

When Something Wonderful Ends
a history
a one woman, one barbie play

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CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

One Woman

A Midwestern Reform Jewish baby boomer. She has black curly hair.

One Barbie

A 1964 near mint Bubble Cut Brunette.

The part was originally written for a mint condition, 1964 Redhead Swirl Ponytail Barbie, #850. The Swirl Ponytail Barbie has an unusual ponytail, which is caught in back with a yellow ribbon. Once taken down, as most little girls did immediately, it was almost impossible to return to its former swirly glory. I did not take my Barbie's ponytail down. She is MC—mint condition. The role has recently been re-written for a brunette bubblecut, near mint. However, in general, any classic Barbie from the 1961-65 era will do. Any hair color, and either style—ponytail or bubblecut. Barbies in less than mint condition are of course also invited to audition.

SET

The set might look like a room in a 50's split-level home, or it might be just a large square of bright red carpet, or it might be something in-between. There are probably lots of packing boxes around.

There are titles in the play. They might be presented in a way compatible with that of a 6th grade classroom presentation in 1964. Or some might be "broadcast" on an old console TV, and others might be written by the actress on boxes or any surface she can find. Or they might all be discovered in different, surprising and magical ways--the set might be like an advent calendar, with titles hiding, waiting to ambush and delight the audience. In the best sense, the titles can function like a treasure hunt for the audience. The timing of the titles in the text is not absolute, they may happen earlier or later than they do in the text, and productions may choose to do most, but not 100% of the titles...each production should make its own path through this element of the play.

There are Barbie clothes, and a tangerine and turquoise 1964 Barbie Dream Car with a dented front fender. There is a 1964 Brunette Barbie, still in her box, and a pile of vintage/vintage approximate Barbie outfits. Four specific outfits—clothing and their accessories--are essential: Enchanted Evening; Red Flare; Nighty Negligee; and Senior Prom. (Three other outfits are not essential but helpful: Tennis, Anyone; Ski Queen; and Solo in the Spotlight.) A pile of unmatched Barbie shoes. A smaller pile of Ken clothes, and possibly another Barbie or two and a couple spare Kens. A vintage Barbie Dream House, either the original Dream House or Barbie's New Dream House, with at least most of their cardboard furnishings. And a lot of Ziplock bags. Throughout the play, as appropriate, the actress sorts Barbie clothes, and puts them in Ziplock bags.

CANDY

The actress hands out Brach's cinnamon discs to audience members as they enter the theatre. Or perhaps the ushers do it. But it would be better if the actress does it. She, or the ushers, can invite the audience to open and eat the candies before, or after, but not during the show.

TITLE: WHEN SOMETHING WONDERFUL ENDS

When something wonderful ends, everybody wants to know how it happened. “How did it come to this,” they like to say. And “Why didn’t we see it coming in time.” They like saying that, a lot. They get a kind of common bewildered comfort from it. And then they get tired of saying it. They get tired of the comfort that not knowing brings.

Here’s the good news. I *know* how it came to this. I *know* why we didn’t see it coming. I even know the exact moment the end started and where I was at the time.

I was at the Toy Box on the Plaza, Springfield, Missouri’s first shopping center, situated five miles south of downtown, on historic Route 66. Now, spending money at a shopping center five miles south of downtown meant that the downtown, finding itself the road not taken, would one day, soon, wither and fade, so the Age of Enlightenment wasn’t the only thing dying at this moment, the downtown was too—and not emblematically, but physically, it was really and truly and specifically dying because I was buying a dress. A dress with a name. A dress called Enchanted Evening. Okay, my mother was buying it for me. I was ten years old, so my mother put me in the car. In the front seat, of the car. The world looked different back then, the un-Ralph Nader changed world, no car seats, not even any seat belts, you could run the hell all over the car.

When we took family trips in the station wagon, mom and dad took a little mattress and spread it out in the back and then it was nap time, party time, the three of us kids, all the way to Cape Cod three times and Miami Beach twice. Oh, and there were cigarette ads everywhere before Nader changed the world. Remember how great cigarette commercials looked? Sexy women, manly men? My mother smoked Herbert Tarytons, the most elegant pack of cigarettes in the world. White background, and no design but this lovely regal blue crown. I don't think the Tarytons killed her. Of course, you can't be sure of much of anything nowadays. So, anyway, my mother plopped me into the car, and drove us from our house in Brentwood, Springfield's very first subdivision, to the Toy Box on the Plaza, where I was allowed to pick out, from a whole wall of boxes filled with unimaginable delight—one outfit.

