

# He's Grieved Long Enough

*by* Jim Harrington

My stepmother called me an amoral virgin during our latest "disagreement." Say what? Is she really that dumb? Is this woman really right for Dad? Somedays I wish she'd checked into a convent and left Dad alone.

I know I shouldn't feel that way. Dad's in his fifties and it's been two years since Mom passed. He needs companionship. And—God knows—help around the house. Still, why couldn't her life-path have taken her in a different direction?

Dad seems happy. That's important—if it's true. I worry he's with her to be less lonely, not because he loves her, or even likes her. Maybe I should have moved in with him after Mom died. Maybe then this interloper wouldn't be in our house. Maybe then I wouldn't have these constant headaches worrying about him.

And maybe it wouldn't have made any difference.

She's at the door in her witch's costume cackling at Trick or Treaters. Dad's around the corner stifling a laugh. When she closes the door he lets loose and laughter fills the house—his and my stepmother's. I hold mine in. Try to look unaffected. But I'm not. He's happy. She makes him happy. I need to let go. Let him live his own life. Be happy for him.

The doorbell rings, and Dad puts a throw pillow over his face. "Trick or treat" echoes through the house mixed with a series of muffled chuckles from the pillow. The door closes. The chuckles turn to laughter, and this time I join in.

\* \* \*From a prompt to use the following in a story: amoral, path, stepmother, convent, virgin.

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