The Companion

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Memory Is a Nuisance

A little company for the memories, belongings and dates that catch you off guard after someone dies.

This excerpt is Chapter 6 of The Companion, a book of gentle conversations about grief. You can read it slowly, leave it for another day, or return whenever you want.

The following three pages retain their original book page numbers.

Because life needs digesting, too.

6. Memory Is a Nuisance

Are you afraid you'll forget?

Their voice. Their laugh. The way they said your name. A certain look they had when they were thinking, maybe? Or the sound of them coming through the door.

It's often the little things, isn't it? Nobody ever thought to memorize them. Why would you?

We always assume there will be another Tuesday, don't we?

My memory can be such a nuisance. It'll keep something ridiculous from 1983 and hide the very thing I'm desperate to find.

Right? I used to be afraid of that too.

Sometimes I think the fear underneath it is that if a detail disappears, somehow they are slipping farther away too.

But memory is a strange keeper.

Some things fade. Then years later a song begins, somebody says one word, or you open a drawer…

and there it is.

In my heart, they're still who they were to me.

They're still whole.

Funny how your memory gets attached to their things too. You know what I mean?

Yeah.

Well, for now, why don't you just leave their toothbrush where it is. Or move it if you want.

There isn't a right day.

What's that?

They think you should get rid of it?

Mm.

People can be very certain about somebody else's grief.

So you keep their voicemails, if you like listening to them. You keep their messages. Write down a story you don't want to forget. Wear their shirt if it still smells like them.

And if somebody has an opinion about how long you should keep it, they can keep that too.

Sorry, Love. Other people's certainty can get me a bit worked up.

Now, where were we? Oh yes. Memories.

But it isn't only their things that can catch you off guard.

Dates can be troublesome. They hold memories as well.

Birthdays. Anniversaries. Christmas. The day they died.

You might feel the date coming for days. Other times you wake up feeling heavy and can't quite work out why. Then sometime around lunch it occurs to you.

Oh.

It's *this* day.

Sorry? Oh, you're so right. And then you start wondering what you're supposed to do with it.

Make plans? Stay home? See people? Be alone?

I don’t know that there’s a right answer to that either.

And it can happen that the date you’ve been dreading arrives and it’s almost gentle.

Then an ordinary Tuesday knocks the wind right out of you.

Grief has very little respect for a calendar.

Goodness, look at your tea. You’ve hardly touched it.

Here. I’ll warm it up.

There is more here when you want it.

The Companion offers sixteen short conversations about grief: the mixed feelings, the ordinary moments, and the days when other people seem certain how you ought to feel.

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