



9. SPACE SUIT



After many years of indecision about engaging with **High Acres Farm** (inspired by its beauty and potential, haunted by its legacy of suffering), during a trip to India in the fall of 2015, I finally decided to move home, choosing March of 2016 as a moving date.

Starting that same fall, my mother began to experience severe breathing problems from fifty years of cigarette smoking, and she was sent to the hospital by ambulance multiple times. For the next few months, she was in and out of the ICU, a local rehab center in Burlington, and her bedroom at High Acres Farm, where she eventually entered hospice care in February of 2016.

On March 4, 2016, I loaded up a U-Haul truck in Brooklyn, New York to finalize my move to Vermont, arriving home at High Acres Farm that evening. The following afternoon, just after the truck had been fully unloaded, I received a call from my sister, telling me to rush upstairs to our mother's bedroom, as her health had suddenly become precipitously worse. As I arrived at her bedside, she asked me to put on her favorite recording of **Wagner's** final opera, *Parsifal*, about the knights who guard the **Holy Grail**.

While the gorgeous music played, my sister and I lay together with our mother in bed, as she was coming in and out of consciousness, talking to us whenever she could. By the late afternoon, with the winter sun going down behind the Adirondacks, our mother had taken her final breaths, and her body had become limp in our arms, as my sister and I held her and cried.

A few minutes after her passing, I found myself alone with her body. I felt a sudden urge to look in her eye, so I rounded the bed to kneel on the floor beside her, and with one hand holding her forehead, with the other hand I gently lifted her eyelid.

As I looked into her eye, I marveled at its beauty, remembering all the times I'd looked into that same exquisite eye over the many years of my life. And yet now, her eye was missing something ineffable.

Like gazing into a glass marble, I saw my own rounded reflection looking back at me. And in that moment, I realized that my mother's body was only her **spacesuit** — allowing her to be here on Earth for a while to experience this human life, with its strange phenomena of time, touch, choice, and emotion. Her body was her spacesuit, but it wasn't really her, and where she was then I could no longer say. From that point on, the subsequent tending to her body was like putting away a costume from a long and beautiful (and yet finally finished) performance.

This ritual documents the experience that followed three days later, when our mother was cremated by **Stephen C. Gregory and Son Cremation Service** in nearby South Burlington, Vermont. The process — careful, meticulous, and full of love and respect — was carried out by **Gary Reid**.

In the back room of the crematorium, where few families ever ask to go, the owners of the chapel had parked their fiberglass boat, presumably waiting out the winter for future summer adventures on nearby **Lake Champlain**. I remember glimpsing their boat in the distance, and imagining my mother's spirit stepping out of her spacesuit and into this watery vessel, chatting with the boatman while traveling the **River Styx** to her next incarnation.

The music that accompanies this film is the opening prelude to *Parsifal*, which we introduced after the edit was already complete, but which matches the picture in an eerily natural way.

Performed in 2016 — Duration 5:10