

GRACE M WELLS

# Bereavement

*A Short Story Collection*

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*First edition*

*This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.*

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*This book is for anyone who has lost a piece of their heart. This book is for anyone who is suffering through the pain and grief of losing a loved one.*

*This is for you.*



“Where you used to be, there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in the daytime, and falling in at night. I miss you like hell.”

— Edna St. Vincent Millay



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## Preface

This is the kind of book that you read late at night when you're all alone and curled up in a blanket in your bed.

### — Warnings —

Before you step into this world, I should warn you of its contents. As someone who gets deeply affected by a lot of things, it's important for me to let you know just what you're getting into.

I don't want you to be taken off-guard by any of this. I don't want to cause you more suffering and more pain than you're already experiencing. I don't want to make your day harder than it needs to be.

\* \* \*

This book is about death and mourning the loss of loved ones. This book talks about losing your significant other, your child, your best friend, your father-figure, and your younger sister.

This book has mention of stillbirth. This book has mention of alcohol. This book has mention of heart attacks. This book has



mention of accidents during surgery. This book has mention of car crashes. This book has mention of suicide. This book has mention of addictive substances/drugs.

Here are the individual warnings for each story:

**Isabel:**

**Henry:** Stillbirth

**Allison:** Alcohol, suicide

**Richard:**

**Blaire:** Accident during surgery, fatal anesthesia allergy, malignant hyperthermia

**Thomas:** Car crash

**Louise:** Stillbirth

**Zoe:** Suicide, addictive substances/drugs

**Colin:**

**Lacey:** Fear of needles (trypanophobia), malignant hyperthermia, self-gaslighting

\* \* \*

If you have experienced any kind of loss in your life, don't be afraid to seek help. We're not meant to carry this burden alone. You can try your best to bury it inside of you, or cover it up, or "deal with it" on your own, but in the end, we all need help.

You are not a burden, and your feelings aren't either.

Please know that you are not alone.



## Isabel

**T**he watermelon was wet and sticky on my hands. It was a hot summer day. The sun was shining bright in my eyes. The rocks and stones and pebbles were all heating up because of the light. There was a bird chirping not too far away. The creek was lazily moving next to us. I reached my hand in to wash off the watermelon juice.

She — Isabel — sat next to me and watched the water take the stickiness off of my hand. She reached into the bowl to grab a third piece for herself. I leaned back on my arms when I was done and let my head rest looking up at the sky.

The clouds seemed to barely move like they were watching us closely — like they were trying to keep track of our every move so that the memory of this moment would remain imprinted in their brains forever.

And then it was cozy. The fire crackled in the fireplace. It was cold outside. The blankets were fuzzy and soft on my skin. The hot chocolate warmed my throat.

Isabel sat next to me again. She was watching a movie. It was a

Christmas movie. I smiled and wrapped the blankets around me again.

And then the pavement was beneath my feet. The ice cream was slowly melting. The drips slid down the side of her cone. Her hands were sticky from the chocolate mess. My hands were clean.

The sun reflected off of the glass table. The umbrella did us no good that day. The seats were hot because of the light.

She was wearing her favorite shirt: the purple one. Her hair was bouncy and free, as always. Her fingernails weren't painted and bore the marks of her teeth. Her eyes were as bright as they had been since the day that we met in front of that big oak tree in the walking park.

And then I open my eyes. I'm still in my room clutching a pocket watch with "*forever and always*" engraved on the back.

I put it back on the shelf next to the picture of her and grab my bike helmet.

# Henry

**H**e was so tiny when we first saw him. So small. His little fingers would barely wrap around mine. “Henry James”, we called him, even though we had no clue how we could nickname that. Maybe he would’ve liked to have been just called “James” or “Jim” or maybe even just “Henry”.

I still like just the name “Henry”. That’s what I like to call him. James might be his middle name, but that name belonged to my husband first. I don’t call him just “James”. It’s either “Henry” or “Henry James”.

I still have pictures from his birth, but not very many. Obviously James was not in the mood to take very many pictures. Blood and other fluids everywhere. Poor James. He had never seen such things. He wasn’t raised on a farm where he occasionally had to assist with birthing goats and calves.

