

Bourne toWrite...

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My Story

by Zoé Carroll

Most of us only have one story to tell. This is mine. I was a widow at thirty and the pain of losing the love of my life almost took my own life with it. I felt like I was in freefall, my life tumbling away from me; we had plans, we wanted children, we had just bought a house near to where you worked. Everything was going well and then it ended. And I was alone. And I couldn't breathe.

First there was shock, the ambulances, the hospital, your parents, I can't remember the order of things, it was like I was outside of my body and seeing things as if through water, I couldn't reach out, I couldn't speak. In my head I was screaming but nobody heard. It was frantic and chaotic and everything was happening too quickly. The doctor was speaking to me and I heard the words but I couldn't comprehend their meaning. Your mother held my hand and looked at my face but I faded. Then I was at home, and people asked if I was ok. I wasn't, but I said that I was and I didn't want to be alone but I didn't want to have anyone around me either. I wanted to be with you, at home, alone together. But I'd never be at home with you again. You were dead. You had had a virus and it had reached your heart and one moment it was beating and the next it wasn't. It will never beat again.

Then came the disbelief. People were surprised and I was asked time and again what had happened. I didn't want to keep telling people, but they wanted to know. My heart broke open wider every time I relived the moments, but people felt entitled to know. Then they apologised for asking and asked how I was. I wanted to scream at them "How the fuck do you think I am?" I didn't though, I was polite, despite myself. I'm not sure why, it's cultural training I think, not to wail and clutch my chest where the pain was the worst although that was what I wanted to do. My public grief was separate from my private grief.

Some people found it awkward to speak to me, I didn't want to make them feel like that but I didn't know which was worse; for people to carry on as if nothing had happened and to fail to acknowledge my loss, or to crush me with kindnesses and their ideas about how I must be

feeling. I know there was suspicion about your death, some people had discussed motive, poison, smothering. My loss became gossip. I retreated into myself, I didn't want to be in this world that dealt in gossip over heartache.

My friends became distant. It was like they didn't know what to say to me any more. I felt guilty when I smiled or laughed, as though I should be eternally in mourning. I felt people judging me and I didn't know how I should feel. All I knew was how I did feel. I felt hollow, lost and distant from my own life but desperate to stay out of the depression that was nuzzling at my edges. I wanted to talk about you and how we had loved each other, how we had planned a life together and not make other people feel uncomfortable with my talking.

And then, most bizarrely, came the envy. I was mortgage free and we had only bought our house a year earlier. I could sell up and be financially secure and start my life again doing exactly as I pleased. People actually thought that that would make me happy. It was like I had wanted it to happen. And I really didn't. What I had wanted was my ordinary, everyday, happy life with my best friend, planning our future and living our life.

I did sell the house. I moved to somewhere that I picked on a map. My company were happy to relocate me, I think they were relieved. I wanted to start again but not to forget. I talk to you like you're still here. It's as if I'm thinking aloud and I am not expecting an answer of course, but it feels comforting to be able to share my life with you, just in case you are able to hear me somehow.

I met someone new. I didn't know whether to tell him about you or not but it came up in conversation early on and so I told him everything about you and how you died and how I had been rocked by it. He was considerate. He took some time and then he came back to me. He had a proposal. Not a marriage proposal but a proposal about how we could try to live this love triangle. He didn't want to replace you he'd said, but he knew that you had to exist within our relationship. I couldn't live without being able to talk about you and my loss. He added though that I had to recognise that our life together might not always have been perfect and that he couldn't compete with an image in my head of our perfect life if I kept using that as a reference point. We had to make our own way of muddling through and of making each other happy he said. I liked his proposal. His acceptance of you as part of my life made him all the more attractive to me and I felt a weight lift from me. I didn't need to keep you alive on my own, you could be part of my future as well as part of my past.

I married him in the end. We have two children now, but still all the high points are reminders of the experiences I had planned to share with you. He vetoed me giving our son your name, but we compromised and it's his middle name instead.

I still miss you every day but I lived on when you died. I honour you with my life and I live each day as if it is my last because you never know how long you have and each day is a precious gift. I didn't think I could love again but I have, and I do. I know that you would have wanted me to. I live for the both of us. Love is infinite, it grows as you share it. My story is incomplete. Most of us only have one story to tell. I have a story that will forever be in two parts; the part with you in it and the part thereafter. I am glad that you loved me, and I am ready to let you go.