

Grieving

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It was raining. I only half-listened to Mark, instead letting my hearing drift to the patter of the rain against the house. The steam rose slowly from my cup of coffee. I stared at it, watching the wisps come up.

“Julia,” he said.

I looked up at him. He was in the process of tying his tie.

“Have you been paying attention?” he asked.

“No sorry.”

“Are you alright? You’ve seemed different the last few weeks.”

“I’m fine.”

“I was telling you that I’ll be out of town this weekend. I was just going to leave from the office.”

“That’s the fourth weekend in a row.”

“I know, I know. Sorry. With the company expanding so quickly I have to devote more time to it.”

“I can’t remember the last time we had time to ourselves. It’s always late nights or you’re out of town.”

“It’ll get better.”

That’s all he said before he walked out of the kitchen and out of the house. No kiss, no hug, no goodbye. I heard the door latch shut. I just sat there. Our fourth anniversary was coming up. He had always planned something. This time I had a

feeling that it wasn't even on his mind. I got up and went to my office. I passed by the bathroom and thought I should take shower, but I just didn't have the energy.

I started to go through my e-mails looking for a job, something to distract me. There was an offer from *Time*, an op-ed about women in the corporate world, a few blogs, a couple of small magazines looking to break out. I just kept scrolling and scrolling, everything became a giant mass of text. I shut off the monitor and decided I might watch some TV.

Lying on the couch I simply stared at the TV. I held the remote loosely in my hand meaning to turn the TV on but never did it. I didn't really stare at the TV, I stared through it, my vision becoming unfocused.

Mark and I had once talked of having children. We decided it was something that could wait. We were both in our earlier 30's. Our careers mattered more. But what were we missing out on? Were we making the wrong choice? I see my friends who all have children. Sometimes I try to imagine myself in their shoes.

Eventually the stream of thoughts ran dry and my mind was left blank. And soon that blankness was replaced by darkness. My body relaxed, giving in to the lethargic beast that had come upon me.

Hours later I later awoke to the warm moist feeling of drool against my face. It was late afternoon. I had slept most of the day away. I still felt tired. I decided I would make reservations for our anniversary, which was the day after he got back.

I busied myself as I thought about how Mark and I had been in the last year. We had grown more distant. It's true that neither one of us really made an effort anymore.

But I still loved him. I wanted to return to where we were. To the days when we enjoyed each other's company and made the effort to find things to do together. This anniversary I was going to bring that spark back.

The next day I decided I would go buy a dress. It had been a long time since I wore a dress. I don't know why I stopped. Mark really enjoyed my bare legs. Though that would only matter if we were being intimate. It had been months since we had sex. There was little physical contact between us these days. No pecks on the neck, no groping or grabbing, no passionate kisses. I longed to be touched again.

I found a dark ocean blue dress. It was his favorite color. It came down just below my knees and it didn't show too much cleavage, just enough to catch a man's eye. I felt good as I turned in front of the mirror.

Sunday night when Mark got home I told him I had made reservations for our anniversary the next day.

"Four years already?"

"You will be able to take the night off won't you? I think they can afford one night without you."

"Of course, no problem."

He went upstairs to get ready for bed. I followed him. I sat at the edge of the bed waiting for him to get out of the bathroom. When he lay down I tried to kiss him playfully along the neck. He barely responded.

“Sorry, I need to be up early tomorrow,” he said as he rolled over. I didn’t even bother to get under the covers. I went downstairs and slept on the couch.

I spent a good hour before Mark got home to get myself ready for that night. I took a moment to look at myself in the mirror. My eyes looked tired and worn. The intense black that had characterized my hair most of my life had been replaced by a duller black that would eventually be replaced by gray. I combed my hair letting it gently fall behind my shoulders. I heard Mark downstairs. I went to greet him. He didn’t look ready. He hadn’t shaved that day and looked like he had run his hand through his hair a thousand times every which way. It would have to do. We had to get to the restaurant. I handed him a comb and told him to brush up while I drove. He didn’t seem to notice the dress or my legs.

We arrived at the restaurant and were seated. The ride in the car was uneventful. We barely said anything to each other. I didn’t know what we should talk about, I doubt he knew either. We didn’t really look at each other.

I played with the rim of my wine glass. When they brought us our salads we ate in silence. As I shuffled my salad from one side to the other I thought about our first date.

Mark had taken me on a picnic. It was out to an old unused bridge. Only half of it was left standing, the frame rusted and weather beaten. He had brought a thicker blanket so we could lounge comfortably on the bridge. After eating we sat on the edge overlooking the creek. We let our bare feet hang, the droplets of moisture below leaping

trying to catch a hold of us. We talked of life, how we thought we were doing, where we wanted to go. As the night came we looked up to the sky pointing and making up our own constellations. That day had been filled with such zest and life. Now we sat here barely dragging ourselves forward.

