

It isn't true that you have to get over it. It isn't even true that you have to want to. No one else can understand what you have lost. No one else can bear the burden of your tribute to a love, to a life, to an identity now gone. What a privilege it is to feel deeply.

Something happens when you entwine your fate with someone else's. If they go somewhere you cannot follow, part of you goes with them, and it is like birthing a baby who comes out of you: still and limp.

You are helpless as you watch the labor of your deepest love, your most sacred creation disappear under the dirt without you.

You want to hold it in your arms and join it in a sleep that never ends. You want to claw at the boundary of the earth between the two of you with your fingernails, but someone grabs you and pulls you away, and all you can do is wail.

You become hollow. You are missing a chunk of yourself, and no one can really see it once you put on your creamy lipstick and your designer dress, and you pluck your eyebrows and paint your fingernails and toenails to match. No. No one can see what you are missing; you look so well put together.

"The worst type of crying wasn't the kind everyone could see — the wailing on street corners, the tearing at clothes. No, the worst kind happened when your soul wept and no matter what you did, there was no way to comfort it. A section withered and became a scar on the part of your soul that survived. For people like me... our souls contained more scar tissue than life." ~ Katie McGarry

Maybe your closest friends think **you are lonely**, but it is worse than that: you have lost the part of yourself that you loved most. The last period has been stamped onto the page, and yet somehow you were left behind, running your fingertips over a leather bound cover slammed shut.

You are a character in a story that is over, and since this never happens in the fairy tales you were fed in your most formative years, you are lost. You no longer fit in the world, and there is no star that can grant your truest wish.

And yet there is hope, but it is not the hope you want. Your sadness becomes all you have left and you begin to cherish it, to worship at its feet so you never forget the most important thing that ever happened to you.

You hold it in your body and you feed it all your love, all your light, so that it stays, so that

you can be closer to death. It will never sneak up on you again, because it never leaves your doorstep.

And they will tell you that you're expected at the office by nine. They will recommend that you still go to church. They will expect you still to celebrate at birthdays, and pretend it doesn't pain you when you must change your grocery list. No, you mustn't cry when you have to put back the soy milk because the only one who drinks it is gone.

Well-meaning friends and family will repeat the lies repeated to them in their hours of need, but they will not reveal the truth. They will not tell you how angry they were when this trite advice was handed down to them, how they took it with a joyless, tight-lipped smile, and an insincere "thank you," just as you will do.

They know no other way. There were things they valued more than their grief: unsmudged eyeliner, making their friends feel comfortable, staying unemotional at work.

*Their platitudes won't help you at all, but you'll hear them so often from so many directions that you will begin to wonder why you can't heed them. Instead of realizing the obvious truth: that the advice is terribly flawed, your conditioning will tell you that it is you who are flawed, adding the burden of guilt to a heart already **gasping for air**.*

There are many lists of trite advice you can read about grief, but they will only add to your confusion about why you can't seem to sync your feelings with the grief map sanctioned by your culture.

This map is supposed to tell you what is normal, but that map was not made for you. It was made to keep the engine of our cultural machine running. It requires your numbness. Refuse, my friend. **Refuse with all your might to be numb.**

I have no trite advice for you. I have nothing prolific to say. I'm not going to tell you to get therapy or accept how life has changed. I offer you this in the spirit of "you-are-not-aloneness" and "there-is-no-scheduledom." I give this freely from a place of "I-don't-know-how-you-feel-but-I-sure-as-shit-know-what-it's-like-to-be-devestatedism," and "This-is-how-I-feltity."

Can anybody hear me?

1. The Lie: You should be over it/him/her by now.

The Truth: No one has the authority to tell you how you should feel, when you should feel it or for how long. Do you hear me? There is no normal when it comes to grief. There is no

quantifiable estimate of how much value who and what you have lost has added to your life or for how long you should be sad about that loss. You are not a machine. Numbers: days, weeks, months, years are meaningless.

Death and aliveness are inextricably linked. You may stop weeping (or not), but you will never forget the love, the adventure, the grandiosity of the effect that your beloved lost has made upon your life, and your character. In this way, death will guide you for the rest of your days.

“You will lose someone you can’t live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn’t seal back up. And you come through. It’s like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly — that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.” ~ Anne Lamott

Your life has changed forever. The touch of death is a part of you now, woven into the tapestry of your new and unfolding experience.

2. The Lie: You should stop talking about him or her / Stop living in the past.

The Truth: The only people who cannot bear to hear you speak of your beloved are those who cannot accept their own mortality. They are people who have never grieved. They either don’t know loss, or they buried themselves with their loved ones. Trust me when I tell you, they have their own mountains yet to climb.