I think Henry would like calves. I can imagine him now, walking up to ol’ Bessie and petting her nose with his chubby, grubby hands. Then he would turn around and notice a smaller cow in my arms. He’d come over and give her a hug and then smile up at me with that same smile that James wears in every one of his

childhood photos. The calf would be healthy, just like Henry would be.

Bessie knows what I mean. Bessie has given birth to a Henry before. Bessie has licked her calf clean only to find that he won't open his eyes.

I can still feel his fingers in mine as I kissed the back of his hand for the first time and the last time. I can still feel the weight of his tiny body pressed up against me. He was warm and then so cold.

I didn't let them touch him. I cleaned him. I swaddled him. I held him. That was the last time that I slept. Who knows how long ago that was.

Now it just seems like my time is just spent laying in bed being soothed by James. Poor James. He probably never imagined this ever happening to him.

We have few pictures from after his birth. They are all of Henry.

## Allison

I want to talk to her. Obviously I can't find a way, though. It's just one of those days.

I pour myself another drink from the top shelf of mom's liquor cabinet. She only keeps the good stuff up there. Whatever I grabbed, it burns my throat when I throw my head back and pour the contents of the glass into my mouth. I never could get used to that sting.

I still remember when Ali first caught me with the bottle. She was over at my house and I pulled out whatever cheap stuff mom had at the front of the cabinet. She told me I was stunting my growth. I said I was done growing. She told me I'd lose some of my brain. I said I'd already lost most of it. She told me it was wrong. I said I didn't care. After a few moments of thought (and a lot of convincing), she joined me in my recklessness. She took sips as I took swigs. She started laughing. I started laughing. And then the whole world went black. I think I threw her life away that night. A few months later, it was routine for us. Sneak out, drink some mystery concoction, and don't get caught.

I remember the first close call. My mom was away. Her parents

weren't. I hid in the bushes and threw pebbles at her window. She flicked a flashlight twice at me. She climbed out. She reached the bottom. Her dad decided to finally take the trash out to the curb. He barely missed seeing us pull away from the curb. We went to the drain pipe that night. We got wasted. She smiled. The world went black again. We probably did some stuff that we'd both regret if we could remember.

I remember the final straw. We were sitting on my couch. She turned down a sip of a mild mixture I created. I took a sip and laid back. She told me she couldn't have any more. I asked why. She told me she was still trying to get into a good school. I said so what. She told me that I was a bad influence. I said she was stuck-up. She told me I was throwing my life away. I said she didn't give a damn about me. She told me she was going home. I said then get out of here. And she never came back.

I didn't finish the drink that night. I finished it the next morning when she didn't show up at the Halloween party she had been planning for nine months and her name was being blasted across every local news channel and radio station.

I sting the back of my throat with another swig. This one is my favorite. It does the job quickly. I close my eyes, listen to her laugh, look at her smile, and then the world goes black.



## Richard

**H**e liked to cook in the kitchen with me. He couldn't play Cribbage to save his life — card games were always Grandma Bobbie's thing — but Grandpa was master of the kitchen. He made crepes with me every Sunday morning before taking me and Grandma Bobbie to church. He liked to quietly hum along to their gospel songs, but he was always belting out Dean Martin when flipping those perfect crepes.

He used to make a show of it. He'd cook them in a skillet pan and would flip them in the air, then catch them in the pan. He said that's how he won over Grandma Bobbie's heart at the diner. One look at his crepe-flipping skills, and she couldn't keep her hands off of him.

He also made great omelets, too. That was Saturday mornings. He'd load them up full of sauteed peppers and onions, bacon, cheese, ham, and spinach, and he'd always scramble up the eggs with his secret ingredient. Grandma Bobbie and I both knew the secret ingredient was milk, but we let him think that he had us fooled. I think he knew that we knew all along.

He'd make paninis on Wednesday afternoons with ham and

tomato and onions and pesto and cheese, and he'd make tomato basil bisque to go on the side. Grandma Bobbie liked to dip her sandwiches in the soup, but Grandpa said that ruined his masterpiece.

