also got the second white chair, a new rug, and some porcelain slippers for the front by the "door." We axed the parasol because it was lavender and corny looking. I so love that my sister is more obsessive than I when it comes to details. I wish I

could make a piece of theatre with her. And Jerry has a mini plate of Chinese traditional food he is bringing (have no idea why he had) and a piece of cream lace ribbon to make a runner doily for on top of the piano, as she had in NY. And I told Remi about the cloud house, and her boyfriend Sean is making a lamp that will resemble a cloud. It's a family affair...

As we were burning money for Cassey I noticed again how stunning the paper is after it becomes embers, like a kind of flaming mass of flowers or burnt coral, the edges are all wavy and carnation or mum like. I always want to reach in and rub my hand over it.

Chien-te met us on his "bike" a racing BMW motorcycle that has more testosterone in it than I do for sure. He has three large bikes, and two small ones. And this one he loves so much, he washes it after he rides it every single time. He has had it two years and it looks showroom new. And I don't like even scooters as you recall, and yet, this one gives even me a little woody. Very cool. And off he went. And Remi dropped Ling-Long and I off at the video area of town. Where you can get DVD's and VCD's.

Taipei is still like New York used to be. Areas of town that specialize in things, districts. Earlier we went to the wholesale health and beauty aids area for Ling-Long to get shampoo and for me to get little plastic bags for vitamins. They are very cheap

there. About 50 cents per 100. Cassey used to bring them back every trip, so of course I had to as well. But now I am getting a few Wong Kar Wei movies and the Internal Affairs trilogy, that is being remade in Hollywood now I think. And I also bought a beautiful Korean film that I saw with my friend Brendan in London called Spring Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring. Cassey and I watched it in NY before we left. It is full of wonderful imagery and has a nice Buddhist take on life. I hope she found it comforting. She said "nice" when it was over. Which is a rave from her. Movies are not as cheap as the pirated ones in Shanghai, those are a dollar each. But these are legal and about 3 to 7 dollars each.

I took the train home and made myself a salad, but Ma had cooked me corn and Ba had ironed my shirt for the funeral and I thought seriously about bringing them over to live with me, but that has about as much chance of happening as me not eating bread. And talk about pathetic a 46 year old man, who lives with his mother and father-- in law. And they can't understand a word that each other say and still talk to each other... sounds like a mid-season series to me.

Tomorrow are the prayers for Cassey to make up for the weeks we will miss and in the evening Jim arrives from Thailand for Cassey's service and we will try and have dinner so I can release that tension for her and I (or I should say her by way of me) beforehand.

Katherine has translated my words for Cassey so Remi can speak with me in Mandarin. I have attached them for you all to read. I tried to make sure that Team Cassey back home was given their props and obviously there is so much more that should be said but...Two more days to go and then it is on the plane, but oh, what a two days. It will feel like twenty before it is over I am sure. As always, thanks for listening.

Words for Cassey

Please forgive the need for my dear sister to echo me

But even though I tried, I never learned your beautiful languages

It is one of my great regrets.

And dear Cassey use to scold me-

Lee, she said, your nieces and nephews know better English than you know Mandarin

Couldn't you at least get to the third grade?

So I want to say to all of my family and especially to my dear Ba and Ma

That I wish I could tell them even now how much they mean to me

And how grateful I am that they always treated me like family and with deep love

I asked Remi just days ago if the family had ever been angry with me for helping their daughter live so far from them and her home

And she said of course not, we all just wanted her to be happy

and you made her happy and living there made
her happy
I was deeply moved by that and it reminded me of
what family meant to Cassey
You all know how talented she was funny, smart,
top of her class
And she rose to be a senior graphic designer first at
New York University
And then the prestigious Guggenheim Museum
And though she liked her work, and loved her
colleagues, what gave her the most satisfaction
Was that she had made her family proud.
That was very important to her Ma and Ba.
That your daughter had made something of
herself.

Cassey was a great giver of gifts
I remember our first trip back to Taipei with four
huge suitcases of things for the family
And she said Lee four is not enough. This is my
family
if they would let four hundred suitcases on board it
would not be enough
And though she had great taste, the best I have
ever seen
her gifts were not always handbags and shoes and
wallets and things you can touch
Sometimes it was laughter when you were sad, or
listening when you needing an ear
Or love when all around you was anger or hate.
money meant little to her,
but the giving, the simple want to give back-
meant so much

And that is why she came back here to her
beloved home and left so many new and old
friends

Her other family that had to say their goodbyes,
much too early.

And for every one of you sitting here today there is
a family member of mine
and a friend of ours weeping and wishing they
could be in your chair

For that was the greatest gift of my wife's too, too
brief life-

She touched people of all ages, all over the world
from Taipei, to LA, To Oklahoma to Germany, Italy
to her beloved NY

But she knew she needed to give one last gift-
one last great honor to her family and especially
her Ma and Ba

And I thank Remi and Ling-long, Jia and Chien-te
for helping make that gift possible

And that was to come home and spend whatever
time she still had with her family

She said to me two days before we left,
she said, you have helped me do the most
important thing Lee-

we have a saying in Chinese-

We say the leaf falls to the root,

And thank you for helping me to live by that.

Thank you for giving me such a gift-

Thank you for getting me home.

I have but one thing left to say and forgive me if I
say it directly to her
My dear, sweet, darling, beautiful wife
Never thank me, for I will spend my life thanking
you
For giving me the honor of being your husband
for a brief moment here on earth but for all time in
good time
And that gift I will carry with me and hold onto
until I can give it back to you
And that gift makes me the proudest and luckiest,
and yes, the richest husband of all time

Sent **Tuesday, December 21, 2004 8:11 am**
Subject **promised pics**

Here is a picture of the living room site with the
glass off and the
piano probably on the opposite side that it will live
on. The flowers
are not the final choice, there is no carpet in this
shot, the second
chair is missing and there will be in the center
between the lanterns
writing in Chinese that says Chou, Ling, Ling. But it
gives you the idea
of what it will be like.

The second pic is the valley on the mountain
before cassey's mist set in.

And you were now there... Lee

Sent Tuesday, December 21, 2004 8:15 am
Subject Pics, I swear...
Attachments cc living room.jpg 168K
mountain valley premist.jpg 177K

And now finally, ruined after all that build up, are the pics.



Sent
Subject

Tuesday, December 21, 2004 11:52 pm
years from now

Began packing, and planning for the tough week of work that I have renovating my life before going back to work in January. Ba came in and asked me if I wanted to go for a walk and I tried to explain that I want to go for a run and we like Abbott and Costello in sign language went back and forth, you walk, no me run, we walk the I run, me no run, finally a treaty was struck and out we went. As we walked to the university together I thought of our first long walk together many years ago. Silent except for him trying to explain a few of the sights to me. But we were on the same path now, just him and me, and so much had happened since. We got to the spot where I saw Cassey's bird and there were now two of them and I again thought two things right on top of each other, well, that means it is just a bird with a mate, and this is its home, and that Jessie and Cassey were together and having a ball. I whispered hello to them both and they flew away rather quickly and only did bird things and no gestures of hello.

