

Let me tell you one last story

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

Sometimes a marriage ends, a mother dies, a world collapses, and there is little to be done once it's over. Once the bed is cold, it remains cold. How we will begin to dismantle our lives together, when you are always reminding me that you love me? It's not enough. Let me say this again. It's not enough. I don't know why. It should be, but it's not. That's the way it goes.

Up in the mountains, we both knew it was the end. *Let's be honest, you were cheating on your girlfriend, and I would've slept with anyone.* Say this to yourself a couple of times a day, and it will stop hurting so much. It's worked for me.

I'm actually dating someone. It's not love, and we won't be living happily ever after, but he's sweet and funny, and he has a name. He has a five- year-old son who lives upstate. We do other things besides fucking. We go to baseball games, and ride our bikes together. Sometimes he cooks dinner. I see this lasting through September, maybe October. He'll end it, not me. I'll want to hold on, but he won't. He's been single for fifteen years. He's said things like, "You can't keep casual going forever." This is the voice of experience. It will be my voice, too.

You've asked what my grief is like these days. It's a constant presence, and it is, surprisingly, not always sad. Sometimes it's manic; deep depression to giddiness in a matter of minutes. Sometimes it's a stillness so profound I have to shake myself. What's it like to live like this? It's a minute-by-minute proposition. The full impact of all of this has not hit me yet. I won't let it. I'm not ready.

I just know that, for us, it's too late and neither one of us can go back.

Let me tell you one last story:

In December of last year, the sun set at 4:25, in January at 4:45, and when you walked out the door of our marriage, the sun set at 6:45. Listen, can you hear it? Neither do I. The clock's not ticking anymore. It's the sound I heard last spring when you moved out and it's the sound that drove me relentlessly, up until the very moment my mother died. And then there was silence. Blessed silence.

I write this letter, appropriately enough, the sun is setting. But the late afternoon light is amazing. It illuminates my hands, my arms, my face, my fingers splayed across the keyboard. There is nothing else for me to lose, so I'm not afraid any more. I am dangerously free to become what I choose.

Let me tell you one last story:

When I married you, I wore your mother's white eyelet lace wedding dress and a pair of pink satin high-heeled slippers. I carried a bouquet of pink and white roses as we entered the stone chapel. It was a glorious summer day, the waves whipped up whitecaps on the lake, we served champagne in plastic cups. We were so young. My brother read "Sailing to Byzantium" by Yeats. We waltzed out of the church to Vivaldi, sure that there wasn't anybody alive more in love than we were.

When I married you, we wore matching wedding bands, each set with nine diamonds, yellow gold, and inscribed with our initials. We bought them at a discount jeweler, and packed up our Volkswagen bus. We traveled north along the coast to be married. I slept next to you in the back of our bus at truck stops, our bed a foam mattress set up on plastic milk crates. When we woke up in the morning, you

would kiss me, look me in the eyes and say, "Oh, baby, baby, baby," jump out and return with hot coffee, throw the clutch into first, and drive out onto the highway, the windows down, the radio on, my hand on your knee and your smile as wide as the open road before us. You made me very happy for a long time.

My days these days are very quiet now. Mostly I am here alone, out in the garden, content with the silence, knowing in my heart that it's finally over. Maybe sex has nothing to do with love. When you first moved out, I was sure I could resurrect the sexy woman I thought had died, when our marriage died. After you left, I had sex with men I found attractive, men who intrigued me, men who ignored me, and even men I didn't like.

But, now, this is my grief, my orbit, my trajectory, my affair. I know this is difficult to comprehend because even now on good days, and more so on bad, I say to myself—I've got to call him, tell him what I'm thinking, what I'm feeling, otherwise it's not real, otherwise the day doesn't assume a shape I can define. But practice makes perfect, and this is what we must practice. I appreciate the phone calls, I know they come from love, but we've got to practice living our own lives.

Since all this started, I've written you many letters, but never sent them. And now I will. You need to hear the whole story. You need to hear this because I have loved you for such a long time, and I think I will love you for a long time to come, long after you have drifted out of my life. Darling, we can let each other go gradually. We can unravel our lives, thread by thread, with grace, with compassion, with sanity. I choose to remember our innocence in the early days, the early years, when we turned to each other eagerly, fresh in our passion, delirious in our desire for each other—our honeymoon, our vacation beside the blue lake, our trips north for the holidays, when even after the longest, most arduous day, we turned to each other, melted into each other, every night, as

naturally as the sun melts away the darkness. I am no longer afraid.

I'll be happy, I think, when this summer is over, when the leaves turn, when the days grow cold, the light no longer blue, but golden. It was always my mother's favorite time of year. One of these days, soon, I will have to begin to say good-bye to her as well. But not now. Not yet. It is still summer. Don't turn back the clock. Go back to your lover, lover. I will call you when I get the papers in the mail.

Let me tell you one last story:

I love you.

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Blue-Hours-ebook/dp/B008WDT9D6>

