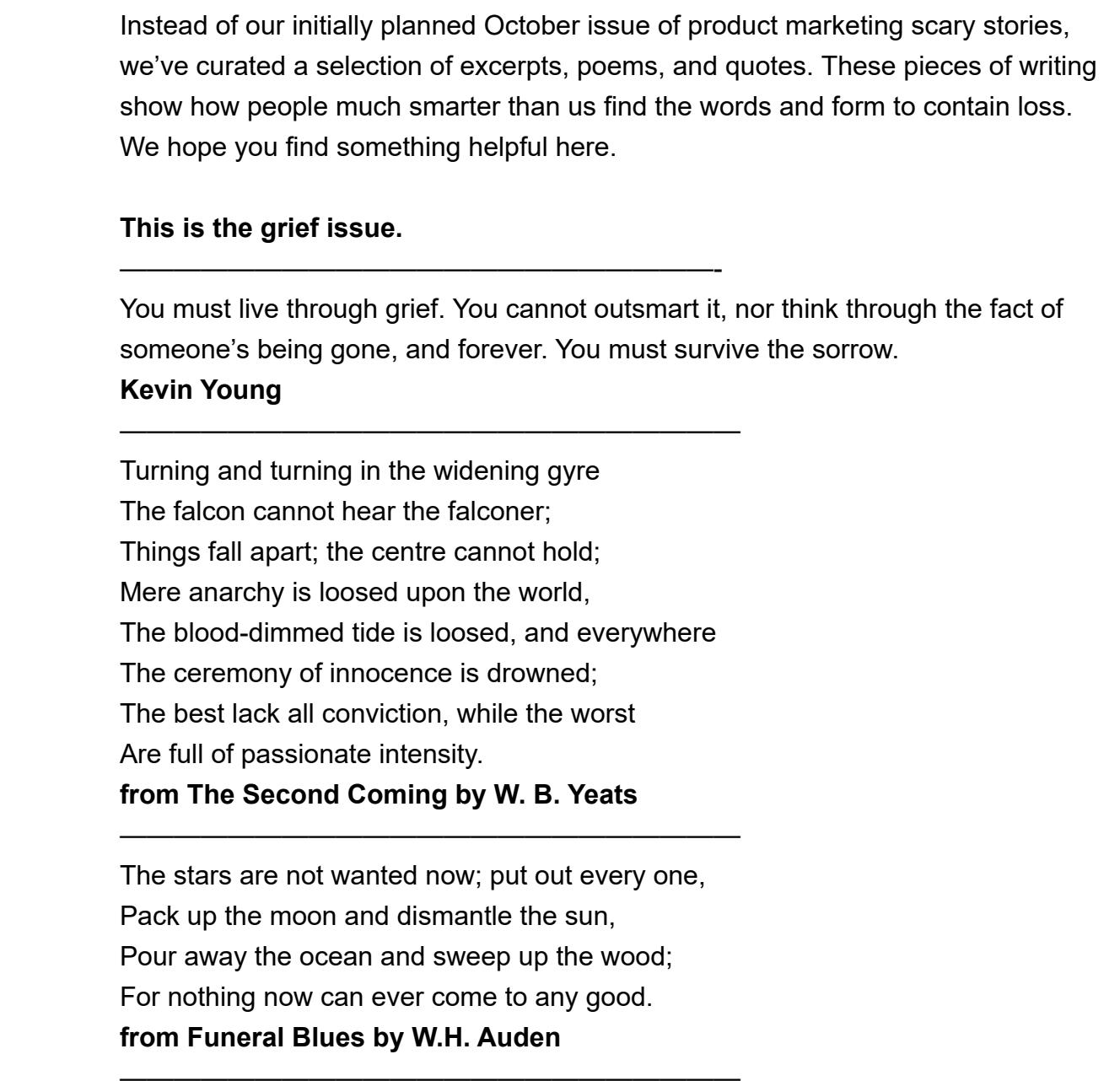


Human Conditions

Exploring the messy, contradictory, and sorrowful side of creativity



There's not much good to say.

We started this newsletter with the intention of calling gray gray; to represent chaos as chaos and examine the unseen complexities of things that seem simple.

