

Young Widower: A Memoir

John W. Evans

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Heartbreakingly honest, authentically mature, Evans's memoir is a testament to survival through loss and grief.

Stanford fellow and poet John W. Evans delivers a memoir of unexpected grief which is both emotionally ragged and deeply introspective, a stark and magnetic read.

While capping off a year in Romania, Evans and his wife decided to hike through a section of the Carpathian mountains. Though they expected the normal frustrations of the trail, they were unprepared for the traumatic. Evans's wife, Katie, fell back to keep pace with a visitor and found herself instead confronted by an enormous bear. A few harrowing hours later, Evans was a widower.

These pages encapsulate Evans's struggle to reconcile the terrible facts of that day and its aftermath with his previous expectations for his marriage and life. In prose that reflects his lyrical capabilities, in language both sparing and confessional, Evans details how he and Katie met and fell in love as young, idealistic Peace Corps volunteers; he traces their loping moves toward marriage and the challenging questions which arise when lives intertwine after "I do."

Young Widower proves a nonlinear read as Evans trades between those pensive recollections, his memories of the day that took Katie from him, and his attempts to rebuild his life after she was gone. Evans has his good days, in which he can recall Katie with the clarity and sometimes disgruntled affection of a young spouse, but he also has days in which guilt and regret weigh out, and they, too, punctuate the work meaningfully.

Some chapters find Evans immobilized by grief, subsisting on rented movies and the insurance payment from his wife's policy; some find him pouring out his thoughts to counselors or leaning heavily on Katie's family for a shadow of their connection. Still others find him, though, gradually learning how to live with the unthinkable, and these proffer an eventual, hopeful edge.

Nevertheless, Evans never entirely manages to pull away from the day of Katie's death, and its details are revisited throughout. Readers will appreciate the honesty in this, if it also renders them voyeurs in a nightmare with one inevitable conclusion. Evans's pages will garner deep empathy, particularly as the author works to find some measure of peace.

Though the tragedy of Evans's title is borne out, his memoir brims with maturity and authenticity, and it should find a ready readership with those who have lived through incredible loss. *Young Widower* is both a loving tribute to a cherished spouse and a testament to survival.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Spring 2014)

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