Ba and I kept our silent walk up and we passed the basketball courts and I thought of my older men's game that I was invited to attend on Wed. nights but haven't been back and how tonight I hope to meet with Jim so I will never see those men again probably. Wonder if they wonder why I never

came back. If they think American's don't honor invitations. And as we almost got to the track, just one of the white birds flew down and stopped in front of us. I said its beautiful isn't it, to Ba, but hoped it heard too, and Ba said something that seemed to be, these are Blah Blahs they are special to Taiwan. We see them a lot. But for all I know he was saying hello to it as well. It took off and flew over our heads and far down into the valley. And I went for my run and Ba climbed and explored as I did, and students gathered for an outdoor volleyball class, and probably wondered why this American that does not shave is using their track, and some were late to class, coming up as the role was being taken, and you could tell they didn't want to be there, and I thought of how so many of us do not live in our bodies, use them, are comfortable in them, until it is too late.

And Ba came back just as I finished my 10th lap and we walked back a slightly different way through the university under the huge metal spider sculpture that is some student's legacy and I thought of what will Cassey be remembered for? She claimed to never care. Knowing how important it was to me to live on through my work, that someone hundreds of years from now might still know there was a Lee, she said Oh sweetheart, I hope so. But some of us, we live to live. And that is all. But she did get such a thrill out of seeing her credits in her published articles, and for her designs. And she got such joy from her Glamour article, though maybe that was because it was

anonymous. I hope wherever she is, and whatever she is, she is still able to do that- to live to live. And I hope that those of us that knew her, will always help her by doing that along with her.

And now it is off to prayers and to see her and hold her soul in my hands again.

Lee

Sent **Wed., December 22, 2004 10:41 am**
Subject **Probability**

Only one of the three chanters was the same. The one with the high pitched bell. The wood frog beater and the priestess were different. And their harmonies were not as sweet. Made you wonder if they look forward to doing a service with each other, is it just work for them, or is there art involved. And how many services do they chant in a day's work? There were three sections of prayers again, and almost everything seemed about the same. We took her soul-box to the small hall, next to the one we used before, but it was only set up for Cassey this time. No double duty. There was a bit more food this time, but otherwise the same setup. Looked nice. But still no matching chairs. She did not respond to my first coin toss, but said she was here and ready after the second. And because on the way to the prayers two sisters and a brother were all on their cell phones at the same time, and Remi apologized for how annoying that must have been, I got a chance to say no big deal but during

her prayers can we keep our cell phones turned off? She said yes, and conveyed to all and the prayers were only interrupted by a workman who came in to get a ladder tucked behind a piece of silk curtain. Felt like when you see the stage manager or techie run out and straighten an errant piece of scenery. So out of place.

And all throughout the two hours you could see the processions of others, coffins then families, sometimes led by bands, reflected in the glass frame of the Buddha looking at us. There must have been five or six of these parades passing by as we were chanting and again the amount of loss on one day, in one county, in one city, in one country kept giving me pause. How many will there be tomorrow on her day?

Ling-Long had said to me as we took the train together to get her shampoo that she would have loved to ask Cassey if she was all right and not afraid. Was she out of pain. I said so would I, but I would be so afraid the coins would come up negative. She agreed and she said that is why she didn't ask either. But during the first break I saw her ask three questions, three different tosses of the coins. I hoped she hadn't and had, both hopes with equal worry. I did not find out until the second break what she did ask. One: did you come to our house and speak to Asia? Yes. Did you come to Asia's school and help her? Yes. More than once. No. And then ever the opportunist she admitted a fourth question- do you have enough money? No.

This explains the funeral home attendant, who wears the same necktie every time I've seen him and I just realized today it is the cloud logo of Northern Sea- Blessed Rest, dropping off a huge bag of paper money during the second section of chants. We ended with the coin toss of acceptance, was she happy with what we have done for her, and I told her again how much I loved her, and she said all is good on the first toss. And I wept and thanked her for letting me off so easily. And we went out to burn a rather vast amount of money after returning her to the 33 top shelf, and this time, the others waiting to do the same, had smaller amounts to give. And even as the family burned it, I thought of how Cassey never cared about money or if we had it, and when we did, we spent it rather freely, and the only explanation I could come up with for the "no" to Ling-Long's question was there was a wonderful discount department store, a sort of celestial Century 21, that she must have just discovered and she was gleefully stocking her cloud closets with all those wonderful designers who have left us.

Ended the day with a nice talk with Jim that wasn't as intimate as Jerry's but probably didn't need to be. Glad for the exchange and so was he when it was over, and he recognized my need for it. Jim has a very humanistic point of view, Do not look for meaning in what probably does not have meaning. A death is a completion of a life, simple as that. And I thought of Una's saying in India, that when someone dies, you say they are complete.

This is of course in direct conflict with all that I have been participating in these last two weeks. And tomorrow. Cassey is, in this custom, to be allowed to go on a journey and I will do the best that I can to help her. But talking to Jim, certainly was fascinating. I found agnostic me, taking the side of something greater: certainly makes the meaning of life less valid for me without a greater order or truth. Maybe not a specific deity but not ready to hang my hat on no meaning at all. And I keep coming back to the unfairness of it all, she just so damn desperately wanted to live. And Jim said yes, but this happens all the time, that's the tragedy of it, and I thought of all those coffins. And I said doesn't seem like there is a whole lot of justice in it all does it. And Jim said exactly. Who said that it was just?

And now after riding the train home for probably the last time this trip, and who knows when it will be the next, I am about to go to sleep. And I know that there is no way to prepare for what I will feel tomorrow, especially when I see her again. I only know that it will be the last time I see her, at least for a long time. And maybe ever.

Sent **Wed., December 22, 2004 7:54 pm**
Subject **ahead of time**

Of course we all got up to early and are sitting a bit in our dark suits, me almost suit, and we are trying not to let our grief give way. Breakfast before a funeral, it doesn't get any odder than that. Fuel the

bodies that are still functioning. Deb pointed out the feeding of the dead in this culture as a beautiful example of how present they still are believed to be here. And I thought of the can of Pringles that sat for two days at Cassey's site because Remi said as a girl Cassey liked Pringles. But they were sealed tight when we brought new rice and tofu and had to make space. Even the sparrows couldn't get to them. Perhaps we should have opened the can for her. I did always cry when we got to the part of the prayers when the priestess took up the bowl of rice and put chopsticks to it, took some and dropped it into the incense urn in front of her soul. Then laid the chopsticks down and bowl for her to eat from it. And I also caught my breath, when she made this beautiful fanning motion with the prayer books pages which are not cut but joined like a long paper fan, continuous to their binding. She turned them back and forth as if waving the prayers, and it was like when a magician fans cards and then shuffles them with one hand into the other, passing them through the air. These ancient words, joined, neverending, fluttering in front of Cassey, fanning her, honoring her, and it was no trick or illusion, it was tenderly real.

I am wearing the wrong tie, though it is one of my favorites. It is grey and has white stitching around the edges, Sort of Frankensteinish in this context, and if I had another I would wear it, now is the time for a solid Regis, but the only other I brought is bright green striped; thankfully for most of the

service we wear robes and the tie will be irrelevant. And obviously it is anyway. Ba is also wearing a striped tie with white in it so I will not worry him at least. Ma gave me a tiny plastic bag with some dried leaves or herb or wolfsbain in it; I have no idea. She has tucked it in my top shirt pocket, patted it and motioned for me to leave it there. She has one and so does Ba.

