

Sudden Widow: A True Story of Love, Grief, Recovery, and How Badly It Can Suck!

Bella Lynn Thompson

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With advice to others who are going through similar losses, Sudden Widow is a rounded memoir about confronting an unimagined future.

Bella Lynn Thompson's humorous and direct memoir-cum-self-help-guide *Sudden Widow* follows the aftermath of the unexpected loss of her husband.

When she was forty-six and had two children to care for, Thompson became a widow after her husband, Paul, died of a massive heart attack. Thompson's narration of these personal experiences is at times rueful, at times self-deprecating, and always honest. She casts Paul as the love of her life, presenting him as not the perfect man, but the perfect man for her. He is recalled as an engaged and loving father, a faithful and affectionate partner, and a friend. His death is said to have amplified the couple's oldest son's OCD and youngest son's anxiety and need for attention, emphasizing the fact that losing Paul had profound implications for both his family and friends.

The book's first few chapters are its most personal. They are focused on the couple's past and personal connection. After this background work is done, most of the book's remaining chapters are devoted to addressing single topics—subjects that, from her experiences, Thompson feels are the most important when a person is grieving the loss of a partner. But this switch has the effect of recasting the book's initial chapters as the work of background reportage; the later chapters are more audience focused, speaking to fellow survivors with specific advice in mind.

Metaphors are the book's frequent tool, used to make sense of grief and survival: one chapter likens the aftermath of a loss, and its feelings of overwhelm, to sinking beneath the weight of new challenges, like parenting alone, financial worries, not feeling good enough, depression, and health concerns. Many such metaphors become concrete means of understanding the morass of grieving feelings.

The book covers ample ground, with topics including dating, parenting, and practical concerns around money and property. It sometimes gives the impression of crossing its topics off of a list, though. Most helpful is the book's breakdown of tasks that grieving people perform, often with the help of friends or lawyers. Such pragmatism, combined with Thompson's more personalized and frank discussions of the difficulties of raising her sons alone, stands out.

With advice to others who are going through similar losses, *Sudden Widow* is a rounded memoir about confronting an unimagined future.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (December 16, 2020)

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