After Grandma Bobbie left, it was just me and him. He didn't make omelets anymore; just crepes. He made crepes on Saturday and Sunday mornings, packed me crepes for my lunches, and always had a backup cache of crepes "just in case".

He let me drizzle honey on my crepes even though he held his own protest every time I did it. I like them with honey. I like a lot of things with honey.

I taught him how to play Go Fish, and he got really good. Meanwhile he taught me how to *properly* make spaghetti and baked ziti. That's all that we had for dinner for a long time: spaghetti and baked ziti.

He used to tell me that it doesn't matter the grades I got, only the smarts stored in my noggin. Then, he'd go on explaining that schools nowadays don't know how to grade smarts, they only grade you based on how good you are at spitting back what they tell you. He said a lot of stuff like that.

Now I live with Aunt Helen. She doesn't make crepes. She doesn't make omelets. She doesn't play Go Fish with me. She plays Cribbage, but only a little. She only eats baked ziti every once in a while, and even then it's only when she picks it up from the store. I bought the ingredients for it and cooked it for us once, but she didn't seem to really care.

RICHARD

I make crepes and paninis and omelets and baked ziti, and play Solitaire and War and Gin Rummy. But it isn't the same. It's never been the same. And it never will be.

## Blaire

**I**t hurt. Her stomach hurt. It was just above her hips. Mom told her it might've been cramps.

Then her right side hurt. She had a fever. Mom said it was normal. Dad told her to take a sick day.

Then she felt sick. She took a few more days off of school. It was lonely there without her. Mom took her to the doctor.

They did some tests. She got her blood drawn. They did an ultrasound on her side. (I knew what that was because it's the same thing Mom let me watch when Blair was in her stomach.) They said something wasn't right and that her appendix had problems.

*Appendicitis.*

They scheduled a surgery. They said she'd be out in an hour. They said she would sleep there and could go home with us the next day.

*Appendectomy.*

She hadn't really been eating for awhile. We got some Panera Bread while we waited.

They took her away for surgery. She said she liked riding on the bed before she left.

They came back after an hour. They didn't have a bed with them.

*Malignant hyperthermia.*

They talked with Mom and Dad for a long time. They asked questions. They dealt with paperwork. I sat alone in the funky chair.

They told me that she went to sleep during surgery but they couldn't wake her up.

*Anesthesia.*

They didn't let me see her until it was very late. She looked funny.

Her skin was muted in color. It looked way too gray.

Her eyes were closed. I had never seen her eyes closed for more than a blink.

She was wearing the clothes she had brought with her in her pink duffle bag. They were her favorites, and only for special occasions.

## BEREAVEMENT

I examined her hands. I picked them up carefully. They felt like they were made of glass. They felt stiff. They felt dusty. They felt cold. I didn't like it.

Her hair was brushed. She hated anyone touching her hair. She threw the brush across the room once when she was 5.

I checked her body. What else had they done to her? What else made this girl different from the Blaire that I spoke to this morning?

She had a scar on her right side.

## Thomas

**I**sabel was always one to take risks. She liked to tell me to “live a little.” She thought it was great fun to wear a funky-colored shirt to work. She thought it was funny to surprise me by showing up spontaneously. I miss that. I miss everything about her. The way she laughed, the way she spoke, the way she walked into a room, the way she looked into my eyes, the way she would kiss my cheek...

My bike pedals spin beneath me. It’s a quiet day. It *was* a quiet day. I block out the bird chirping in the distance. I don’t stop by Jerry’s for ice cream. (He hasn’t heard from me in a while.) I pass by the park without looking anywhere near it. My brain still starts to swell inside my head.

I *made* it a quiet day. All I would let myself listen to was the *click-clack* of the bike wheels under me and the words of *A Great Big World* in my head, which I could never get to stop.

*“Anywhere I would’ve followed you. Say something, I’m giving up on you.”*

That song has been stuck in my head for a year and a half straight.

That is definitely a record. Before this song, usually the songs in my head would only stay stuck for a week, maybe two.

I ride past a crash site on my way home. My stomach gets queasy. My legs stop moving. My bike is coasting, but I'm about to fall over because my hands won't control the handlebars. My head hurts. Then the adrenaline kicks in and I can't stop pedaling and my hands firmly grip the rubber on the ends of the handlebars.

