



DUTY BOUND

It's interesting how people are so eager to put words in your mouth. The more ambiguous the situation, the quicker they are. Take lingering death, for example. Or, more exactly, lingering dying.

"After all these months, years really, it must feel anticlimactic," my mother said coming in the front door as the men from the funeral home wheeled Sven out through the garage.

My mother has a taste for highs and lows. I have dedicated my life to everything that lies between these extremes, as close to the median as possible. "A tortoise has more bravura," is the way I heard my mother once describe me.

"My sweet certitude," Sven said last week as he rose to consciousness briefly before slipping back into the morphine haze that would see him through to his next, best, life. He didn't even have to search the room, he knew where I'd be sitting, in my armchair at the foot of the bed, facing him, the morning light from the window gleaming down on my book.

"Now it's *your* time, Laura," my best friend Justine said as she helped me make arrangements for the funeral. "Leif is on his own. You're going to learn to spread your wings."

"So you think champagne is in order?" I asked, looking up from my shopping list. "Or should we stick to coffee and tea? Mulled cider?"

I'd tried to discuss the arrangements with Sven, but he just yawned and said he would leave it up to me.

"Just don't get your hopes up about attendance, Laura," he warned me. "People have written me off for several years now." There was no rancor there. It was just a statement, a fact of life. Sven is—was—an engineer. He took calm satisfaction in facts, emotional as well as physical. We are who we