Woke up at dawn today, and it felt like Cassey wanted me to see this particular sunrise. Have slept longer other days but today woke for no other reason. We have packed her things and I have her ring in my wallet. Ma says now we need three more sets of clothes to burn with her, and some of her most beautiful jackets were going to ash. I showed her some older, but still things Cassey wore, more day to day, and asked if it would be all right to switch them. Ma said fine. I explained I wanted Ling-Long and Remi to have these beautiful things, Cassey would want them to. She is wearing Prada already after all.

And the bags of things sit by the door and Ma and Ba are sitting in the living room. And Ba is flipping channels and we still have a half an hour before we should leave.

Sent Thursday, December 23, 2004 9:25 am
Subject secrets

The longest day of my life so forgive the longest email ever written. I will break this one into two

parts. If you've tired of these writings long ago remember there is only one more day after this, and there is always delete.

Ma and Ba and I were the first to arrive. About twenty minutes early. I was carrying her things in two bags and a beautiful orange basket that I found out later was to hold her soul box. I noticed right away how stunning the flowers and setting up had made the space. Hearts of roses on the pillars, her name in Mandarin on the sign above, and yes a sea of white flowers, bamboo, and candles. And then center stage her picture. Seeing her smile, her beauty again and in such a large scale and in such a sweet amount of flowers I felt my heart tie itself into a slip knot. This picture was taken at a peak in her life and it was full of joy, radiated Cassey. She was not aware that she would be sick again in a matter of days- no, on that day she was triumphant, had just delivered her lecture, on the famous lecture tour, and was so, so happy. I sat down and tried to begin a long day of processing, of searching for a how to make sense, but then a sound check began and the love Theme from Titanic played and I knew that detached and surreal was going to be a better way to make it thought some of this. No need to worry, a kind of numbness takes over- half in and out of body and you just know it is a dream, just too real a one to wake from.

Ling-Long arrived moments later and was already telling the many workers what was wrong. I will try

not and retell all of the Ling-Long moments of direction, but as this list of events unfolds, imagine Hitchcock obsessing and Oliver Stone demanding and put them both into a sweet faced young Asian mother and throw in Karl Rove and you have Ling-Long throughout the day. Thankfully that was the last time we heard "my heart will go on." There was a brief sound check of Rainbow Connection, the Kermit song from the Muppet Movie which was one of Cassey's choices so even as it was so sweet to hear and deeply sad as well, I relaxed about the music.

The family began arriving and none of the ladies were wearing dresses and most not even black. Even some jeans and sneakers. So odd for a culture that prides itself on tradition. And yes, many cell phones went off during the service. But thankfully none of my immediate family. We went with the priest- no woman today- and I was handed the basket and we put Cassey in it and took her to meet her body which thankfully was draped and out of view. Remi was asked to look at her and sign for her as being her sister. We then led her down the long inside aisle that connected each of the funeral halls and that we never had walked down before. Only outside before this. It was about a full city block or two long, and you could feel every step. When we got to the back of our hall, her open white coffin was waiting and we went through the back and out front while they prepared her.

Once out front, the Bach began and we lit more incense and then I was asked to bow first to her and place the incense, then pick up a wreath of flowers that had a Styrofoam ships wheel shape to it covered in flowers, and bow with that, and then lift a bowl of fruit (apples) and bow with that. Each series of bows, for each group of friends and family was a repetition of that series, incense, flowers, fruit- many times throughout the morning.

Once she was ready and in her coffin, she was wheeled out and placed behind the short wall of flowers that also had her feast placed the back side of it. All of the speaking was done in front of this short wall and the only time we went behind it was the procession of last words at the end. After I bowed, I sat next to Remi in the front row. As the other family groups began their bows I noticed that we were only hearing the Bach and I asked when the music would begin in the order Cassey picked. Remi said, oh, I picked a few selections and the rest we didn't think was appropriate. The guests wouldn't understand. I hope you understand, and I hope I will one day, but it took every ounce of self control- and I used to fail in that subject in elementary school, straight A's except for self control, not to stand up and say "stop this now until that music is played." I kept saying Let go. Let go. It has not been the way she wanted it once, why should it be now. But I was so angry at Remi for this violation. I know how hard she has worked and how much she cares, but please- the guests wouldn't understand? This is not for the guests, it is

for her, and they love her and so yes, they will understand. But Bach it was. And Bach is beautiful, and okay so it was going to turn into exactly what she didn't want: a weepy, sorrowful affair, but there was no stopping it now. I found out later that Remi had even burned a CD with her edited selections so this was not a spur of the moment decision, only passed off to me as a "oh by the way" thing, probably because she knew I would go ballistic. I vowed to Madame right then and there I would play her music tonight as soon as I got home, and I am playing it for her as I type this right now. And I will play it for her on New Year's when we gather and we that knew her will all understand. And now that I have let go again, I will get back to the service.

The bows finished and the MC, oh yes, we had a silky voiced master of ceremonies that would use a very phony weepy voice of his own as the family bowed and he talked a prayer as if crying for them. It was like bad presentational acting, no one really cried, just as no one really feels for bad actors, until the true emotion came as we spoke in the next section of the service. The MC had two helpers, who ushered us through the service and motioned when it was right to bow, and handed us incense and the fruit. So the family section of the service ended and the friends arrived and all of those folks that I met over the years, there they all were, and all were genuinely moved. She was so loved. And I thought of all of those not present, and knew they were there, just as she was listening

to Native New Yorker somewhere, as I am now. Ma began to weep and I kneeled by her side and held her. And then the youngest aunt stepped in and took over as we got to the section where we all spoke and I was allowed to go first. With Remi as my echo, (and she had retranslated what Katherine had done and I can only hope it was truer and not changed for fear of audience discomfort) I spoke and only lost it when I turned and faced dear Cassey and told her of my love. Remi spoke next and then Katherine. Woody was crying throughout this section and since the men where now on one side and the women on another I was by his side. I held him and he wept into my robe for a long, long time. Remi and Katherine both spoke in Mandarin and I only found out later what they said. Katherine said a bit for each friend because they “cared” so much for her. And Katherine said Remi spoke of how all of Cassey’s friends accepted her temper and moods as just Cassey and thanked them for that. She also said that Cassey had orchestrated her final days and it was her wishes that helped the family through such a difficult time. Ironic, I thought, and when I asked Remi later what she said, the reply was, oh, nothing, no big deal. Thanked everyone for being friends with Cassey when it wasn’t always so easy, and that was about it. The games never end.

After each group of friends bowed, high school, college, travel agents (yes, they showed up), and business colleagues, the procession began.

Rainbow Connection began to play and I couldn't believe this was the choice for this point. That banjo and Kermit singing, Why are there so many songs about Rainbows.... Lee, don't get corny, I could hear her saying when I had suggested the Beatles. And she got the Muppets. Oh, well, she loved this song, did want it played, so why not at the climax. I was given a small bouquet of orchids (she finally got her orchids) and I placed them with her, and a white rose for each of my family members and the friends far away. I found out later at dinner that in Taiwan, goodbye is never said at funerals or after. I have always hated goodbyes and never believed in them. So I was delighted to hear that I was truly Taiwanese in one way. She looked so gaunt and she was covered except for her face. You could barely see even her beautiful head scarf. But she looked peaceful and I tried to take in as much of her as I could knowing it was my last look. And I said I love you beyond words, and I will see you soon. I know you know how much I care, and always will. Until then. And all of the family and friends began to pay their respects.

