



The
Long Nights
of
Mourning



A Journey with Grief after Sudden Loss

by Janis Ost Ford

Jamie Lebovitz

To Jamie Lebovitz, my attorney and champion, I want to say these things. I have a hunch your mother taught you well. I think you climbed upon your parent's bed in dinosaur pajamas and lay sleeping between safety and love. I think you put puzzles together effortlessly. I think you looked at maps and brushed your teeth carefully. I think you smiled brightly as you blew out each birthday candle. I think you helped elderly people across the street and amused your chemistry teacher with your questions. I think you had a social conscience at a young age. I think you wished everything could be fair.

I imagine you were pulled aside as a young man by leaders who told you that you too could lead. I think you had an insatiable appetite for wanting to understand.

Whatever brought you to this table is unknown to me. When courageous people are asked why they commit acts of bravery, they look blankly at the person presenting the question. They see nothing more than common sense as the driving factor, or maybe good morals. I would not ask you why you make others feel safe, and why you fight for the underdogs. You might give me a blank stare. Like a child interested in holding a shell next to his ear, like an opera singer hitting a perfect pitch – certain things just are the way they are.

You have stayed next to me, watching me weep uncontrollably. You've told me that sitting in offices with insurance carriers working with the airline would not be comfortable. That answering questions about my relationship with my ghost family would haunt me. You don't say this, but you let me know they are not sincere like we are. It is not their job to welcome me. There will be no chicken soup or art books on the table that we might discuss. They don't care that Cody loves "101 Dalmatians" and can pronounce the name "Cruella." They will not care, but you do.

When we sit in a meeting with these insurance company negotiators the problem gets very clear. My family was needlessly killed because of mistakes made by men and machine. These men in suits seem robotic to me; they want me to sign a paper, so they can hand me a check and send us back to the different world we come from.

You know I cannot do this. Mentally, physically, spiritually, morally, at this time I am frozen. I look to you, at you, in these moments of panic. You give me a Kleenex, waiting for my tears to form words. You don't look at your watch at these moments. Your briefcase is firmly planted on the tile floor. You are tall and stoic and you believe in me, in my plight, in our struggle for justice. You are not chasing ambulances or covering bad news in modern cities. You are on my ruthless playground, helping me face the bullies, allowing me to stand up and spit the dirt out of my teary mouth.

This is the first time in my life I have ever felt so afraid, because I feel *hatred*. They may just be men in suits, but I don't like who they work for. I don't support big corporations who think safety is just a slogan. Something bad happened out here, and you are my advocate.

I have a hunch your mother taught you well, Jamie. When the calendar pages flip to July, our partnership on paper will officially come to a close. We will send e-mails only to stay in touch; in our later years, we may be smaller and smaller in each other's lives, like the view from the window seat on a plane. Ah, we will remember one another when we think of planes. That is inevitable.

I am afraid for the time to come when you are no longer a requirement in my life. If this were a fairy tale, you would be the perfect lawyer, and I would be the devastated daughter, sister, Auntie. We would befriend one another, working side by side to fulfill our purpose. But this story is my life, it is as real as a truck hitting and killing a deer. Nothing can repair the damage. I do not expect you to remove your mask. It will not come off, because it is your skin. Your professionalism and compassion are not of this world, they are far too great. Thank you for sticking up for me, for looking at my family pictures, and for knowing how much I love and miss them. Thank you for being someone who allowed his mother to teach him so well...