

## Grief in Two Days in One Week

### *Creative Non-Fiction*

Grief is a process of elimination; it's the process of finding the things that are important to you and realizing that one day, you will no longer have those things. It's not the process of expectation of loss, but acknowledging the time limit provided in life and the acceptance of death in her prevalence and importance. When comparing it to a feeling, it's waking up in the middle of the night, probably three am, and looking out the window and seeing the streetlights, people driving home after a night shift. The hums of your family members asleep in the next room. Grief hits you in the throat with a piercing arrow; it breaks through your skin and tugs at your vocal chords. This is *grief in two days in one week*.

### **Monday**

You wake up feeling normal; nothing is wrong. Except your grandfather is in a nursing home, put on hospice. And your dog's arthritis is taking over her entire body. Calls to your mom feel natural, minus the fact that she sounds exhausted, and your grandmother is sobbing alone in her bedroom every evening to herself.

You feel the urge to stay in bed and lock the door, thrown into the sheets and bleeding emotions like they are a sneaker wave in the sea, grabbing at your ankles and pulling you deeper. But you've moved out, so you don't have that option, and it's easier for you to pretend to be okay in your day-to-day life than stay at home and act truthfully about your emotional status.

So, you pick yourself up out of your sheets and walk to the bathroom, looking in the mirror at your swollen eyes and feeling your empty stomach. Eating feels harder than you would

expect, but you try to at least eat a little bit at every feeding time. You press your hands to your forehead; it hurts because you cried yourself to sleep. That's what grief will do to you.

Work and classes are fine, but you miss your ex-best friend and laughing with them in the safety and security of your car. Choosing yourself in the end, whether that be your choice or not, was what ultimately saved your feelings this semester, but sometimes grieving the alive is just as hard as grieving the dead. Missing is okay, just don't tell them.

Trying to sleep is a nightmare of being awake. You try, but the light of your phone is more satisfying, and the safety of over-stimulation eats at your brain. Your cat meows at her food, even though the bowl is full, reminding you that you forgot to eat lunch today, while your eyes drift.

## **Tuesday**

Your alarm shallows out the voices enough for you to remember that even through all of this, you have to be at work in about an hour. So you swipe to allow for an 8-minute snooze, just the once. Once your eyes start to flutter at the sound of the second alarm, you remind yourself that bills do not pay themselves. You get up.

Standing at the mirror another day, you rub your eyes, water spitting out the sides as if to say, "yup, we're trying as hard as you are." You lightly comb through your hair, which has been shedding recently. You put a scarf on to wrap around your unwashed hair, mostly because depression is your entirety and showering, unfortunately, takes more effort than you can provide.

On the drive, you type, "Feel Good Mix" into Spotify, and it gives you a blend of pop that is too insufferable for six am, and not very feel-good songs, including Phoebe Bridgers, which just makes it worse. You turn Spotify off and hit the steering wheel out of anger. The anger, though, just doesn't go away.

Mom calls and tells you that your childhood dog is not getting better. This breaks you, enough where you “have to go to the bathroom” at work, but instead, find yourself weeping in the bathroom, huddled into your knees.

The drive over to your parents is long and exhausting. The heat is getting to you, and your shirt is sticking to your wet skin. You miss when you were a kid, and it snowed that one time, and everything was okay. Or when you would climb on the dinosaur sculpture in kindergarten and tell your friends about all your weekend adventures. But this was not what was happening now.

Opening the door to your parents' house feels nostalgic, even though it's only been six months since you moved out. Your grandparents' dog meets you at the door with sounds of love. You gently pet her, but you didn't come to enjoy her presence.

Mom is in the kitchen, working on food prep that distracts her from the grief we're all experiencing right now. Your dog lies on a blanket on the tiles of the floor. You bend down to sit with her, reading your books for school while taking breaks to gently pet her head. She sighs, her eyes shut, but her lungs are breathing. Her white ears, speckled with brown and beige dots, her deep brown eyes. You wish that you could stop time to be with her just a little bit longer than now.

Ring. Ring. Ring.

Mom's phone.

Everyone stays still. Hold on.

She answers. She sobs. The world stops for a second. Breathe in. Breathe out. Remember who you are. The person who cares. The person who cares for others so deeply and gently. The person who needs to support. Who needs to care for others now. You get up off the ground and

run to Mom. You wrap your arms around her as she sobs into your shoulder. You let her break down. Her breathing gets intense. You try not to cry, but a tear streams down your face and lands on your shirt. It's your turn to care for her; all of those times where she has cared for you have led to this moment where you need to care for her.

The drive home from your parents' house feels five hours long. You drive across your homeplace and remember all of the memories made here. You remember how you used to drive to your best friend's house before she cut you off, and how you would feel at home at her house with her parents. You even think about the one time they mentioned that you felt like a daughter to them. You remember hikes with your dog, letting her lead because she likes to pull. You remember riding on your grandpa's lap as he drove his tractor in the outskirts of Arizona heat. And you sob, you allow yourself to melt and break, and it's okay that you don't exactly have someone to help you through. You have yourself.

