

w e e k

I learn to hold my grief inside my chest carefully, as though it is a glass lung, agreeing to tell no one about this. *The first week is the hardest*, I tell myself. *Survive it, and the rest will follow.*

But everything was over the moment he whispered in my ear with a voice as uncertain as it was broken, *I no longer want to be married. And I no longer want to be married to you.*

He said this as if marriage is what it was.

And wasn't it? Granted, we *were* two men, but there was also a church ceremony, with over a hundred witnesses. There were candles lit, and songs sung, and prayers spoken, and hands held; and vows were cited, houses bought, and beds shared.

And there was a knot so tight even God couldn't untie it.

This is the way it happens, that first night, after the whisper:

Day One

He says, *Let's spend tomorrow creating separate bedrooms.* And I agree because I know there is nothing else I could do. With the sky hanging low and heavy in my hand like a wet tea bag, I agree, hoping tomorrow will never come.

And I spend all day preparing for the last night we will sleep together. And I wonder, *Will we spoon one last time? Wonder, Will it be the sound of his breathing or the sound of my heartbeat that keeps me up all night? Think, Will our bodies repel each other like broken magnets, or will they embrace each other once more for old time's sake?*

And I cry. Four times to be exact, because crying is the only thing that seems natural. *Crying is for sissies*, I've been told all my life, as if that moment of goodbye were predicted even when I was a child.

And so I stall my arrival back home. Decide to work an extra hour. Go to the gym to run for 30 minutes hoping the endorphins will somehow save me. Stop to pick up dinner for the two of us, taking the long way home before eating it at the kitchen table as if there were no meaning at all in this pathetic ritual. And later in the evening, when the hour comes to go to bed, tomorrow arrives a day early. While I was working—trying desperately to hide the inevitable—he had already taken the liberty of preparing his own room. And I try not to notice as he enters it, closes the door behind him, and says nothing.

Not even, *good night.*

Day Two

I forget what to do with my mornings. *Divorce will do that to you*, a friend consoles me, but consolation is too far away and divorce reserved for other people. I fill the tank with gas, drive around until I run low. Fill it up again, drive around. Pull over on the side of the road to shake and cry and repeat to myself, *How did this happen? How did this happen? How did this happen?* I find myself shaking in my own private seizure, and begin to feel both afraid and pathetic.

It is winter in Minnesota, but I walk around the lake anyway. Go to the local animal shelter and notice a dog I want to adopt. *She's broken, like me*, I say to myself, but then deny myself the thought of adopting her.

How can you think about adding to your life, I say to myself, *when you need to start subtracting?*

Another day. Another loss.

I am told this is what it is like.

Day Three

I am invisible. There is that feeling that I should matter, but I do not. Friends forget me. Family ignores me. The only constants are the answering machine greetings and the cold, falling snow outside.

Ten years together have come, sadly, to this.

Gone are the meals together, the movie theaters, the yearly vacations, the family visits. These were the things I could not stop thinking about. The loss eats away like a virus, and the obsession started here.

No here.

Or here.

The problem, from the onset, you see, is that it is vast. So vast a page cannot contain it. And letters grow into words grow into sentences grow into paragraphs grow into chapters grow into complete or incomplete thoughts: the pen is so dangerous.

And none of this matters, because no one is listening but me.

Day Four

I know of no other place to go except the places we went together, but being there does not feel right without him. He has become my compass, my travel companion, my tour guide, my reason

to sleep, my alarm clock, my reason to face the next day.

In a word, he was my life.

Day Five

Words repeat themselves like rain on April meadows. Words. Words repeat. Repeat themselves. Words repeat themselves like rain. Like rain. Like rain on April meadows.

It will never be this way again.

Day Six

Here, before the therapist, I share my thoughts as though I am all alone:

Mornings, by far, are the most difficult. Especially early, black-stilled-sky mornings. A force weighs me down into my bed. Another pushes, all the while reminding me that the world, in all its cruelty, does not stop to allow the catching up. The paper still arrives with the expectation that I will read the article *Should Gay Marriage Be Legal?* And I scoff at the twisted meaning in it all. *If there is no gay marriage, how could there possibly be a gay divorce?*

So instead I draw my attention to the bills—in both names—that arrive in the mail asking to be paid.

I don't always remember to exhale with each inhale.

Expecting as much would be heresy.

And here is what I want to say: Nothing has meaning anymore. Not the writing awards nor the men who want to date me, nor the friends I want to inspire. I am too numb to find reason in any of it. Nothing has meaning anymore, and I never intended to live a life without meaning.

Divorce, they say, will do that to you.

Day Seven

Grief. It happens at first in the morning, before the sun has done its dirty job, when I least expect it is when it happens. My eyes, though alert, may even be closed. And this is the way it happens: it leaks from me like dew on dead leaves, the drip slow at first—so slow I don't even notice the salt as it seeps from my eyes. There is no stain or residue to remind me that love was there, once.

It just happens to be more invisible than that.

And once it leaks from me like dew on dead leaves, it crawls on the ground around me, surrounds my feet and covers my ankles so that every step I take has me bumping into things: a broken sidewalk over here, an extra step over there. Thoughts, as solid as icebergs both above and below the ocean's surface.

I could have avoided these things. Could have turned the other way when love opened its callous hand to stroke my guileless face. Could have wrapped myself in the brittle leaves of autumn when no one was looking.

I had that chance to be invisible. But chose, sadly, to be noticed.

There is nothing to grieve anymore; after all, this was never really a marriage.