The past month has brought global events that words fail to explain — but sometimes words are all we have for comfort.

Instead of our initially planned October issue of product marketing scary stories, we've curated a selection of excerpts, poems, and quotes. These pieces of writing show how people much smarter than us find the words and form to contain loss. We hope you find something helpful here.

This is the grief issue.

You must live through grief. You cannot outsmart it, nor think through the fact of someone's being gone, and forever. You must survive the sorrow.

Kevin Young

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

from *The Second Coming* by W. B. Yeats

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

from *Funeral Blues* by W.H. Auden

Someone is dead.
Even the trees know it,
those poor old dancers who come on lewdly,
all pea-green scarfs and spine pole.
I think...
I think I could have stopped it,
if I'd been as firm as a nurse
or noticed the neck of the driver
as he cheetahed the crosstown lights;
or later in the evening,
if I'd held napkin over my mouth.
I think I could...
If I'd been different, or wise, or calm,
I think I could have charmed the table,
the stained dish or the hand of the dealer.
But it's done.
It's all used up.
There's no doubt about the trees
spreading their thin feet into the dry grass.
A Canada goose rides up,
spread out like a gray suede shirt,
honking his nose into the March wind.
In the entryway a cat breathes calmly
into her watery blue fur.
The supper dishes are over and the sun
unaccustomed to anything else
goes on the way down.

Lament by Anne Sexton

"Why are you crying, mama?" he asked; the minute his feet touched the floor he recognized his mother's face.

"Your father is dead," she said.

And then, as if her coldest grief had suddenly burst free, she turned and turned in a tight circle until hands grasped her shoulders and stopped the spiraling of her tortured body.

Through the door he could see the dawn.
There were no stars. Only a leaden gray sky

still untouched by the rays of the sun. A drab light that seemed more like the onset of night than the beginning of day.

from *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo

Dawn...It was time for us to gather up Father's ashes. Each of us picked up a pair of hollow chopsticks and walked to Adashii noor. Even the last traces of smoke had disappeared this morning, and there was only the sound of the wind blowing uneasily in the pines. When I had come back on that night the third month, I had received the joyful cup of wine. Now at dawn, I was gathering up the sad white bones of parting. The world is like a rope, plaited with strands of joy and anger, pain and pleasure. All that meets will part. This present state of affairs should not surprise me, but until now I had always relied on Father whenever I returned to my village. From now on, whose strength could I depend on? I have no wife or child to hold my affection. I haven't a thing to my name and am drifting like foam on the water, blowing along with the wind like a speck of dust. Yet this string of beads that is my life is difficult to snap.

Left behind
and drenched as the grass,
with drops of dew.

...
We cannot make water flow back again, we cannot return fire to the flint. No matter how many regrets we may have, they are all useless. Each of the relatives on whom we think we can rely will pass to decay. Ah, this lonely orphan Issa, abandoned like someone banished to an unknown land! How pitiful I felt.
from *Journal of My Father's Last Days* by Kobayashi Issa, trans. R. Huey

The mower stalled. Twice: kneeling, I found

A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.

Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world

Unmendably. Burial was no help;

Next morning I got up and it did not.

The first day after a death, the new absence

Is always the same: we should be careful!

Of each other, we should be kind

While there is still time.

The Mower by Philip Larkin

In mourning we found that the inhibition and loss of interest are fully accounted for by the work of mourning in which the ego is absorbed. In melancholia, the unknown loss will result in a similar internal work and will therefore be responsible for the melancholic inhibition. The difference is that the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely. The melancholic displays something else besides what is lacking in mourning — an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego at a grand scale.

from *Mourning and Melancholia* by Sigmund Freud

Soft.

Slight.

Like light, like a child's foot talcum-dusted and kissed,
like stroke-reversing suede, like dust, like pins and needles, like a

promise, like a curse, like seeds, like everything grained, plaited, linked,

or numbered, like everything nature-made and violent and quiet.

