

The Good Widow: A Memoir of Living with Loss

Jennifer Katz

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The Good Widow is a heartbreaking memoir about love, loss, and a transition into widowhood.

The Good Widow is Jennifer Katz's moving memoir about coming to terms with losing the love of her life and learning how to live with grief.

In this touching collection of personal essays, Katz captures the experience of loss and grief and suggests practical ways to deal with the traumatic experience of losing a loved one. Her own husband, Tristram, died following a heart attack. He was fifty-seven; she was forty-five.

Before she met Tristram, Katz did not think she would get married. With her unhappy parents as her main example of such partnerships, she refused them on principle. She also recalls being told not to be "too smart," and to avoid "scaring off the boys." Anecdotes, as of refusing to catch the bouquet at a wedding, play into her ethos. But after she met Tristram, her notions of love and marriage changed. They fell in love while teaching university courses, forming a relationship based on friendship, respect, and trust. She recalls building a life together in which they both had the space to explore their own passions and hobbies.

When Tristram passed away, Katz was forced to accept that she was not as independent from him as she thought. Her book is an attempt to understand their relationship in retrospect, as well as to help others facing similar situations. It includes letters to Tristram and to grief itself; its three parts explore the physical pain of grief, relationships with others, and learning to live and love again. Reflections on motherhood and feminism also play in as Katz explores contrasts between what is expected from wives and widows, and what it is actually like to be both.

These thematic essays eschew chronology; each grouping ends with a set of questions to prompt others to reflect on their own grieving experiences. The othering feeling that comes with losing the one person who knows everything about you is centered throughout, complemented by expressions of Katz's coping mechanisms for such situations. As she comes to terms with the trauma of losing Tristram, she explains grief in direct, touching, and vulnerable ways: "We yearn for the past, a time when our loved ones were within reach. Without them, the world is different. The future is different. We are different."

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ANNA MARIA COLIVICCHI (June 4, 2021)

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