(She brings out Enchanted Evening.)

This is Enchanted Evening. I think it cost a dollar fifty. A Barbie only cost three seventy-five. I know because I still have the box.

(She brings out her Barbie, still in the box. She takes the Barbie out of the box.)

This is a Bubble Cut Brunette Barbie, a model made between 1962 and 1964. She is a basic Barbie, nothing really rare about her. Solid, unremarkable, excellent condition but not exactly mint.

(She dresses Barbie in Enchanted Evening.)

Enchanted Evening is a classic Barbie outfit. A pink satin evening gown with a huge, full, round train, the skirt gathered up tight at the waist with a pink rose, which causes it to start off as a tight sheath, then falls in graceful folds that create an elegant drape. A great look, especially if you don't actually have to walk in it. It's from the Golden Age of Barbie, 1959-65. It is one of the most valuable of all the Barbie outfits I have—worth three thousand dollars, NRFP—Never Removed From Package, or three hundred fifty dollars, MC—mint condition, with *all* the accessories. These include—

(She holds up each one as she mentions them.)

-- a white fur stole lined with pink satin. Sparkly pink plastic shoes. Pearls. Pearl earrings. And opera length gloves. And you can forget about the big money if it's not mint—twenty bucks on eBay, if it's missing an earring or is worn or discolored in any way.

My Enchanted Evening is not worn. It is mint. It's almost as if I'd never played with it. None of my Barbie clothes—and I have fifty-nine outfits, virtually everything manufactured by Mattel from 1960 to 1965--none of these fifty-nine outfits--with the exception of a corduroy jumper with felt poodle appliqué called Friday Night Date which is stained and discolored and may actually belong to Sara Thomas, from across the

street—none of my outfits show any sign of being worn at all. Enchanted Evening looks as good as the day I bought it. March 4, 1964.

And this is how I discovered that that very day was the start of the end of something wonderful.

I was driving back to Springfield to begin the long process of packing up my parents' home a few months ago, listening to a book on tape about the U.S. and the Middle East. It astonished me. I realized that while I had been acquiring Enchanted Evening, serial number 783, for my bubble cut Barbie, serial number 750, at the *exact same moment*, a SOFA, or Status Of Forces Agreement—S-O-F-A, had just been made the official law of the land. Not this land. Iran. Status of Forces Agreements are common, we sign them whenever our troops are stationed in foreign lands, but this SOFA started the cascade of events that lifts the Ayatollah Khomeini, until then a mild mannered cleric minding his own Islamic business, into a rabid dog of rage, launching his career as the official Islamist godfather of hate until he passes the baton to Osama, though not directly, we'll get to that, who then launches two planes into the Twin Towers, one into the Pentagon, and one into the ground. Which then launches America's attack on Iraq. Which then—well, we're just at *that* which then.

TITLE: THE WHICH THEN

Here's what the which-then looks like, from my point of view, the place from which I am packing up the house and sorting my Barbie clothes and watching America's dream go bad.

I am on my way to the cemetery, to put some gladiolas on my mother's grave. It's a frail, magical ritual, a little bit like performing a miracle—doing something beautiful for the dead. It's impossible, of course, to do anything for the dead, but we still do it--my mother brought flowers to her mother's grave, and now I'm doing it for her. The willfulness of the miracle appeals to me. On the way to the cemetery, it's easy to believe in contact with the unseen, the divine, it's easy to believe that the small miracle you're about to perform will somehow be enough. On your way home from the cemetery it's different. This sudden ache hits you, because you've performed the miracle, and nothing changes. It is *not* enough. You pull out of the cemetery and that's it. Miracle over.

I have a Picture of the Miracle.

(She shows a picture of gladiolas at her mother's grave. Then she shows four or five more pictures.)

I don't remember when I started taking these pictures, but I have hundreds of them. It's some sort of documentary impulse, I suppose. I

won't be coming back to Springfield after we sell the house, and these pictures will be the only way I'll be able to visit her grave. When I look at them I feel a little comfort. I know that photos don't have any real power, I know they aren't real miracles, they're just pictures of miracles. And I know that the miracles they are pictures of are small. Small miracles that don't have the power to transform the world beyond the cemetery gates.