My thoughts were disrupted by Mark's phone. He answered, I didn't really listen.

"Sorry Julia something has come up. I'll make it up to you."

I didn't protest, I didn't call bullshit, I said my okays quietly and let him leave without much of a fuss. I looked around the room at all the people, all caught up in their own moments of happiness. I wanted to throw my plates at them. How dare they! While I sit here stewing in my own misery. I wanted to yell and scream. I wanted to go to my own little corner and cry myself away. Instead I held it in, gulped the rest of the wine, and asked for the bill.

When I got home I didn't bother turning on any of the lights. I felt my way up the stairs to the bedroom. I don't know how long I sat in the darkness just staring into nothing but then I was startled by a text from one of my friends. She wanted to know if Mark and I were fighting. She knew it was our anniversary. She had seen him at the bar.

I nearly snapped my phone in half. I threw it aimlessly and I just started screaming. Eventually the screams gave way to sobs, my body convulsing with rage to destroy anything within my reach. It wasn't fair! What happened to us, when did we become so complacent with each other? I went to the bathroom and grabbed some sleeping pills. I didn't make it back to the bed. I began to feel myself descend further

and further into the darkness. As I did I tried to grasp at memories like water. I looked for that moment when the spark between us went away. I looked for someone to blame. Did he do something? Did I do something? But I couldn't find it, there was no moment. Had that spark simply faded away? Was that even possible? Could the spark between people simply vanish? It became harder to hold on and I simply let go.

The first thing I did was cough, and continued coughing. Eventually I stopped then I tried to open my eyes, too quickly at first, the light searing my vision. I tried slowly this time. I was in a hospital room. Mark was sitting on the far side of the room. When he saw I was waking up he walked over. He just stood over me. He didn't bend down to kiss me or hold my hand. He looked concerned but it wasn't the concern of a loved one. It wasn't the concern you show when your grandmother has Alzheimer's or when your mother is diagnosed with cancer. It was the concern you show a stranger when you recognize their life is tough and you simply feel sorry them. There were no tears in Mark's eyes. It didn't even look like he had lost much sleep. I tried to speak but my throat was too dry. I motioned for water. He got some for me.

"Why did you try to kill yourself?"

"I didn't," I lied.

"I found you on the floor in your own vomit."

"I just wasn't paying attention."

"Why?"

I tried to scream at him but my voice wasn't up to it, "You ass. You spend less and less time at home, you leave every weekend. When's the last time we had sex! To top it you ditch our anniversary to go to the bar with your buddies."

He didn't say anything at first, "No my behavior probably wasn't the best way to handle this."

"Handle what?"

"I don't think we work that well together anymore. Until a couple weeks ago you didn't seem bothered by all the extra time I was spending at the office. I wasn't the only one pulling away. How much time have you spent with your friends or on research for your articles? I thought both of us were coming to realization. I was going to approach you earlier about it but then you started being really down so I thought I would wait until you were in a better mood."

I thought about what he said. I wanted to be angry. But I knew it was the truth. We had grown apart over the last year. When I really thought about it it started before Mark spent so much time away from home. We just didn't do that much together. I would spend time with my friends and he with his. Somewhere along the way we became different people, but I didn't want to let it go like a child who didn't want to grow up. I was simply grieving over the death of that thing between us. I had tried to bring back something that couldn't be brought back

Before Mark left he told me he was staying in a hotel until he could find a place to rent. He was going to let me keep the house. He said he didn't feel the need to have all that space. I simply shook my head coming to accept the reality I had long been denying.

My contemplation time had been interrupted by a tall blonde woman with too much energy who entered my room. I watched her ponytail sway as she sat down. She shot out her hand, "I'm Doctor Scott."

"I'm Julia."

"I'm here to conduct a psychological evaluation and to give you some information that might help you. Why did you try to commit suicide?"

I explained to her the situation between Mark and I. She listened, nodding, and taking notes. I finished by saying, "I guess the hardest part is trying to grasp what has happened. We seemed so good together," I said.

"People change. The person you were good with five years ago isn't necessarily the person you'll be good with now. Sometimes people just grow apart. You've been here three days already. I'll just need you to sign some papers and I'll want to check up on you over the next few weeks."

She gave me some information for a support group for suicide survivors, a suicide hotline number just in case, and the number to a counselor who could help with my emotional troubles if I needed it. I accepted all of this without much spite.

I was out of the hospital the next day. I returned to a much emptier home. Mark had already come and taken his things. He had left the keys on the kitchen table. I sat alone wondering what I should do now. There was only one thing to do really. I just needed to learn to move on.