There was a brief moment outside, as I thanked those that came as they walked out, and Sylvia handed me a small black journal. I had forgotten and for a split second did not know what it was. But held it to my chest and then kissed it. And my name was called immediately after that and the Paul McCartney song Venus and Mars came on,

and I could hear Martha smile and say yes! all the way from Miami.

It was time to lead my wife to the cremation. Her picture was held by Lee-Yin and he led the processional, which was in order: her picture, her coffin now closed again and draped with lovely flowers. Then Remi with her banner and I was carrying the orange basket with her soul box and plastic servants in it, and in that moment I placed her journal in the basket as well. I was not going to read those words, they were secrets, they deserved to be burned with her. And I thought for a minute not to tell Remi, she might not agree, but I knew that would be wrong, she should be given the choice- she too had wanted to read it, said so when I told her that it existed. I whispered, Remi, is it all right, I put her journal here to be burned with her. And she said sure, she was a private person; that is what should be. And we both knew we wanted to read every word but never would.

Sent Thursday, December 23, 2004 11:23 am
Subject no goodbyes

There was a large smokestack billowing smoke above the crematorium and it had obvious overtones for me as we processed towards it.

And I should warn you here the Taiwanese treat death head on, no punches pulled, so if you don't want to read on I understand. There is much I

would rather not have had to have taken part in, and mostly record here so years from now I can truly say yes, this was what I had to do. But for the my family here, it is part of a rich tradition and the children, even young Woody and Asia took part as well. Through all of it.

We led her up to the door, and I thought we would stop there, but we took her inside, and she was led to one of about ten oven doors, and we were told to stand back about twenty feet, and I thought "my Lord, if they make us watch her go in there I will pass out." And then they told us to (and I have no idea how the logic of this works) they told us to yell Chou Ling Ling watch out for the fire don't get burned be careful. And then we should walk out and not look back. There is a lot of not looking back in this day of not saying goodbye. So the family and friends that stayed all yelled for her to be careful and then we left her at the doorway to the oven.

And were told it would be two hours, and there was a bereaved family lounge with a small food stand and closed circuit televisions of each oven door, and on another TV was a listing updated of who was ready and finished. I could not believe as my wife was being turned to ash, a food order was being taken and someone was running out to get lunch. And the family all sat about, some in the lounge, some outside and we waited. Chien-te was leafing through the latest Mercedes Benz brochure that Wen-Ning (who works for them) must

have brought. The kids were playing; Woody who had been sobbing not a half hour ago was making silly faces. Cassey's friend Janet was the only one still in a somber mood, she was reciting a very long Buddhist prayer, because it was her way, she said.

After lunch, we got the word that she was ready, and I thought this meant in her urn and time to go to the burial site. I had forgotten that Remi had said something about by the way there will be bones. And as we were led to the other side of the crematorium I could hear another family screaming don't go into the fire, but their screams turned into true wails of despair, loud and long. And I remember some families even pay criers to come and cry for their loved ones.

Our entire family and the friends that had stayed were gathered around a stainless steel table that had her urn opened on it. It looked lovely, and, in miniature this time, there was the same joyful Cassey picture in an oval on the front. About the size of a cameo. And her shroud of yellow silk had gotten a little singed somehow they said and so it had to be swapped out for a new one. How odd, I thought she was just burned to ash and we are worried about a small singe? But it is considered bad luck so this new strange to her shroud would stay with her forever. Then a squat middle aged worker wheeled her remains out on a small metal cart. I was not prepared for this, a small pile of her bones- not ash- not coffin-nothing but bone. And I thought I might have to leave, but I thought of how

solid and strong she had been, and this is what held her up, held her through all of her struggle, I can look at this, and Remi leaned over and said, the man from the funeral home just told her the discolorations in the bone were from the chemo. That I could have lived without knowing forever; I just figured it was where the fire had singed her, but this was the radiation on the pieces of her skull...

And I felt someone's hand steady me, I think it was Jim. And I thought, my dear sweet Cassey, how brave you were and look what you withstood. Nothing they threw at you was going to knock you down. And there was a large pair of wooden chopsticks, about a foot and a half long and they were handed to me and I was told to pick up a piece of her leg bone and place it in the urn. (I thought of Jon's mother's funeral again, only my second in my life, and my revulsion at the shoveling of dirt) and now I was having to use large chopsticks and move my wife's bones. I prayed that I would not drop it and didn't. And then each family member moved a piece, and that included the young children as well. And then the friends. And when it was needed the yellow silk was held over the pieces and the workman gently pushed down to crush some of the bone to make space for it all. (Later Remi said did you noticed we started with her feet and leg, and then ended with her skull, that is to keep her placed correctly) And the pieces of her scorched skull were the last bone placed in the urn, after that the tray was wiped with a trowel like a jeweler might for every last bit of

gold dust. Her jewelry, some necklaces, gifts she never wore but were dear to Ma, and her wedding ring were placed in the urn and then her yellow shroud was placed very ceremonially on top. And the lid was placed on it and much disagreement was made between Ling-Long and Chien-te about how the gradations in the Jade should line up. Final placement was finally agreed upon and it was glued into place and her name piece from her soul box was taped on top. Then this worker, like the marines who fold the flags as ceremonially as possible, folded another piece of yellow silk around the entire urn, knotted it beautifully and after we chanted over her, I was told to pick it up and carry it to the car for the ride to the site.

She rode the entire hour on my lap with Remi at my side, and we called out just as we had that first night. Come with us, we are over a bridge, on the highway. Here is your new home, up the mountain covered in clouds. And it was. A huge grey group of clouds were covering the entire sky and the top of the mountain was gone. We pulled up to the Northern Sea and went inside and into the big Buddha Room and there was more chanting and she was unwrapped. And then we brought her to a chanting room and there was about thirty minutes of ceremony with only one chanter this time, ringing a bell, hitting a sweeter sounding block at the same time, and stopping the small bell, every once in awhile to strike a chime or small gong. She was a nun, with a shaved head, like Cassey's had

been, and she had a microphone draped over a shoulder harness. And she led us next up to the ninth floor and to Cassey's site.

First the site was wiped with a cleaning cloth, and that would have made dear Purell loving Cassey so happy. I was then asked to place the urn inside and we would place the living room in front of her. She should have her picture turned just off center I was told. And there was some type of prayer on a sheet that was placed under the urn. Remi then said why don't we place the design samples in the back next to her, and I said I'd like them out front visible, but Ling-Long and Remi said they won't fit and won't look right, so next to her and her urn it was. I placed her POP invitation, the one she won an award for, and I knew she was most proud of, and her Brancusi, because it was similar in shape to her urn. And the living room was placed in front, and the furniture was added, and more discussion about how to make it just so, and once Ling-long was satisfied, we were told to leave while they sealed it. Out in the incense area on the 9th floor, we chanted a bit more, and then we were told we could have a last look, for today, but when we left to not look back, this upsets her. I waited to the end of this line since it had already begun, and took a bit of time to wish her peace and rest and how proud I was of her bravery, and that it was all her time now. And there'd be no more pain and struggle. I told her how sorry I was for the arguing over her, and for her wishes not being met, but that

the rest of my life would be about making her even prouder of me. And no goodbye.

Outside it was storming, big winds, like out of a movie- ten commandments before the red sea parted- that dramatic- rain spitting- and a mist of cloud. Chien-te, Remi and I burned a large amount of money for her and the goddess of that location. And it was over.

