

Annie Overly died Monday, November 6, in her bed, somewhere in British Columbia. She was 68, though preferred to say she was in her early 70's. She had ovarian cancer, and preferred not to talk about it. Some of you will remember her comment on Story Club a few weeks ago.

We met on my Substack, though she knew me years before, from a book, then saw my name on a Story Club thread. She crashed my Substack and pitched sharp, brash, perceptive, intelligent comments. Right from the get go I saw she knew me better than I knew myself. She said a lot of her life she'd lived to please other people, and liked that I said what I thought. She loved things I wrote, said the book had seduced her years ago. People noticed: Who is that woman? That Annie is amazing! You can't miss Annie!

At first she left to go down the street to prune a neighbor's fir tree.

She would not tell me where she was, but at one time cheered the Bulls, and had a roommate who dyed her hair orange in honor of Dennis Rodman. A degree in geology, and then two more. I should put together a book of stories, she said. And she knew journals where I might send things.

She rode with the visiting nurse on her rounds in the north country where people burned wood and used outhouses. She held hands with the old people, and called the experience a privilege. Sometimes on the overnights they slept on straw.

After a month of writing every day she told me about the cancer. It had been found early, by accident really, unusual for ovarian cancer, that she was on chemo, pills, for now, and we'll see how it goes.

Sometime around then, she posted on Story Club, during the Granny Weatherall time, the comment about receiving a "death sentence." Later she shied from the exposure and wanted to take it down. She was just as private as she was outgoing. She was touched by the responses she got here.

I looked up ovarian cancer. Saw it wasn't up there among survivable cancers. Some last a year, but then, some go for five to ten. The latter didn't sound bad. Hell, I'm 75.

Lulu the dog came to visit.

She got demoted from working in the garden to walking Lulu, who was old, and would not get up off the porch to go pee unless she went with her. I did not get the meaning of the switch at the time. She said she slept around Lulu's schedule to go pee.

She said she had to be careful what she said or people would bring things. One time she said she liked a Johnny Cash song, and the next day the computer was filled with Johnny Cash. Round pebbles, yellow leaves, people brought her.

It was some kind of residence with a church affiliation. Almost everyone is here to be away from something. Parents, spouse, guilt, a crime, death, divorce. If you ask for me by name at the garage, they would deny knowing me. We feel safe.

Getting out of bed later. Slept through Lulu one morning and one of the young men had to carry Lulu down the steps into the yard to pee. A good day was black coffee in the morning, tea and toast with cinnamon in the afternoon. She said she was losing weight and didn't like how she looked nude. One morning there was a frost. Then came the night Lulu slept beside her bed.

I sent her my writing. She read everything. We spoke in poetry. Not polished, but off the cuff, conversational. We told each other things. I sent her the piece Donald Hall wrote about the life he and Jane Kenyon shared, and after Jane died the solitude and loneliness. Rather I tried to send it, but was blocked. No problem she said, she had a friend who could get behind any paywall, and the next day she sent me a copy. I said I'd always wanted that kind of relationship and now I did. We did. I told her I left an otherwise good relationship because it didn't support writing. She said I was a shit, and that she left a marriage without leaving a note. Comparing our backgrounds she said I was an eastern dick and she was a flat assed hick. I asked why she wore the hick over such intelligence and sensitivity and she said she cried at the beauty of a snowbank when a child.

The cancer. We wrote four or five times a day. She was on a treatment program, and when I asked, she said she was pleased with the care she was getting, for the cancer.

What the hell are we doing, she said. I said what the hell are we doing?" One thing I was doing was pulling over to the side of the road in the middle of an hour drive to check my email.

They watch me, she said, skipping to the computer every half hour.

Came a visit to the clinic. She only ever told me just enough. I sort of knew this.

I only asked once. She never sent a picture of herself, hated the phone, never took a selfie in her life, but did send a group photo of ancestors somewhere in the midwest. "They came from Tennessee, I think. It always terrified me that no one was smiling. I had a genealogy chart but burned it years ago." Said she feared for a long time about her father disappearing when she was three or four that she'd pulled the trigger. Such a big hole left. Everything was going by so

fast. She said she was good with words but if we met in person she'd probably be quiet and walk away. She always left before they left her.

We lived in our words. We made love with words. I printed out our emails. From the black and white printer the original and colored replies came out the same gray. I said you can't make out who's saying what, it's a big mess. What did you expect, she said, from two people like us.

After the clinic visit she said they found another tumor. A biopsy, more tests next week. She warned me she might disappear for a few days but she didn't and said she was surprised and didn't think it was possible for her to feel this way. I assumed radiation, perhaps surgery, but she only ever told me just enough. Then, a thing. All attitude and posture vanished and left her caring, sensitivity and intelligence shining. She wrote straight from her dear heart.

What she wanted for me. What she wanted for us. If I went to Spain I must go to Barcelona and see Gaudi's Casa Battllo and the Basilica de la Sagrada Familia. Take the train to San Francisco, and write about your friends there. Confirm you hear me say these things.

Ruth knew her last wishes, she said, while making plans for the two hour drive to Vancouver, though I did not know it was Vancouver until later. They allowed an extra day in their schedule for the return trip because of the way appointments went, and they didn't like to drive the icy roads after dark.

Sunday morning she told me she didn't want to make the trip to the city, was scared she wouldn't come back, but everyone was urging her to go. I read these lines in a daze. I didn't know anything anymore. I told her I wished I was there.. She was scared that we had become part of each other and when she died part of me would die too. I said I would be OK, and she said, a small ok here, too. They had planned to leave at noon, and I knew I would not hear from her after that. The last thing she wrote was I was the most wonderful person she had known.

I have no where else to go. I don't know any of her friends. She said she was not in touch with any family. I don't know what she looked like, never heard her voice. We had words, and open hearts.

Early Monday morning an email from her surprised me. For a second. But. Just like she told me it would happen, it was Ruth. "Annie Overly died in her bed this morning. Her heart just stopped at 5:00 AM.. She refused to go to Vancouver yesterday because she was afraid they would put her in hospice and she wanted to die with us. We loved her greatly, as you did. She loved you."

I agree, she wrote, at death...now there is time for everything. I too find that so many things now seem possible that previously were only imaginable. AO