Those who would have you silence yourself, choke on the words that you must speak, are people who do not know their own souls.

“Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o-er wrought heart and bids it break.” ~William Shakespeare

I’m not a psychologist. I’m a writer, so you must know by now that I am having a love affair with words. I know how to make them sharp and pointy. I know how to make them sing like music. And most importantly, I know that they keep me connected to everything beautiful in this world, and the next.

Speaking of your loved one can keep their presence with you from far across the boundaries of the point where life meets death. It is a way to honor them, and a way to honor your

feelings. It keeps their love alive in you. It extends the meaning of their life into the world in powerful and meaningful ways. It gives them back a voice in a world hell-bent on forgetting.

It's okay to speak of them, to them, and even for them when there is good that can be done by you because they have lived. What better way to honor a life, than to extend this love to others?

3. The Lie: You have to move on with your life (right now).

The Truth: This advice is an act of violence against a grieving heart. It is a kick in the ribs while you lie hopelessly seized by despair. Whatever it is your loved one would want, it is unlikely that he or she would want an avalanche of guilt entombing you with your grief. You have enough to climb out of, enough rebuilding to do.

In many ways you are restarting your life from scratch, especially if your beloved lost was the central pin you'd built your life around. For many of us, there is no life to get on with; the lives we were living are irretrievable.

We must begin again, and we don't want to begin our new lives on a foundation of unacknowledged, disrespected grief.

Being with your grief may require you to sit amongst the rubble. You may have to watch a city crumble. You may have to let go of who you thought you were, in order to make meaning out of the meaningless tragedy of death. Someday you will rebuild this city, but it will be new, updated, your tastes will have changed, you will be more wholly yourself and your kingdom will reflect that.

4. The Lie: You could have prevented this tragedy.

The Truth: If your loved one passed in a sudden or unexpected way, somewhere inside you is a voice asking what you might have done differently that would have changed the course of events that led to the death of your beloved lost.

The truth is that the factors that influence the course of our lives are bigger and more mysterious than what we did and did not do. To hold yourself accountable for any reason is to deny the greater context in which life happens, and that is a dangerous choice to make, because it will eat a hole in your spirit that you can never fill without asking much scarier questions. Bigger questions.

How will I live with this loss? **Will I survive this sadness?** Will I ever love again? Who am I

now? In what manner will I go on? How do I want to spend what's left of my life? How can I honor my loved one's life? And death? Is there more? What is the meaning of living? How can I find fulfillment now?

Why the fuck am I here?

“Watch the ones whose only option left is to lean into the questions. The ones who are uninhibited by the unknown because they’ve jumped into that gaping hole and found themselves, by grace, unswallowable. Watch the ones who willingly stand with Feist and say, “I feel it all” even when it scares the shit out of them. It’s not brave to have answers.”

~ Mandy Steward



Girl in the Rain by Autumn Ann

5. The Lie: Time heals all wounds.

The Truth: The truth is there are losses you never get over. They break you to pieces and you can never go back to the original shape you once were, and so you will grieve your own death with that of your beloved lost.

Your grief is your love, turned inside-out. That is why it is so deep. That is why it is so consuming. When your sadness seems bottomless, it is because your love knows no bounds.

Grief teaches us about who we are, and any attempt to crush it, to bury it with the body is an

act of vengeance against your own nature.

If everyone felt, honored, respected and trusted their true feelings, this world would be a different place. Instead of reacting, we would respond. Instead of judging, we would see ourselves in everyone. Instead of consuming, we would notice that we cannot fill the gaping wounds inside of us with trinkets.

If instead of pretending we are okay, we would take the time to wail, to weep, to scream, to wander the woods day after day holding hands with our sadness, loving it into remission so it doesn't turn cold inside of us, gripping us intermittently in the icy fingers of depression. That's not what grief is meant to do.

Grief has a way of showing you just how deep your aliveness goes. It's a dagger shoved down your throat, its handle bulging like an Adam's apple protruding from your neck, edges pressed against both lungs, creating a long, slow bleed in your chest that rolls down the edges of your life, and you get to handle that *any fucking way you want*.

If you have been sitting on old grief from your childhood, your failed relationships, the loss of a family pet when you were nine, and any other losses you were unable to honor in the past, this left-over grief will also come through the broken damn. Let it.

"Grief does not change you... It reveals you." ~ John Green

And herein lies the gift that cannot die. It changes the course of your life forever. If you allow yourself the chance to feel it for as long as you need to — even if it is for the rest of your life — you will be guided by it. You will become someone it would have been impossible for you to be, and in this way your loved one lives on, in you.