I kept thinking this would be when I would wake up and she would say, love, what is wrong, was it a bad dream, look you are all wet...

And we drove to dinner in the cold and rain and by the time we got to the restaurant, that Ba had chosen the other day, the one we had lunch in with the fish in the tanks waiting to be eaten, maybe a half hour later, it had stopped raining and the sky had cleared. And all of us, family and friends that had stayed, ate dinner. And Sean, Remi's boyfriend, joined us; he had not been allowed to attend because his birthday numbers were bad luck for this day's ceremony. And I thought of Jia, eldest sister, also not here, and unable to attend because she was the female head of another family, also bad luck. But her children and husband could be here, so go figure....And I knew she was home sobbing with Tang Mama. And I thought of how much Cassey'd love to be here with us. She'd have loved the fried bread, her favorite, the shrimp, all of it. Even me and my egg fried rice. But the family was eating

and laughing, and Katherine leaned over and asked if I was tired, when I was close to tears, and I said no, just...

And then later she said we don't believe in goodbyes in Taiwan and so we will all just leave and they did. And Ling-Long said the same thing- Lee we are not allowed to say Goodbye-I know I said, but if I may- thank you so much for everything you have done. And she said- yes, you are family- and we will see each other soon.

And for a culture that does not believe in goodbye they sure do go through a lot to not do it, and I remembered all of Ma and Cassey's tearful airport scenes. Ma sobbing and Cassey then having to sob, and to let each other go was agony. But finally Ma would let go and all along the glass panel that separated them Cassey would wave and cry and Ma would run along the outside waving- and then she would disappear from view and I am sure Cassey did the same for her, just vanished...and there is no such thing as goodbye, and I thought about tomorrow and being in that same airport, and wondering what we would all be not saying then too.

Sent Thursday, December 23, 2004 8:21 pm
Subject endings of beginnings
Attachments ccservice2.jpg, cassie.jpg

So this will all end as it began with a long flight to a home. And the clichéd bookendingness of it is just that for the same reason that clichés are clichés. Because they happen too often to be anything else. Even Disney grasped and exploited the cyclical Lion Kingability of life so there is nothing profound and yet everything to know lies in the acceptance of that continuum. But maybe because I use words and stories in my life, and stories beg to have beginnings and ends, once upon a times, best of times worst of times, I hold onto the neverending book, like those prayerbooks that were flown past Cassey's soul, as an image that comforts me at this moment. And I think of all the books and movies that ended abruptly shockingly and in some cases so unsatisfactorily. And I spoke of that to Jim the other night, how Cassey's just learning to master her life, and her deep desire to live, the cutting off of that mid-reel, felt like when I was watching Hitchcock's *The Birds* for the first time and how they just drive away and all the birds are watching and nothing is settled and I remember screaming "that's it, that's the end?"

And every time I watch that movie I feel that way, and that is still what my wife's life story feels like,

and maybe always will. And I think Jim said "yeah, and some lives are like that and some aren't." And maybe Hitchcock was saying that sometimes we end where we began, and that might just have to be enough. Even if it sucks. But for her, for her read of her story, I hope it means never ending, that there is room for a wonderful sequel-- since she was a success, and success loves a sequel.

Because the best stories, the great words are picked up and re-read and re-lived and never do die, they go from sign language to word of mouth to Aramaic, to Latin, to paper, to digital, they find an eternality of their own. And she was that if she was anything, a great story. She said to me, "Lee, I don't want to go, honest I don't, but if I do, I have been so lucky, look at my life, how lucky can you get?" If that isn't a good read of a life, in every sense of the word, I've never heard one.

Oh, how I miss her, even as I look at the closet of things I must leave behind and know there are many more closets of things still to sort through. And I know that too will never really end. My mother talked of how she is surprised now when there are whole days that go by and she does not miss my father, and I wonder when those whole days will come and will I regret the forgetting of her for that day. Should I walk out the door each day and blow her a kiss as the devout Catholics I see cross themselves before going out into the world? Would that help?

I have attached two pictures- one of the service decorations before she was present in the room, for those of you who so wanted to be there, and one picture of Cassey that Kim sent me from the shoot she did with him five or six years ago. It was a lovely gift to get, and so I pass it to you for the same reason. It is so Cassey, elegant, stunningly beautiful, and deeply thoughtful. And still from her black period...Thank you Kim.

I still must begin to pack, and I will as soon as I write a few more thoughts. I have so many new friends from all this, another gift from my wife. And both my families and new and old friends, I know are stronger from this lesson, we grow so from everything we feel. I hope we will all have learned to quarrel a bit less, to play a bit more, and to listen to our most passionate dreams for ourselves and each other. And to show up and be there for each other. So many of you did, and it meant the world to her and to me.

I know that I will soon be looking out the window of the plane as we both liked to do, how most like to do, what a view that we so seldom get, and where I am sure she rekindled her love of clouds. And I know that too will always be bittersweet from me from now on. But my fear of flying will always be a bit diminished now. And if you've ever flown with me, for you and I that is a great gift, trust me. If my story ends in flight, I will possess the knowledge she know has, and hope that means I will be closer to her, and I can live with that. No matter how I end, I

have held death's hand and I can live with it now. My only worry, since my partner is no longer, is that I will have no one willing to flutter my stories pages in front of me and more importantly in front of others years from now.

I asked Cassey for one vow when we married. Sure a kiss and hug every now and then would be nice, but I asked her to, if I died, honor me by working to get my words spoken, published, dispersed. She promised she would. I never for a moment thought she would go first. I was the older, and ate more poorly. I had the poor posture. I couldn't balance a checkbook. I never thought I'd have to worry that though unbroken, that vow would no longer have potency.

So many of you have spoken of your wish to help, what can you do for me to begin again. I will sign off the last update with what my friends and my family can do for me, for they will do for Cassey what in their hearts she is asking them to do already. Please remember these words of mine, and share them when I join her. She will not feel it selfish or a breach of privacy if they are helping me stay aflight over a field somewhere with her, three of us birds now, and you know how three birds will squawk at who should get the attention. And so maybe I will be the less elegant, not all white bird, with a little goose-like heft, but I will still fly. And I will thank you, without being able to say hello, and for understanding it is me.

Democracy



DEMOCRACY- A SHORT STORY

Frame it and hang it in a museum, that face....Twelve years of marriage and she still looks like no one he had ever met. And just this morning, he realized, actually had the thought, that he had never grown tired of the way she looks. Ever. Pretty damn rare, was the next thought. More people'll vote for Nader than can say that about their wife. Other things drove us nuts, but she's forty one now and looks thirty, and I have never met anyone with her face...Some folks look like others, a movie star, someone you went to high school with. Somebody at a trade show or in that hotel lobby. Some people marry their mother or father or sometimes each other. But she- he would see her in a crowd, if they were meeting up after work, or get separated shopping and bam, he would want to know her, he would want to hit on her at that downtown party because out of all the trendy and hipster people, she was the one that you would sharp focus on like Maria and Tony while the others soft filtered into a blur. She was the one who every time you see her would cause you to all over again reinvent a life with ...They'd known each other for almost fifteen years and it seemed like fifteen years of first time sightings.

