

HELPS FOR GRIEVING

HOW TO GRIEVE

"After the first death, there is no other," wrote Dylan Thomas. That doesn't mean the ones that come after won't break your heart, but it's the first that punches your soul's passport. Welcome, fellow human, to a different country than the one you woke up to this morning. The air's different here; so is the scenery. Your knees don't work so well; in fact, you may want to fall to them.

For a precious little while, you are allowed to be stunned into silence, or to shriek, or to talk—recounting stories of who he was, what she meant to you, and how it all came to an end. Tell those stories. Some people may try to enforce "The Rules," to wit: Enough of This Drama Is Enough. Ignore them. Besides, if you treat yourself gently and take the time you need, someday soon you'll hear the faint but steady voice of your own good sense. Play music you love, sit in the sunshine if you can find some, and if anyone offers you a hand, hold it. Let them feed the cat, too, because they want to be useful. If your good sense does not kick in on its own, help it along: scramble some eggs. It will feel strange at first. But if you pretend that scrambling eggs is normal, eventually it will become normal. Soon you can squeeze some orange juice, too.

For some of us the stay in this new country seems endless. But time passes, seasons change, and, truly, would those we grieve for want us to mope? Come with me back into the world. We'll return to this land someday, all too soon, but in the meantime the garden needs weeding, the bills need paying. Your other loved ones need you. And you, my sweet friend, you could use a shampoo. —Larkin Warren

GONE FROM MY SIGHT

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength.

I stand and watch her until at length she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.

Then someone at my side says: "There, she is gone!"

Gone where?

Gone from my sight. That is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side, and she is just as able to bear her load of living freight to her destined port. Her diminished size is in me, not in her.

And just at the moment when someone at my side says, "There, she is gone," there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout:

"Here she comes!"

...And that is dying.

—Henry Van Dyke

THE ROSE BEYOND THE WALL

Near a shady wall a rose once grew,
Budded and blossomed in God's free light,
Watered and fed by the morning dew,
Shedding its sweetness day and night.

As it grew and blossomed fair and tall,
Slowly rising to loftier height,
It came to a crevice in the wall
Through which there shone a beam of light.

Onward it crept with added strength
With never a thought of fear or pride,
It followed the light through the crevice's length
And unfolded itself on the other side.

The light, the dew, the broadening view
Were found the same as they were before,
And it lost itself in beauties new,
Breathing its fragrance more and more.

Shall claim of death cause us to grieve
And make our courage faint and fall?
Nay! Let us faith and hope receive—
The rose still grows beyond the wall,
Scattering fragrance far and wide
Just as it did in days of yore,
Just as it did on the other side,
Just as it will forevermore.

—A. L. Frink