Most of the other graves in the cemetery have artificial flowers on them. I think that the flowers I put on my mother's grave are *better* than the artificial ones people put on the graves of their loved ones, nearby. I think that the miracle *I* make is better than the miracle *they* make.

And I think this: that anytime a person puts *their* miraculous ritual with their dead above somebody *else's* miraculous ritual with theirs, means the start of something very unfine. In my case, the unfineness manifests itself as a little arrogant smug smallness. This smallness does two things. It files down some of the finer points of my soul, and this filing down process, it's cumulative, it's catastrophic, it will show up in twenty years as a dull, dead place at my very center. And the other thing it does is put me squarely in a vast historical context. My grieving heart has landed me smack dab in the center of a ritual that has had some of the ugliest unintended consequences the world has ever known. Miraculous rituals with the dead are the very heart of all religious belief--especially now that we don't spend a lot of time appeasing the weather and the crop gods.

One of the sadder things about life on this planet is that half of all the rotten things people do to each other start out as miracles they're trying to do for their dead. Filling up the pyramid of someone you love with lots of nice things to eat in the next life—thoughtful. Burying seven thousand slaves alive to help them around the house on the other side—not. I slipped a piece of wrapped candy into my mother's hand, as we left her. A Brach's cinnamon disc—her favorite candy, my favorite candy. Giving her a token—a little sweet to bribe the gods, or tip the boatman, seemed terribly significant at the time. And not just significant—but necessary. Because when your mother dies, and you are, in some way that makes no sense at all and all the sense in the world, dragged pretty far along with her into that other place—you *understand* the *point* of *religion*—to issue the passports and publish the train schedules and arrange the passage that is the transformation of the living into the dead. In the end, *all* religion is basically just a construct to organize what happens after. To hold back the night. The reform Jewish night, by the way, is incredibly long and completely dark, because Reform Jews don't believe in heaven or hell.

The fear of death is the thing that drives all our drives.

Of course, the modern age has a new kind of drive. This kind.

(She takes out Barbie's Dream Car.)

This is Barbie's Dream Car.

That's its actual name, the Dream Car. When you put Barbie in it, you dreamed about the day you'd be behind the wheel. But the thing about driving in your dreams is—you never run out of gas. Because running out of gas--as U.S. policy in the Middle East for the past 50 years will attest to--is a nightmare. A nightmare about oil—about oil and America, the Miracle Nation.

TITLE: AMERICA, THE MIRACLE NATION

The miraculous thing about America is that we're an Enlightenment Nation. Many of our founding fathers were Deists, a religion that believed in God the watchmaker—God made the watch, and then let it run. So when they invented America, they insisted on the separation of church and state.

Most religions encourage you to prove your love for God by making other people love Him—kind of like forcing people to friend your best friend on Facebook. Some religions go further—they require you to torture and kill anyone who won't friend your Friend, and pile up their bodies to prove your commitment to the Friendship. Pile the bodies high enough, some religions say, and you can climb them like a ladder all the way to God. Deism didn't do any of these things. God rewarded us for nothing. Goodness was its own reward and there was no other. This made a blueprint for a new kind of country. America is the child of Deists like Tom Jefferson, who was the intellectual child of the most famous Deist of all, David Hume, whose writings directly inspired the Declaration and the Constitution. And David Hume's nickname, for anyone who is interested in these things, was The Great Infidel. Just so you know who your Daddy is.

Before America, there was no such thing as a nation where church and state were separate. In the old worlds, governments were a franchise arrangement, God was the *owner*—we were just the *operators*. Not in America. In America we're the owners, and it's always been a Mom and

Pop store. God was just a shareholder at the very best, and he owned a *minimal* amount of stock. Sundays. He owned Sundays. And a few Catholic schools. He did not have the controlling shares in a country for the first time in history.

Once America existed, the world changed, from a vertical world to a horizontal one. “We the people” versus “the glory of God.” The different use of your fellow human beings, in a horizontal world instead of a vertical one, is night and day.

The problem with fundamentalist countries is that they’re still engaged in the old *vertical* relationship with God that gets played out *horizontally*—God’s up there, they’re down here, and they don’t have any way to climb up there and be one with Him without building a ladder, and that ladder has always been, and seems like it will continue to be made out of the bodies of unbelievers.