You open your apartment door, face red and swollen from tears. Your roommate stands in the kitchen and looks at you. You fall into her arms and cry. Sometimes it's okay to ask for help.

### **Wednesday**

You stay in bed the whole day. Except you have to go to Spanish class because it's mandatory, so you go, which makes you feel worse. But life does not stop when you lose your grandfather. And life does not stop when your childhood dog is actively dying.

### **Thursday**

The alarm you set the night before goes off, which upsets you because you didn't actually get any sleep, and now you have to get up and provide customer service to hundreds of people at a college coffee shop.

While you sit down to do some studying, your dad calls, which you know cannot be good news, because your dad doesn't ever call unless it is bad news. You answer immediately. He tells you that your dog is getting worse, not better, and that they are worried about what the next step will be for her. You try to keep your tears in as you sit in public, but you feel the need to give in and let a singular tear slide down your cheek. The person across from you looks up from their homework and gives a sympathetic smile.

There's not much that anyone can do. Vestibular disease is extremely common in aging dogs, and unfortunately, all dogs age. Veterinarians don't have many answers. Vestibular disease can show up as arthritis, as it makes it harder to maintain normal balance in the legs. It is directly located in the dog's ears and brain, and if it's not caught early enough, it can be what ends them.

She lies there as you allow yourself to cry over her. It's okay, it's going to be okay. She'll make it through; she's made it through everything else, and you have, too. Your heart is strong, and you will love her enough to save her. You will.

### **Friday & Saturday**

Your high school best friends convince you to take a day trip to go see one of your favorite bands, and you obliged because it's been a second since you've left the city, and you miss traveling and a change of scenery. And maybe it'll be nice to see the water, because you feel a connection to it, it's just so far away. Plus, you get to visit one of your long-distance friends.

Lying down on the beach, you look at your friends. Community contains the word unity in it, which has been something that you have been noticing in everything recently. Your community has grown smaller, you have sensed loneliness, you have sensed fear and frustration from within yourself, but your community has supported you through the dark and held you while you weep.

### **Sunday**

A week after you got back from your summer job, your roommate let you know that she was going to have to get married due to personal reasons. You love her so deeply that you support her decisions. Today was the day that she was getting married, and you wanted to show up for her as best as you could, so you woke up early, even though you got home at three o'clock in the morning, so that you could attend her wedding.

It was small, at a courthouse, and exactly what you were expecting, which means that it was beautiful and simple, and that's all it needed to be. You hug your roommate so tight as one way to show her how much you love her, and know that this next step in your life will involve big changes at home as well.

After talking with many different people at the reception, you sink into yourself and remember that you're still processing grief. It's hard to take a break from loss; it's hard to just sit there and not think about all of the things that make you angry.

You feel your phone buzz in your pocket. You pick it up and see that it's your mom. You remember that she said she's bringing your dog to the vet today. You answer.

The news is heartbreaking.

Breathe in and out.

Out and in.

Don't look at anyone. Hold it in. Don't breathe. Just walk up to your roommate, tell her you need to go, and leave. Don't tell her why. Just go. She will understand.

You find her. You tell her you have to leave. She looks at you and already knows, which allows you to release. You try not to sob, but your heart is breaking actively, and you know what you are about to go do, and you are scared of that.

You run to your car and drive down to the vet. You drive in silence, because you don't want to associate any music with this situation. You just stay silent and let yourself cry and scream while you drive.

Once you place your car in park, you run to find your mom. She's standing outside the vet, waiting for you. She walks you in through a door, where you see your soulmate lying on a table, wrapped in a blanket, shivering but not from being cold. The tears shed from your eyes almost immediately. Your mom holds you as you sob. You go and cry over your dog, repeatedly saying her name and kissing her forehead so that she knows that you love her. Your sobs echo through the room, your mom rubbing your back as you let it all go.

This will not be how you remember her. You will remember her for the way that she would jump on your bed and plop herself straight on top of you, for how she loved fresh eggs and chicken over her kibble, for how your family had to spell out walk because she knew what that meant, and how you had to start calling it a stroll because she memorized the spelling of walk. You'll remember her every time that you see the moon, every time that you take a walk in your parents' neighborhood, every time you see a randomly placed hole in the ground that's the perfect shape for a dog to lie in. You'll remember her for being calm, gentle, and kind. You'll remember her for being your best friend in the entire world, for always being there for you, from when you were diagnosed with depression to when you had your first heartbreak. From when

you started middle school to your junior year of college. From meeting her, full of love and life, to losing her, full of love and memories.

Grief haunts you. It creeps up on you randomly, in ways that you wouldn't normally assume. In ways that hurt you, that cause you pain, that you wish didn't. But it does. I lost my grandfather and my childhood dog in one week, four days apart. Grief struck me two days in one week. Part of me is upset with the universe, because why would it take so much from me so quickly? But there is another part of me that senses that the universe knew that my grandfather loved my dog, and that my dog loved my grandfather, and that they needed each other, and that they are in the afterlife, whatever that may be, frolicking through forests and swimming in lakes of love.