

## It's Almost Dark



By Anna Von Reitz

It's almost dark. Just a faint orange strip of sunset sky remains, with a dark purple band of clouds and a slash of dazzling stars far above. It's cold, but not uncomfortable as I work, harvesting the last of the Swiss Chard, chives, and herbs.

This has been a beautiful fall this year in Alaska, all amber and gold and warm lingering days, but at last all the leaves are on the ground and the weatherman says it will snow for the first time tomorrow.

It won't stay long. We will have a few days yet to dump out flower pots and pile up leaves. There will be a few more days, maybe a couple weeks-- before the real snows of winter arrive. I know I should be thinking about burning a certain brush pile, but a family of rabbits moved in a couple weeks ago and I'll just leave it until spring.

Coming home tonight in the dusk the road was empty, just a dull silver ribbon making a straight line among the fading colors of the day. I came to the familiar turn off and paused. There's a rough wooden cross at the corner there, in memory of Garrett Seurat. I never knew him. I knew his Father, Jay.

I briefly remember the summer day, maybe fifteen years ago, when I heard tires squealing wildly in the very early morning, and later, the sight of his shiny black sports car hanging nearly upside down and halfway up a stand of birch and spruce trees, like an airplane that didn't make take off. He was dead on the scene.

Shortly thereafter the wooden cross appeared, and it has been there ever since. This late summer I saw a woman and a girl there putting new silk flowers around the cross arms. I suppose the girl was his daughter, too young at the time of the accident to ever remember her father or know his face.

I've marked the passage of the years and noted the days when old flowers have been taken away and new flowers come to take their place, and nodded to his loved ones who have kept their faithful tending of his memorial as I went upon my way.

Tonight I stopped, the cross was awry, knocked about by wind and rain perhaps, or some careless accident of passing moose or motor bike. I parked and set it straight again, piling up the stones around the base of wood and replaced the silk flowers that love left there a couple months ago.

Not a soul passed by and hardly a leaf stirred in the fading light. I thought about this young man that I never knew. I thought about how loved he was, and is, even now. It seemed like setting his cross straight in time for the winter was the least I could do, if only to comfort those who remain and who will come again and look for it at Christmas and again in the spring.

Then I hurried on home and put dinner in the oven and tended to the last of my green garden tasks, quickly heeling in the potted perennials, cutting the Swiss Chard and herbs, taking in a couple wine-

colored petunias that will live on for a couple months and bloom in a glass of water long after the rest of this year's garden is gone or sleeping.

Chives and spearmint, bee balm and oregano, sweet verbena and lemon balm, hyssop and cone flower; I have already and long-since potted up the lemon balm and parsley for the indoor garden. These are just the straggle ends that will go into a salad or top a baked potato or make a cup of tea. My teapot is sitting on the table, center stage, a cast-iron pot on a cast-iron tea candle-powered base, guaranteed to keep the tea warm for an hour or two while I work deep into the night.

I have more sympathy for autumn now, that like the year, I am older, too. Life oddly seems more precious and love more miraculous now, when nothing is guaranteed and beauty is gone past remembering and every day that dawns appears in its true colors as a blessing.

The great struggles of kings and queens and countries and empires shrink down to the embers of the fire on my hearth and the wind blowing around the chimney. All day long v's of Canada Geese have been passing over, their mournful honking like a friend calling good-bye over their shoulder, and now, at this time of night, the bats, too, are taking to the sky in search of what scant insect dinners may be left. The resident bunnies are snuggled in their brush pile beds after a hard day of munching sweet autumn clover.

I hope that all those who are reading this will take Nature's message to heart and re-connect to the times and where we are. Make the effort now to shore up your world, and to do what you can to prepare for dark, cold days ahead, to be ready for yourself and your family and your friends, and to be able to assist others who are less fortunate.

We especially want to thank the many people all over this country who have eased our days and budgets by sharing the good produce of the land and the things they have made. Cheese curds and mustard from Wisconsin. Vanilla beans from Hawaii. Cucumbers and squash and tomatoes from Washington. Herbs and honey from Oregon. Mushrooms from Pennsylvania. Lobster from Maine. Vidalia onions from Georgia. Buffalo jerky from the Great Plains. Pistachios from California. Apples from Eastern Washington. Cheddar from Iowa. Ham from Virginia. And so much more. These gifts of the land and the people mean so much to us and to other members of The Living Law Firm who get their share of this bounty, too.

It helps a lot in many ways and we want you to know that we are grateful and we have shared and we give deep thanks in our hearts for all of you and for this abundant land we share.

As winter closes in our days grow rapidly colder and darker. By mid-December we will be down to about four hours of daylight per day. It becomes increasingly difficult for mail and deliveries of packages to get to us in Big Lake. Anything but First Class Letters and packages of dry goods get problematic this time of year, so please be aware that you shouldn't send anything that can freeze or break in transit, and if you send meat or other frozen perishables, the best way to send it is to the office in Anchorage: The Living Law Firm, 1336 Staubbach Circle, Anchorage, Alaska 99508.

We are deeply truly grateful for all of you and everything you send, whether it is cash or radishes. It all gets put to good purpose and good use by good people for a good cause. God bless and keep you all.

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