

BEAUTIFUL

A I M E E M U L L I N S

"I AM SICK OF PEOPLE TELLING ME HOW 'BEAUTIFUL' I LOOK," she said, flatly. The obvious discomfort registering on my face pressed her on, her insistence rising with the flush of embarrassment in my ears. I had, of course, just greeted her with a hug and told her that she looked beautiful. "I know when I look beautiful, and this isn't it. Far from it."

I understood the root of her frustration, because this was a woman who had known the kind of effortless beauty few women ever experience, and her flair for the theatrical and her love of a good face painting made her even more adept at climbing into the pantheon of Great Beauties from which "ordinary" people are barred entry.

But, even then, the summer before she took leave of us, she *was* beautiful. She of the long fingers crowning an elegant hand, the green eyes that saw more adventure than the lips below them would reveal—even though she also had the forthrightness and frank storytelling ability innate to her Southern stock.

She reminded me that "to live" was a verb, it demanded action, as opposed to plain old "existing," in which passivity reigned and life just happened to you. Norris lived life. She had the uncanny ability to both be secure in knowing exactly who she was, and confident that she could create and develop facets of any number of Norrises she wanted to be. That is one of my favorite traits in any person.

She always bestowed upon me the feeling of calm and collectedness; she was the kind of mother who didn't mind you borrowing her for the job when your own mother wasn't around . . . or available. Norris knew that she had wisdom of a life well lived to impart, and she made herself available to those of us who asked for it. It was as if she knew, after completing her memoirs,

that Norman and his legacy would be okay, her kids would be okay, her kids' friends would be okay. She didn't need to be available in that way anymore. She wrote it all down and never really got her appetite back. She had lived, and she was full.