All that in a moment as he gazed at her. Five thirty in the morning, dark outside but there was a glow that had been directed to shine on her face as she lay there in bed. Cheekbones cut deep in to the pillow, lips slightly pursed, perpetually poised to kiss,

eyes just threatening to sneak open. And her horns askew. She is wearing a black knit hat to keep out the cold, some say it was a cat, she thinks it is- which would make them ears, some said mouse, but these bumps are more pointed than round, so to him they are little horns, and she's a playful demon or imp, Pan, and right now her horns or ears are bent to one side from slippage in sleep. She wears a hat or cap almost all the time since she lost her hair for the third time from this latest round of chemo. And yet she is still absolutely stunning. (Her favorite word for beauty, and he hears in his thought the way she says it, making it just shy of one syllable longer-stun-n-ning. So much of his life he has realized, as he worries about losing her, has been translated into her. His taste in clothes, his way of cleaning the inside of the Sonicare toothbrush, even his choice of adjectives. (He's always been a morpher, taking on the tastes and affectations of those around, but after years with her, he finds it hard to know where his edges end and she begins.)

Then he senses it. She doesn't seem to be breathing. He sees the oxygen tube still in her nose, he hears the faint exhale of the too loud generator muffled by the two doors shut to quiet the ever reptilian hiss. She's getting air but she doesn't seem to be inhaling.

Is this what it looks like, is this it, it couldn't have already happened, what about all-did we- did I say how much before she- and then she blinks just

a twitch of her eye, not even to open it, but a pulse of the eye, and his panic falls back. Her chest sighs now too, and then stops. He sees that she is breathing but very, very shallowly, effortlessly, delicately, ironically more calmly than he. The disease in her lungs held at bay for a bit of night by some lullaby of a dream. Mercifully, somehow, there was some rest before the big day. Election day. Her first time voting.

And what an election it was. Country divided, most important election in over forty years, candidates imploring voters to understand how once in a lifetime it will be to show up even as they flock lawyers to the polls to impede each other's gains. Just last night he had heard Michael Moore on his last cup of coffee legs pleading the kids to care. Time for a change... Carl Rove like some dark paunchy ninja slicing through the provinces...His boy W as popular with the average electorate as John Wayne- a star that he never understood how they let him make a single movie, let alone wrangle into icon... It certainly had everyone in a tizzy. And it does seem, even to him, as if the world might be teetering in the balance, but this is New York, and things are never as wonderfully complicated, purposeful, or weighty it seems on any other side of the Hudson.

The clock sent by Satan and sold by Sony begins screeching and he reaches over her and shuts it off. She has not stirred. The awful alarm and his slight pressure reaching over her has had not had

the usual unsettling affect, the grimace on her face, the slight turning away. She remains in her trance. Wow, maybe I shouldn't wake her. She's so peaceful. But I will never make it to class if we don't get there by seven, and with the wheelchair, and the large turnout -he begins to calculate all the minute, over processed thoughts necessary to be perpetually on time- afraid, no profoundly unsettled, if late.

And then like a bald Glenn Close, she bolts up from the bed on her elbows and mumbles as though her lips are stapled together: "Is uh time?" Eyes still shut: "whu time is iht?" And her horns fall off completely.

"It's only five thirty. It's early." The autumn air begins to chill the room and he senses how bundled she will have to be. She always needed more clothing than most, wore sweaters into the summer, but now, she was so fragile and cold, brittle as the Venetian glass they watched blown into being and later hand-carried home, and he would have to even more carefully shelter her -it was just starting to get icy cold out. He placed her cat cap over her head but not before kissing it lightly and touching the soft nubs of hair defiantly budding.

"Can we huv some thing tuh eat furst," she questioned and he knew how she must have sounded as a three year old wanting some congee in her Taiwanese town and she slid slowly back down as if to second guess her own awakeness. She always had trouble stirring, to say

she was not a morning person, would be like hoping Dracula would be good to go with a cup of coffee. No, she loved to sleep, she was almost somnambulatory even when healthy. He remembered during their courtship how she'd often sleep to one or two in the afternoon, a grad student on her third degree and little else to wake up for, and he was trying to reach her with the impatience of a new day and new love. And her slumber could not be blamed on a wee hours of the morning parting in Capulet like goodbyes, she just loved her sleep and had not matriculated to post graduate adulthood. Now with the burden of career, she would begin getting ready to work still asleep; often halfway through her commute and jostled by a large man who stepped on a toe, or the two others more than should fit in the space of a car finally waterslapping her round to full alert.

But this sleep seemed even deeper than her usual deep, uncharted ocean floor explorations of unconsciousness. He would find out later when she confessed it was because she took what she claimed to be two Ambien, given to calm her racing anxiety, instead of one or a half. He would find out even later, after her death, confessed by her good friend Carmella, her colleague at work, that had offered to come over later that day in the revolving door of home care friends that had recently been scheduled to allow him to get back to work some days- and even as she said it, you could sense her biting her tongue as if giving away the golden grail of girlfriend secrets, that she

confessed to taking at least two more of the Ambien later that day and wanting to put a plastic bag over her head. She was too tired of the wasting away and wanted out, but Carmella said that she forgot to put the bag on or was too sleepy or had no idea actually why but after four hours of her trying to get inside the apartment and trying to reach him and unable to since he was in meetings and had his cell-phone turned to silent and when she finally stumbled to and answered the door, she fell back to near unconscious most of the rest of the day, and when he raced home alerted in the afternoon, and later took the pills and hid them, ever after giving her a dose when she asked (and she never argued, seeming to be grateful the temptation was removed) because he had no reason yet to not believe, he wanted to trust her when she said she only took two and it was an accident. But it was this weeks later confession, when Carmella slipped up or offered up revealing their too vital to be just girlish secret, that he actually knew what he had known, and it was almost more hurtful that she hadn't trusted him. Couldn't tell him her darkest truth but could tell her colleague. It was this that hurt more than the fact that she had tried to kill herself. He'd never be able to fully process that inappropriateness of emotion, even years later, after W was thanks to term limits no longer the bane in his or any other liberal's existence...Did she not trust me, or did she know it would torment me, why did she not tell me? Is it because I wouldn't help, that late night when she asked me to help her? When all she could say was-

Please, help me- was how she always phrased it... Because this happened more than once. And he knew what "help" meant, pillow to face, end her suffering. Stop the pain. She even asked him point blank once: "You could just smother me, like the Indian at the end of the Jack Nicholson movie" In case there was a doubt- and he knew she was having a bad spell that time. Was much better by that night. Went to her favorite restaurant for dinner. Forgot all about it. Or did she. Obviously not...

Do you want to just wear your pajamas under your coat and some sweatpants? Wouldn't that be easier than trying to get dressed? "Yes," she said and now she seemed a bit more alert. Even picked up her water bottle and swished away the dryness in her throat. As he got her and himself dressed, he thought of the class he would have to teach that morning, and if there were long lines how he might just have to bring her home and race off without voting...and how that would disappoint her, she had been talking about this for weeks now. Not boasting or even wearing one of the "nobody died when Clinton lied" buttons he bought for them. Not her style...In fact some of her friends might even think her a closet rightie, she never talked about politics, as secretive of this as most things in her life. She was amazed and little off-put by his family-always eager to sponsor major debates over dinner, or hold forth about religion, abortion, any of the capitol "I" Issues even before soup was served. But she was a still water and deeply cared- enough

to tethered to her oxygen and still reeling from her full brain radiation willing to rise herself and wheel to the polls. She said just yesterday- please take me there- don't let me not do this. Make sure I go. I want to vote.