It's not good to ride while distracted. However, does that stop me? No. I begin to think of anything I can. Anything. It's so hard for me to try and think of anything that doesn't remind me of Isabel. The trees, the blue sky, distant music, the road beneath my bike, the bracelet on my wrist... There isn't anything in my life that remains untouched by her.

And then I cross over the bridge and my stomach gets queasy again.



## Louise

**H**e was so tiny when we first saw him. And she's even smaller than he is. She's still smaller than him. For now.

I dread the day that she will become bigger than Henry. That isn't supposed to happen. That's not how the world is supposed to work. Henry is supposed to be bigger. Henry is supposed to be able to watch over her and protect her and take her to the mall with friends and bring her to her first dance and take her out for ice cream after her breakups.

She's been robbed of so much already, and she hasn't even been born.

I measure things in months now. It's been 23 months according to the calendar. It feels like no time has passed and yet I wake up every morning with my belly growing bigger and bigger. A sad reminder that time has indeed passed, but also another thing that makes me wake up thinking Henry is still here. When that realization hits each morning that it's not Henry but Alya who's taking up all of this space in my belly, I crash once again.

## BEREAVEMENT

I wonder how pictures will go. Pictures provide proof of Alya growing. Pictures provide proof of a life without Henry. Pictures of Alya will be vibrant with life, while pictures of Henry are the opposite. Pictures of Alya will show her playing with toys or learning to walk or doing somersaults in the grass on a sunny spring day. Henry doesn't get to have that.

Even after Alya is born, our family will remain incomplete. There's no way to change that. There's no way to erase the past.

## Zoe

I can't decide what to believe: if she thought about me or not.

If she thought about me, then this was in spite. Did she know how it would affect me? Did she ever think about that? And if she didn't think about me, then I wasn't important enough to her. If she had only called me, I could've made things better. Or maybe I would've made things worse. Maybe she was right to not call me that night.

Maybe I should've just kept her out of it all. Maybe it's my fault that she did what she did. Maybe things would've been better if I had never convinced her to share that drink with me.

I can't decide what to feel: upset and angry, or just sad.

She would probably be asking me to put down the bottle right now if she were still here. I can hear her nagging from the first day in the back of my mind. I think I threw her life away that night.

If only I hadn't gotten her involved.

Yes, I feel guilty. I didn't need those countless grief counselors to tell me that, because I already know. And yes, I know that everyone says that it's unhealthy, but what if I actually could've prevented it? What if there was some way for me to stop it from happening?

I called the hotline a few times. I don't know what for; I guess just to talk to someone that won't judge me for not being "over it".

All of my friends left me (if you can even call them that) soon after it happened. Or maybe I left them. Who honestly knows? I can't remember much from then. I can't remember much at all these days, actually. Ali was the brains out of the two of us.

Ali was my closest friend, and maybe I was hers. I hope I was hers.

I call her number, but someone picks up.

*"Hello?"*

I quickly hang up the phone and grip my chest.

## Colin

I stare at the headstone. It stares back at me. “Richard Owens, beloved brother, father, and grandfather” it reads to me from its hard chiseled form.

I want to throw a rock at it. I want to wrap my arms around it and cry. I don’t know what I want to do. Nothing has been the same since he left me here.

I hate it here.

I look up at the gray sky, hoping for some clarity. Even better, it just makes me more numb, physically and emotionally. Instead of clarity, I find myself content with doing nothing at all. I sit on the dark grass beneath me and decide to stare at nothing.

The gray leaves on the sycamore tree start to fall on my head and my shoulders. I brush them off. First Mom, then Grandma Bobbie, then Grandpa. Who’s next? Aunt Helen?

How much more time do I have, I wonder? I check my watch — Grandpa’s watch — and I sigh. I have twenty-two minutes. Twenty-one now. Twenty...

I stop watching the second hand spin around and I forget about everything. Forget about the past: about Grandpa and Mom and Grandma Bobbie. Forget about the future: about school and Aunt Helen. I sit in the moment enjoying the feel of the cool breeze on my skin. I pretend nothing exists in this entire world except for this graveyard of headstones — headstones that I pretend don't mark places where there are people buried underneath.