Mostly, Americans live fully in the horizontal world. Yes, we climb over each other, but we don’t do it for God. We do it for ourselves. We didn’t wipe out our Infidels for religious reasons—the Indians were just in the way of our appetite, our huge, unstoppable greed, and after we wiped them out, the word Infidel became a word with virtually no meaning. Oh, our missionaries still use the word, and I heard it a lot when I was growing up, because Springfield, Missouri, is one of the main assembly lines for the American missionary trade, and is the headquarters of the Assemblies of God. It is also the place where John Ashcroft was born. We are the

home of Baptist Bible College, Central Bible College and Evangel College. Hard working people from all over America scraped their money together and sent their children to Springfield, MO, where they were expected to take bible classes, get married and go out to spread God's word. Some of them needed to get part time jobs to help pay for their education, doing housework.

We were one of the best houses for a Baptist Bible Girl to work. Not only were my parents prominent, upstanding members of the business community, but we were Jewish. We were, to vertical religious sects obsessed with proselytizing, Trainer Infidels. The girls could practice their missionary work right here in Springfield while making minimum wage.

This is the way to picture my Barbie and me, during these years. I'm dressing my Barbie in Red Flare.

(She dresses Barbie in Red Flare. She puts her hat on her too, attaching it with a pin.)

Red Flare is a bright red coat with white satin lining, that flares. It also has a matching red hat and a clutch purse with a gold closure.

Meanwhile Denise, a sweet girl from a small town near Denver, wearing a pastel sweater and three inches below the knee wool skirt, is mopping the floor near by. God has firm and unshakable notions about a

woman's knees, so there were strict dress codes at Baptist Bible College. This was not a problem. The BBC girls loved strict codes and rules, they were brought up loving them, that's how you *know*, when you're a vertical, how much you love God, by how much you love His *rules*. And when you're young, and pretty, you're just bursting to love. So. Picture Denise mopping and singing a song about Jesus *just* loud enough for me to make out every word, but soft enough that my mother can't hear.

The BBC girls had to be clever. My parents wouldn't allow them to try to convert their children, so they could never talk openly to us about Christ. But my *mother* was fair game. And in between the mothering they got *from* her and the cleaning they did *for* her, they proselytized *full time*. They weren't expected to actually convert her. They *were* expected to try. The ones who loved her—and many of them did—tried the hardest. There was one who never stopped writing her long letters begging her to accept Christ as her savior. Like clockwork those letters arrived, for thirty-five years. I was the one who had to call and let them know mom had died. I think it was an impossible thought for most of them. They had last seen her in the late 60's or 70's, in the full flush of her beauty and power. She seemed unstoppable to most everyone who met her. Mostly, she seemed blessed. We never expect the blessed to die before us. It always comes as a surprise.

When I told Denise and the others about mother, every single one of them assured me that she was in heaven. I didn't say anything. There was

no heaven and my mother was not in it. But I didn't feel like explaining that to them. I wasn't in an educational mood.

My mother, on the other hand, was always in an educational mood. She never passed up a chance to tell people in Springfield what was good about Judaism, so she would have corrected Denise gently, and then used the opportunity to share with her the three improvements that a couple of thousand years ago made Judaism an important upgrade in religion, a kind of God 2.0.

TITLE: GOD 2.0

First: There was just one God. This made worship so much more efficient, like central heating, it put the same god everywhere in your house at once, and it cut down on system conflicts.

Second: No more human sacrifice. You could no longer get to heaven by killing an unbeliever. No more ladder building using your neighbors. This is the first official step toward valuing the other as we value ourselves. I think it's the reason why everybody reacts so violently to the practice of suicide bombers, a throwback to pagan sacrifice that unsettles us down to the bottom of our souls. Even the rewards of the sacrifice--the Islamic dream of heaven—with the seventy-two virgins? That would be young girls, without experience?—gives us the creeps.

And the third great game changing upgrade on the God 2.0 program goes like this: The after life is no longer the primary focus of this one. Judaism marks the end of other worldly mindedness.

Of course, it wasn't a clean un-install. It turns out that we need our dead. This is why the lack of an operational after life was the deal breaker when it came to Judaism, even though to my way of thinking it should have been circumcision. I remember arguing with my brother about it when we were in high school. I insisted that circumcision was barbaric and aesthetically unpleasing. My brother, ignoring the reference to the

pleasing part, and in any case having nothing more to lose...reminded me that it was a sacred covenant, that God gave the Jews the Torah, the great book of our people, and they in return got circumcised. I pointed out that they might have been better off going to a lending library. But without an after life with its solid hell and palpable heaven, Judaism would always have limited appeal. If we'd had a plausible exit strategy, we would probably be living in a Jewish world. But we held firm. The Jewish world is like Vegas—what happens here, stays here.

