

# Without You

*by* Chris Okum

My husband died. I keep his picture on the nightstand next to my bed. He was handsome. He looked like a movie star. He was tall and lanky. His hair was dark and curly. He had a brilliant smile. And then he died. He died while crossing the street. He was hit by a car. I am still mourning my husband and I shouldn't be, according to everyone I know, including my son, my best friend, and my mother. They tell me I need to let go and move on, and I tell them that I don't want to. I tell them that I will never love another man as much as my husband. I tell them that I don't mind moving through the world as if I'm in a trance. I tell them that I don't mind if everything seems gauzy, bathed in a sad, soft light. I tell that that I don't mind if I seem distant and unreachable to those around me. What I have not told them, however, is what happened to me recently while I was at the supermarket. That someone tapped me on the shoulder. And that it was a man. A handsome man. Who was tall and lanky. Who had dark, curly hair and a brilliant smile. Who looked exactly like my dead husband. Who said, Hello, it's me, I'm back, I was reincarnated. Who sounded exactly like my dead husband. Who had the same eyes as my dead husband. Who knew my name. Who knew my son's name. Who knew my best friend's name. Who knew my mother's name. Who knew my address. Who knew what city I had been born and raised in. Who knew everything about me. This man could not have been anyone but my dead husband, and there he was, standing right in front of me. But it was not my dead husband. It couldn't have been. Because my dead husband, were he really to be reincarnated, would not have come back looking exactly like himself. He would have come back looking like someone else. He would have found me in the supermarket and tapped me on the shoulder and I would have turned around and seen a man who looked nothing like my husband and he would have said, Hello, it's me, I'm your dead husband, and I would have said, No, you're not, because he wouldn't have looked anything like my dead husband.

And then he would have insisted. And I would have said, Prove it. And it would have taken him a while to win me over, despite him knowing everything about me. But slowly, over time, and against the advice of my son, my best friend, and my mother, I would have come to realize that this man, who, like I said, looked nothing like my dead husband, was indeed my dead husband, and how I would have come to this conclusion would have been because of a kiss. This man, who would have looked nothing like my dead husband, would have kissed me, and then, and only then, would I have believed that this man who looked nothing like my dead husband was actually my dead husband. That's how this was supposed to work, the whole reincarnated dead husband thing. Because your husband doesn't die and is reincarnated looking exactly like himself. That's not how it works. Your husband dies, is reincarnated looking like someone else, and then, once he finds you, has to convince you that he is indeed your dead husband. And that's what I told this man at the supermarket who looked exactly like my dead husband. We were standing in front of the yogurt and butter and cottage cheese and I looked at this man who looked exactly like my dead husband, this man who sounded exactly like my dead husband, this man who knew things about me that only my dead husband would have known, and I told him that he could not have been my dead husband because he looked exactly like himself. And then I left the supermarket as quickly as I could, because this man was chasing me, insisting that he was my dead husband. I have not told anyone else about this, though. And I have not told them that this man who looks exactly like my dead husband keeps following me around and telling me that he really is my dead husband, and because of some kind of miracle, he has been born again, at the same age he was when he died, in the same body, back from the dead to continue our life together. He keeps telling me that I don't have to mourn anymore, that there is no need for me to keep being sad, that he's not dead, that he's alive, but I don't believe him. And I have told this man who looks exactly like my dead husband to leave me alone. I keep telling him this but he won't listen. I keep telling him that he's not my dead husband. I

keep telling him I'll know my dead husband is back when he shows up and looks like someone else. Because that's how it works, and it doesn't work any other way.