And now he was cooking her a bit of scrambled egg hoping her stomach would allow it. Eating had already become touch and go- and he knew (and was right) that later there would be no persuasion possible to coax nourishment into her. Thanks, she said as he set the plate of eggs with a croissant he had picked up as a bribe the night before. He knew it had to be a the best pastry or she would not even sniff it, would pinch it to make sure it was worth the eating, not because of the calories- she never gained weight and now was losing it more than he wanted to know. He had struggled with his waist all his life, from husky boys departments to girls saying no at high school dances to a few years of college thinness thanks to sprouting tall and graduating to adult mirror compulsion. You know the constant checking of self as if disbelieving that ten minutes ago you were not that heavy or maybe had miraculously grown thin. How ironic he had married a girl who never in her life hated herself for that extra ice cream. She was a size zero or at her plumpest a two- and was upset that as she aged was finally inching her toward heavy- but now all worries of weight were sadly or wonderfully irrelevant. "When did you get this?" "Last night on the way home. From Balthazar." You needed something special today- it takes a lot out of you to

pull that lever..." He knew it was the excellence in the croissant that would be important, from a good shop, if not the best. She had impeccable taste, in clothes, in art, in food and not because it was chic to like it, but because it just was better. Because life should be about having things that were beautiful and well made, she always said. Trendiness and style had nothing to do with it. "It's good. Yum" "I'm so glad" And he was, more than he could hold in his heart that moment and he left the room to hold back a large weep.

When he got back into the room to take the plate she was back asleep again. With the plate, croissant gone, half the eggs remaining, still on her chest. "What's the matter, you don't like my cooking?" And she just lay there. And he knew that in death she would be so beautiful and he was right. The Chinese custom is to remain with the deceased for at least four hours after death, just sitting with them, speaking with them, talking to them, to guide the spirit, calm it, so that it can become adjusted to the new and strange existence post life. So after they made the difficult flight back home, he and his Taiwanese brothers and sisters would, once she was gone, sit with her, and chat, telling her things, love declarations, not to afraid, and when he was telling her how much he cared, and held her hand as it began to chill and stiffen, even as a small part of him was amazed he was having to do this, talk with her, believe her spirit was still present and in need of comfort, he looked at her stillness and her nubby

head, and her forever closed eyes and she was still breathtaking (if you will) to him. She was still his lovely wife. And right after telling her how much he loved her, would always love her, and how beautiful she was, and that he would never forget her...and asking if it was scary, was she alright, he noticed in her stillness a chill and even as she still was there, his lovely wife, he saw her deathness, and it shattered him and to protect from the devastation, he said- oh my dear, I hate to tell you this but you do, you look a little dead. Sorry, but you really do... All that would come later, now he needed to be out the door or he would miss the election and that damn class.

Nothing is simple once the line has been crossed from well to ill. Like some huge border transgressed with new regulations forfeited rights and privileges and never ending responsibilities- life reduced to two separate passport lines- the well breeze through- fast tracked- piloting and stewarding past, the ill- well, nothing is ever easy again and get ready for the wait of, or in this case for the rest of, your life. Oxygen tanks need to be checked and filled, wheelchairs prepped, pills lined up, do I need a shot today or not? Can I walk or need to be carried to the bathroom? Forget even trying for the bathroom, time for a portable commode, and endless emptying, constant cleaning. He remembered the last time they walked into the hospital so she could have her lungs drained of fluid- that so many folks were moving to and fro along the street- the oblivious- the ones not going

into this terrible place- and the small miracle that separates those that can just hurry by and those that can't. He clanged the canister of air into place on the rack at the back of her chair. Placed it ready at the door and went back to see if she was going to be able to dress herself or needed his help. And this time she was awake and looking at him as he entered the room. There was a single tear rolling down her face.

What is it my love. What is wrong....

The many thoughts that would be left unsaid could be seen scurrying for cover, and finally she said- will you stay with me. To make sure I know how to do it. I have never voted before.

Not once, not even back home?

No, I was too young when I left and well you know, I never bothered the only other time here.

And look what happened....If you had voted we might have had Gore, it was that close remember... (And even as he said it he recalled that he had voted and they had left that evening for Europe while the whole hanging chad supreme court stacking happened and they marveled at how the entire time they were expatriates, the country was left pondering its future.) "Well there really is nothing to voting, they do try to make it idiot proof except in Florida, but it is scary when you do it because you think somehow you are

going to screw it up and elect some parasite because of it, but basically you just yank this big metal lever to the side and the curtain flies open, sort of like a peep show, and you step in and flip the little metal levers, and then when you are done you pull the bar back in place and it goes Ka-ching and the curtain pops open. It sort of feels like a children's magic trick or something from another era, like churning butter, or taking a picture with one of those big cameras in those old Hollywood movies that explode with light and puffs of smoke."

And with that he was lifting her into her chair and settling her in, and adjusting her feet in the foot rests. The left over pain from last weeks blood clot in her legs made this part of traveling always difficult for her and as she impatiently lifted her leg, he sensed her aggravation that he wouldn't have to lift her leg or move it to the side or clang the foot rest down, all these trivial minuscule inconveniences magnified as if moving a mountain by the agony and debilitation. And she would allow herself to be frustrated with him and he would without even truly understanding take on the roll of the damnable, a momentary anthromorphestation of the cancer itself. He understood somewhere deep past the acknowledgement of understanding that she just needed to rail against something tangible something more present and so as all caregivers give over to, it sometime had to be him. She clanged the footrest down with her foot as if to say fuck you. But with that came the need to sit

back and breathe deeply, as if a half marathon was just run. He placed a wool blanket over her legs. And then her down coat was zipped up. Did she have enough layers on. Two hats and scarf later she gave the thumbs up and they were out the door.

Fresh air. Cool crisp. And not quite fully lit with sun, still holding onto a touch of dark. He took a deep breath and it felt so good to be outside. And though she was tethered to her oxygen which was a constant cool of temperature - he could tell she enjoyed the fresh air as well. She had not been outside for two whole days and it was like a surprise birthday for her and it was clear, cold and a deep dark blue of a morning. A few weeks later in the hospice in Taiwan she would beg to have her bed pushed to the window to sit in the sun and have it bask about her face and skin. Like that first day of wellness after a long fever or illness, and just returning to your body, just breathing clearly, just feeling the air, just tasting food again, just the simple living of life can be better than any vacation or shopping spree, that day in the sun lifted her spirits and there would be one on a mountain and a group of friends in the park, others, but this morning wheeling the block down their street before most were even awake, that block to the public school that was their voting precinct- it was if the music should swell in the movie of her life, it was that powerful of a moment. And she closed her eyes and smiled as he pushed her trying not to let the sidewalk bumps jostle her.