I close my eyes. The world behind my eyelids is dark and black. It feels like an empty void; like the expanse of that world stretches on for miles and miles of just emptiness and nothingness.

My stomach growls. I can feel it moving and I can hear it, but I don't feel hungry. Nevertheless, I grab my peanut butter and honey sandwich from my pocket and take a bite.

I finish the sandwich in total silence, and then I check my watch. Three... Two... One... Zero. I stand up and head towards his old, gray, rusty pickup truck.

## Lacey

**S**he hated that red dress. She hated it so much, and yet Mom made her wear it when we went in for family pictures that day. It was all Blaire could do to not scowl in every single picture. In fact, most of our pictures had that signature scowl.

She liked to wear that scowl. It didn't even look ugly on her like it does on me. It was her way of expressing her frustration. In fact, I think that the only day that she didn't wear that scowl was on the day that she went in. She was excited.

I was never quite sure how she could just let them near her with a knife or needle or whatever else they used.

I have tried so hard to get used to needles. When they test my blood, when they give me a shot, when my parents got tattoos, I try to maintain my composure. I try to keep myself from feeling nauseous and fainting.

*Appendicitis.* They bring up that word every now and then, and it still stings. Makes me dizzy. I-need-to-sit-down kind of thing. *Malignant hyperthermia* too. *Appendectomy.*

*Anesthesia.*

That word is the most common. In class and at work, people don't usually talk about the appendix or hyperthermia, but you will hear at least a little something about *anesthesia*, even if it's just a part of everyday conversation.

That word follows me around, haunting me wherever I go.

I still feel like everyone thinks that I should be fine. And I should be fine. I have every reason to be fine. My parents are still together after 40 years of marriage, my home was never broken, I was a straight A student, I got into college, I have a great job, I have great friends — I have pretty much the perfect life.

I used to feel awkward anytime someone would ask me about my family — namely, how many siblings I have. I never knew if I was supposed to say I was an only child, or if I was supposed to say that I was an older sister. Maybe step-siblings have this problem too if their parents get divorced.

Blaire existed, I can't deny that, but it's not like I can show them recent pictures of her, and it's off-putting to bring up a family loss when someone brings up a topic like siblings that's supposed to be lighthearted.

I've resorted to telling them that she'd be just about 34. Her last birthday party was great: just an intimate family gathering. We made a cake together. We also celebrate her half-birthday, and that's coming up in a few months. I repeat the last joke that she told me. I act as though she were still here because who would



want to damper a simple conversation with talk about death?

I show pictures of her and how she used to be, if they ever ask what she looks like. Which is why I keep this picture with me. And why I'm looking at it now.

She hated that red dress. She hated it so much.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my friends that have supported me in my own experiences with loss and grief. There are so many of you, but I'd like to specifically name Amber Hiller, Alyssa Eck, Delainey Briers, Cyrena Reim, and Milo Pinto. Your friendship means so much to me. Without you, I would be even further off the deep end than I am today. I truly appreciate each and everything that you've done for me, and I often think back to those memories that we have.

And I want to thank each of you for reading this collection of short stories. You, my readers, keep me writing. Because of you, I keep creating these stories and poems. I want to make sure that you know that you are 100% not alone. You may feel like an outcast, but there will always at least be a place for you here with me.



## About the Author

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## Also by Grace M Wells



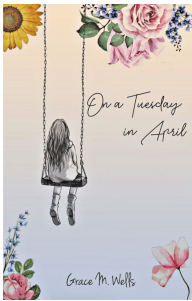
**2/23**

Total words of relief: 2,146

Total moments of pain: 2,389,385

The tragedies of a young soul stay bound inside these pages...

A poet's first work is always their pride and joy, but the work that they feel is the best is only what truly comes from the heart. With a strong voice and capturing themes, this book exploits the inner feelings of one who has loved and lost.



### **On a Tuesday in April**

In a span of 2 years, one can go through feelings of love, disappointment, anger, heartbreak, and acceptance. With her eloquent use of words, Grace expresses her personal experiences with each of these feelings in this 7-part sequential poetry collection.