It is all completely missing. Nothing patient now.

from *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* by Max Porter

I had seen nothing beyond life and accepted it as ultimate truth. When of a sudden death came, and in a moment tore a gaping rent in its [life's] smooth-seeming fabric, I was utterly bewildered. All around, the trees, the soil, the water, the sun, the moon, the stars, remained as immovably true as before; and yet the person who was as truly there, who, through a thousand points of contact with life, mind and heart, was ever so much more true for me, had vanished in a moment like a dream. What perplexing self-contradiction it all seemed to me as I looked around! How was I ever to reconcile what remained with what had gone?

from *My Reminiscents* by Rabindranath Tagore

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,

To give these mourning dues to your father:

But, you must know, your father lost a father;

That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound

In filial obligation for some term

To do obsequious sorrow; but to persevere

In obstinate condolence is a course

Of impious stubbornness; 'tis unmanly grief,

It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,

A heart unfortified, a mind impatient;

An understanding simple and unshod'd:

For what we know must be and is as common

As any the most vulgar thing to sense,

Why should we in our peevish opposition

Take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a fault to heaven,

A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,

To reason most absurd: whose common theme

Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,

From the first cry till he that died to-day,

'This must be so.' We pray you, throw to earth

This unprevailing woe, and think of us

As of a father: for let the world take note,

You are the most immediate to our throne;

And with no less nobility of love

Than that which dearest father bears his son,

Do I impart toward you. For your intent

In going back to school in Wittenberg,

It is most retrograde to our desire;

And we beseech you, bend you to remain

Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eyes,

Our chiefest courier, cousin, and our son,

from *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

There is a loneliness that can be rocked. Arms crossed, knees drawn up, holding

holding on, this motion, unlike a ship's, smooths and contains the rocker. It's an inside kind—wrapped tight like skin. Then there is the loneliness that roams. No rocking can hold it down. It is alive. On its own. Dry and spreading thing that makes the sound of one's own feet going seem to come from a far-off place.

from *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty

and frightened. Don't open the door to the study

and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.

There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

Today, like every other day by Rumi, trans. Coleman Barks

Woke up early this morning and from my bed

looked far across the Strait to see

a small boat moving through the choppy water,

a single running light on. Remembered

my friend who used to shout

his dead wife's name from the hilltops

around Perugia. Who set a plate

for her at his simple table long after

she was gone. And opened the windows

so she could have fresh air. Such display

I found embarrassing. So did his other

friends. I couldn't see it.

Not until this morning.

Grief by Raymond Carver

Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance

The stages have evolved since their introduction and they have been very misunderstood over the past three decades. They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that are normal

people have, but there is not a typical response to loss as there is no typical loss.

Our grief is as individual as our lives.

from *Five Stages of Grief* by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Remember too, when despair menaces you that giving in to it will only disturb the one who has died. Your sorrow may even

drag her back from the path she may be taking toward a good rebirth. And if you are consumed by grief you will cripple yourself

from being able to help her. The steader you are, the more positive

your state of mind, the more comfort you will give her, and the more you will enable her to free herself.

When you are sad, have the courage to say to yourself. "Whatever feelings

I am experiencing, they will all pass: even if they

return, they cannot last." Just as long as you do not try to prolong

them, all your feelings of loss and grief will naturally begin to dissolve and fall away.

from *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not

afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same

fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the same

yawning. I keep on swallowing.

At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or

concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and

me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to

want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be

about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they

would talk to one another and not to me.

from *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis

CHORUS First-comer of the returners, welcome here.

HERALD I am well come indeed; complete and beyond death's fear.

CHORUS You feared to be robbed of return to your fatherland?

HERALD That was the fear filled these eyes where joy's tears now stand.

CHORUS Then we may rejoice that the army too knew this disease.

HERALD The army too? Were you not at peace here? At ease?

CHORUS Our time was like yours. It was fear and longing and loss.

HERALD From the overseas army, our grief for you echoed across?

CHORUS Time of echoes and rebounds of bitterness, truly, it was.

HERALD And this of heartbreak fell on my homeland because...?

CHORUS My oldest recourse against trouble's to hold my tongue.

HERALD Beyond fear—for all is done well!

Or mostly so:

in a long war it's sure collateral damage will come.