As they got closer to the elementary school which served as the voting precinct there were the usual assortment of campaign workers handing out flyers and standing with placards for their candidates. But none for any of the presidential candidates. Only for local races and propositions. Nothing like the campaigning he would see in a just a month in Taiwan when he went back home with her honoring her last wish to let her pass away surrounded by her family that she had forsook to make this new life for herself. It was an ordeal to get that flight home, she was very frail and the airline had apparently lost a passenger to a freak death onboard recently and wanted to take no risks. Doctor's releases and last minute approvals for oxygen and frantic pleas to the customer relations supervisor who was a friend of a friend who worked with a cousin and they were finally cleared to go at eleven the night before they were to leave. And fourteen hours and three oxygen tanks and an emergency intervention for a fourth by a paramedic in Anchorage Alaska during refueling to prevent from being bounced from the plane, and they finally made it to Taipei. It was mid election season. In Taiwan not only do they break out into fistfights in the houses of government as seen on the nightly news, they also campaign with American Idol style media blitzes. Loudspeakers blare from buildings and moving vans proclaiming the importance of each candidate both local and national, and the billboards and roadside placards become thick as newly planted tree farms. Each

billboard and sign with huge Gatsby-Egg style faces of the candidates with the same expressionless gaze. They are numbered to tell them apart, a big red or yellow 7 or 9 or 14 in the picture, so that if you can't remember their name hopefully you know they are lucky 7. And like surreal gods, they were everywhere and filling the air with their loudspeaker voices as she lay trying to ease her self into eternity. All throughout her period of hospice care the pre-election drone continued. And oddly the day before she passed it was all over-it must have been the day after election day, and the eerie (because of his lack of knowledge of the language) calling like a metallic chant, beckoning one to the other side, was no longer necessary.

But here, there were only a handful of local volunteers urging on the vote, and thrusting leaflets into your hand. As they wheeled up the handicap ramp to get inside, he had to cross the school basketball courts where he had often played a spirited game of pickup weekend basketball, which now felt like a lifetime ago, but was only a few years. He had lived in this area, in his rent stabilized apartment for almost twenty years now. Couldn't afford to move because as a struggling artist, and now underpaid teacher, when you found a cheap place to live in Manhattan, like stepping into a tar pit, you stayed put. The apartment had seen relationships come and go, and pets age and pass on, and now this might be the end of another era he thought, crossing these

courts that on any given day, blood was spilt and the score mattered more than life or death. And would he see the same faces he'd know to expect on election day.

His precinct was heavily African American and Hispanic, this area called Manhattan Valley until just recently poor and very working class. But like the rest of Manhattan it had quickly become gentrified and higher prices and greater demand meant the Lorette's Foundations and Bra store had given way to a an overpriced chi-chi bakery and the rice and bean restaurants were all becoming cafes. But at elementary school election central the older African American volunteers were still manning the polls. It had always made him feel a little guilty and proud at the same time, as he had felt as young somewhat privileged southern white boy growing up during the civil rights movement, to watch these mostly women and few soft spoken men of color with their quiet dignity and profound pride man their stations. Not that they were soft spoken, oh no, they told you what they felt.

"What's the name again? That's a mouthful. Is that German? That's some name, ain't it. You belong at number 14 over there under the clock. Right over there, district 21. And don't forget your card. Now you, miss," the monitor said to the woman still wearing the black horns, politely ignoring her frailty.

"I'm his wife", she said quietly with a touch of pride that brought more water to his eyes.

“Well, I hope you kept your name.”

“I did.” And she handed her the registration card he had taken out for her because it was easier than being heard or speaking.

“You go to the same place, number 14 under the clock, district 21.”

“Makes sense doesn’t it.” she said conspiratorially and the two women, the bony older African American who now controlled the voting area that she was once as a negro girl prohibited from going anywhere near, and this frailer though much younger Chinese who had dreamed of being an American because it was the land of Rock and Roll and Peter Frampton and all the TV shows she loved, held each others hand for a moment and laughed.

“If you need any help sweetheart you just let us know.”

“Thank you.”

And that simplest of exchanges, that moment of kindness, was somehow exemplary of all the possibilities of a great nation but of course was quickly interrupted and brought back to the reality of the failed utopia by the woman with a huge handbag and juggling a grande coffee and a bite

of brioche that cut right in front of them to be ahead in the line.

“You have to be pretty shit stained to cut in front of a wheelchair to vote,” he thought. And knowing she hated when he made a scene of these little injustices he bit his tongue. She looked up at him and he became distracted by her excitement like when they were in line for a concert or play, or to see the David in Florence. She had given him the gift of travel, -a real trip as she put it- international travel, he had seen this country, lots of it, but had never left it before her, did not even have a passport, and he was over thirty. Here he was giving her something she had never done, after begging her after the last election to be more opinionated, and he was thinking now of all she had brought to his life. The many trips home to Asia, Europe, the appreciation of all the finer things, the best croissants, the nicer clothes. How that one of the best things of a partnership is the broadening of one's scope- all that the other offers- the challenges, the tastes, the nuances.

Brioche was finished and it was now one of their turns to vote. “This is my wife, may I go in and help her if she needs it?”

“Of course”, said the older African American man with a large paunch and toothy smile and he got up from his cafeteria seat and held back the curtain of the voting booth.

"You go first," she said. "I want to watch you. Who knows, if I think about it, I may want to change my mind."

"I'll kill you if you do," he said before he could stop himself from the inappropriateness.

She smiled as if to say we both know that isn't true. "Go ahead husband, be opinionated for once where it counts."

After he placed his vote, which took but seconds, he came out and the older man said-

"That was fast, must be a democrat. Now you go ahead little lady, and don't let him make you change your mind."

"He couldn't possibly, he knows better." And it was true.

And they were inside the booth together now and he slid the lever which closed the curtain for her. He thought of the picture booths they had made out in together, the bathrooms they had groped in while courting and still pawing over each other, the elevators ridden in doing things that one shouldn't. And he kissed the top of her head between her horns. "Stop that, we've work to do." And he watched her raise herself slightly from the chair, the great effort that took, but she was going to flip those levers herself, and each one clicked into place. And she looked it over as she always did,

everything more carefully, with a built-in proofread mechanism and then one more breath to make sure, whereas he would do it as though he was being tested for efficiency as quickly as possible and then a brief skim over to not hear the implied “Stop! Put your pencils down” of his childhood. And contented with her choices, she placed her hand on his and looked up at him and together they pulled the lever back and the curtain flung open.

“Next!, the older man said to the woman who was waiting looking a bit disgruntled that she had gotten behind the woman in the chair that was taking forever in there. And he smiled at the couple as he wheeled her by and couldn’t resist saying it- “hope he left you alone in there.”

“He tried to bother me, but I told him to leave me alone. I had work to do.”

And with that they were once again outside in the brisk morning air. Of course the election was a disaster for anyone liberal and all of their friends began the threats to move to Canada and Michael Moore vowed not to sink into despair and blamed the equally radical now demonic devil Nader. And as everyone sobbed and wondered why life was so unfair, he had their personal ordeal to provide perspective and he thought of all the years of Reagan and how everyone said the same things, I am ashamed to be an American, how can life go on? Well, sometimes life doesn’t go on, he thought. Sometimes it just fucking doesn’t. But all of

that impossible to live with political despair and her much more incomprehensible final days would come later. For this moment, they were wheeling along enjoying the brisk cool air, and she took out her oxygen tube and took a long breath.

"Nice" he said, "how did that feel?"

"Good, I think," she said. But honestly it is hard to tell." Then another breath. "It feels stunning. Thank you."

"Sure," he said.

And they looked at each other for a bit, though as it was happening they both knew it would have to last a lifetime. Their eyes sank into each other, embracing each other with a gaze.

"I did it, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"I voted."

She sat back and put the tubes she so hated back into her nostrils.

"Hurry up my love, you have to go teach."