The lack of hell created many problems for the Midwestern reform Jewish child. I cannot tell you the pity with which I was regarded by my classmates at Eugene Field Elementary School. For I was not saved. On a dozen different occasions, girls in my class actually wept over this. Beverly King, who sat in front of me for years because of alphabetical supremacy, cried more than once. I did not believe in heaven and consequently would not be going there. Explaining to these decent, religious, and not stupid girls that I didn't have to be saved because there was no afterlife *at all*—well, it wasn't hard. It was impossible. What was the point of living if you couldn't get into heaven? What was the point of being good if being bad didn't send you to hell? The children I grew up with lived in a world so uncomprehendingly vertical to me—I lived somewhere else. Our worlds looked the same from the outside—but on the inside, where all the real things happened, all the reasons were different. I was sorry for them, because they believed in heaven. I was jealous of them, because they believed in heaven. When I asked my

mother why we couldn't believe in heaven, she said we didn't need to. We had heaven on earth.

(She picks up Barbie.)

My mother's favorite color was red. Red was inevitable in my mother's life because it was practically *illegal* in my grandmother's. My grandmother dressed herself and her home in dusky roses and pale, silken shades of Prussian blue. My mother, who didn't know how *not* to fall in love every day of her life, she was continually falling in love with her husband, her children, her house, her country--well, that kind of passion for the world—is red. My mother didn't have a red coat, as far as I can remember, but that is probably the only red thing she didn't have. She had a red convertible, *several* red rooms filled with red sofas, red chairs, a red fireplace, a red kitchen--okay, it was a cross between salmon and red, but it was almost red. Red shoes and red handbags and red paintings, and her favorite artist was Red Grooms. She and my father collected about a dozen of his paintings. And now they're all about to go on the moving van with my father to independent living, and this house, where I grew up, is getting sold. That's why the Barbies had to come out of the closet where my childhood has been taking its long, long sleep. Why I'm driving myself insane, researching the outfits, discovering the names, like "Ski Queen", or "Tennis, Anyone?", or "Solo in the Spotlight"—

(She shows each of these outfits as she mentions them,
and she probably can't help playing with them a little too,

maybe even singing a bit into the microphone of Solo in the Spotlight...)

--sorting the accessories, matching them to the outfit, finding out the going price, putting each outfit in a Ziplock bag with a piece of paper with the name of the outfit, and then—well, that's the then I don't know.

My mother held on to these, all these years. Sometimes I think I should keep them too—but I know I can't. I don't have the room. Tomorrow I'm going to take them over to the guy who's fencing the rest of my childhood on eBay. Maybe it's right that my fifty-nine vintage Barbie outfits join the stream, the great moving river of memory and fetish and greed that the internet has made out of the artifacts of the American dream.

The problem with the American Dream--it's hard waking up from it. The first part of the dream--we're the Good Guys. We're the forces of the Enlightenment. Slavery, eradicating the Indians, these were things that filed down the finer points of the American soul, hell, these were *crimes* that rubbed off Prime Soul Acreage, it's true--we weren't perfect, we had a few things that were *really* screwed up, but we were working on them. And the other part of the American Dream--is abundance. God gave us a land crammed full from sea to shinning sea, He gave us more of every natural resource in the world than He gave anybody--except for one thing. A thing He apparently didn't know we'd need so much of. Oil.

(She picks up the Dream Car.)

Here's a shocker: The Dream Car is an English car. An Aston Martin.

(She puts Barbie into her Dream Car.)

I know, I know, but James Bond drove an Aston Martin, and the whole double o seven thing was huge back then. English cars, by the way, never ran on English oil—there isn't any. So the Brits had been drilling for oil in the Middle East since the 20's. We've got Texas and Oklahoma to keep us happy, so we're busy drilling at home.

TITLE: HIT AND RUN 1

Then comes World War Two. The Brits and the Russians are in trouble. In order to save the world, we have to get supplies to the Russians, and the only route we can use, that isn't impassable during the winter snows is the Persian corridor. But to get to the Persian corridor, you need to go through Iran.

