IN PRAISE OF A REDHEAD

RICHARD STRATTON

YOU WERE A RARE BREED. A woman of uncommon beauty, impeccable taste, and wry Southern charm. Ah, lovely redhead. The universe makes only so many of you redheads. One to two percent of the population of the entire world can claim to be redheaded. Carrot top. Ginger. Firecrotch. Queen Elizabeth I was a redhead. Jonathan Swift said of redheads, "It is observed that the red-haired of both sexes are more libidinous and mischievous than the rest, whom yet they much exceed in strength and activity." Redheads are more sensitive than the rest of us. I remember when Norman first told me he had a new love, he said, "And she's a redhead." I won't tell you what else he said.

He met his match in you, dear Norris, the woman who would love him to the end of both your lives. And you could go with him, word for word, barb for barb in a match of wits, never letting his Promethean intelligence beat you down. He glowed when he was near you. We all did. As if the beauty were some inner light that you cast upon all who came near. Fiery, and yet with a soothing spirit. You could put the old man down and calm him down at the same time. He grew when he was with you, mellowed, became an even greater man for having married a great woman and the great love of his life. You managed his life and took his entire brood under your soft, gentling wing. There was never any question in my mind, you loved him not for who he was but for who he became when he was with you. You made him better. Made him greater and more comfortable with greatness. Your greatness was his greatest asset. To say nothing of your other assets.

Your paintings hang on my walls. Your books rest on my bookshelves. You were an artist, a wife and a mother. A lady. Elegant. Charming. You gave birth to a Buffalo. I loved you for how you loved my friend. When you became ill, your strength and stamina humbled us all. Norris and Norman.

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Lovers. Husband and wife. Writers. Parents. Storytellers. Dreamers and dream weavers. Earth was blessed by your passage through this dimension. I think of you now, together again in eternity. Beautiful Norris, brilliant Norman, a couple and a singularity, a durable duo over which death shall have no dominion.