



## Ride or Die: Loving Through Tragedy, a Husband's Memoir

**Jarie Bolander**

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*Powerful and distinctive, the memoir Ride or Die covers a couple's struggle with terminal leukemia.*

Marked by difficulties, Jarie Bolander's memoir *Ride or Die* is about a couple's contention with the grief and confusion of a leukemia diagnosis.

Bolander and Jane met and married well into their adulthood, after having developed their individual quirks and interests on their own. Jane ran a successful public relations firm for sports and entertainment celebrities; Bolander, an extreme sports competitor whose first marriage failed, was committed to making this one work. But when Jane was diagnosed with leukemia, the couple struggled to keep their early promises to each other amid the devastation. "Ride or die" had always been their mantra; from the beginning of their relationship, they'd been resolved to "go to the very end" for each other, no matter what. Grueling treatment regimens put this resolve to the test, challenging what they knew about each other.

The book is attentive to the couple's emotional states most of all, and the end of Jane's illness is never in doubt. In place of questions about her fate, a sense of who she was propels the narrative, as well as considerations of how she and Bolander (two independent people in a couple) navigated their helplessness and mutual dependence. The prose is thoughtful about making use of contemporary images and figurative language to render leukemia and chemotherapy real: "tiny hairline fractures splinter[ed] her ribs like cracks in a dropped smartphone screen." Elsewhere, unusual musicality is attained because of Bolander's alliteration and assonance.

Throughout the book, Bolander shares confessions of vulnerability and remorse. He evades projecting himself as a superhuman caretaker; his suffering is palpable. He recalls sneaking off from Jane's hospital room to vape, and he records Jane's snarky moments too. He shows how, with help from Jane's family, they got through the initial stages of chemotherapy in their own way. Dramatic events come amid instances of endless waiting and the boredom of medical treatment, and excerpts from a Care Circle platform represent a real-time recitation of symptoms and treatments. The impact of Jane's disease on the couple's wide circle of friends is acknowledged too.

The book includes excerpts written by Jane, vivifying her through her own words. But it's Bolander's self-assured voice that directs it most. His frank admissions of uncertainty humanize his difficult story well, and his sympathy for other couples who navigate serious illnesses or the death of a loved one is clear.

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MICHELE SHARPE (April 28, 2023)

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