(She pulls a Barbie sized map of Iran out of the Dream Car, unfolds it, and indicates the Persian Corridor.)

This means that Iran has to stay in Allied hands. So in 1942, that's where we put it. The Shah was being a little too friendly with Germany anyway, so we just kick him out, politely, but kick him out we do, we remove the ruler of a country—of course, regime changing during war is not called regime changing, it's called what it really is, *war*, but during war it's okay, it's expected, so our hands are still semi-clean on the regime changing charge. And then we turn Iran into—like—a Wal-Mart Military super-center, the biggest Wal-Mart in the world, we fill it up with tanks, and guns, and jeeps, millions of tons of them, it's supermarket sweep for the Russians, and to keep Iran happy, we give her tons and tons of non-military stuff like lampshades and clothing and flatware and such. And the biggest problem we have, as the occupiers of Iran? Traffic accidents.

Traffic accidents caused by military vehicles. Hundreds of Iranians killed by Allied soldiers. An American diplomat explains the fatalities like this: “The reflexes of the Iranians are relatively slow.”

TITLE: NO COMMUNICATION WITH THE DEAD

After she died, my mother did not contact us. This seemed unfair. Everybody I knew who'd lost someone they loved had these stories of the way their mother or brother or husband had contacted them from beyond the grave. I knew that if anyone loved her family enough to bridge the worlds, my mother did. She had already tried to stay with us, after she'd died. When we left the hospital, they were wheeling her body along behind us, on their way to the hearse. Turn after turn on the way across courtyards and hallways and parking lots, we'd lose her, the stretcher was slower than we were, but the attendants knew the short cuts, and it seemed like every time we turned a corner, there she'd be. As if we were still a family of five. And then when we couldn't get my sister a ticket to Springfield on the same plane as the rest of us (my mother had died in Florida, the funeral was in Springfield), the first seat we *could* get her turned out to be on the same plane my mother's body was coming on. That's the way she was. My mother didn't ever want to be alone.

When I went to the airport to pick up my sister, I brought one of my nieces along for company. We picked up my sister, and then I decided that we should at least meet my Mother, even if we couldn't take her home. I asked a scruffy looking baggage handler where her coffin would be, and he said because of construction detours we'd never make it to the cargo area, but he'd go with us, to help us find the way. It was 10:30, 11 o'clock at night, his lunch break, and he considered briefly, before getting

into the car, calculating if he would get back in time to avoid losing his job. He did the math, then shrugged and climbed in. He had had a mother, once, too.

As he got in, a kind of joyriding thrill ran through the car. I looked at my niece. She was numb with terror, she was fourteen years old, how many times had it been drummed into her head, never get into a car with a stranger, and here I'd just invited one in. Of course, the intense aliveness that slices through you after the one who loves you best is dead makes every single moment just vibrate with resonance. The vivid clarity that comes after death—how the important things assume their true size and dimension, crowding out the unimportant things so easily—makes anything possible. Anything except the one impossible thing you truly want.

The baggage handler not only got us to the cargo area, he was our Virgil, he pounded on three different doors, went into places clearly marked NO ADMITTANCE, he did all the lesser impossible things for us that we never could have done. He called and got someone to open a door for us at the *exact moment* the box that contained my mother in her coffin came off the transport and was carried into the cargo area. My mother had gotten off the plane, we had put a strange man in our car, and we had met her. We had not made her wait. The person you're picking up at the airport always knows how much you love them by whether you're there on time or not. It was one of the early miracles, one of the first things we did for our dead.

We waited with her coffin until the people from the funeral home came. We watched as they took her away. Then we took our guide back to the main airport. He was forty-five minutes over his lunch break, but he didn't care. He had taken us to see our mother, out of love for his own. He had been performing his own miracle for his dead.

Anyway, it gradually became clear to me that if my mother hadn't contacted us, it was not out of an inability to do so. Because if defying all the laws of God and nature, if will and love were all it took to communicate with those you left behind after death, she would have been talking to us non-stop. We would hardly have even known she was gone. No, it was a choice. My mother did not *believe* in communication with the dead, and since she always had the courage of her convictions, she was keeping still. It shouldn't have surprised me that she refused to contact us from the other side. Just because she was dead was no reason to let down her standards.

Standards are a funny thing. They are the way we have of believing in things, out loud.