

Boldly into the Darkness: Living with Loss, Growing with Grief & Holding onto Happiness

Autumn Toelle-Jackson

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Boldly into the Darkness is an emotive spiritual memoir about loss and the search for divine understanding.

Autumn Toelle-Jackson's moving memoir *Boldly into the Darkness* is about her grief following the losses of loved ones.

Toelle-Jackson met her first husband, Joe, during college. At first, they had a long distance relationship; eventually, they started a family. But then Joe collapsed during an evening run and was found too late to be saved. It was the first of several losses in Toelle-Jackson's life, all of which she describes in terms of their emotional impacts. After losing her husband, for example, Toelle-Jackson flees to the beach: "I stood there and screamed, and the roar of the ocean drowned out the noise I made." Such moments are raw expressions of the personal changes that grief leads to.

Roughly chronological in its progression, the text encompasses years of pain. But it is not until after Joe's death that the book rewinds to cover their love story—a choice that is used to amplify Toelle-Jackson's sense of loss. These memories focus on high points, like Joe's proposal and the births of the couple's sons, though all are shared with a bittersweet sense of the family's impending loss. After covering their happy moments, the book then returns to the period after Joe's death, moving through his widow's grieving process, as with scenes of the time she spent at "Widow Camp," where she found kindred spirits.

Because the book is directed by its sense of loss, its expressions of anger and grief are recurrent. At times, its emotions are overwhelming to absorb. An eerie scene set mere days prior to Joe's death includes the heavy question "What would I do without you?", followed by his reassurances that she'd be okay, which land hard. The cause of Joe's death is kept a mystery as the book works toward the realization that Toelle-Jackson could love again, despite the darkness that she faced. The sudden loss of a child results in new darkness, though this is somewhat balanced by memories from her family's ranch life, and by recollections of the love of family members and friends.

There's a religious element to the book as well. It often links Toelle-Jackson's struggles with Christian expressions of hope, seeking understanding and connections to God, even when its recalled circumstances are grim. At the end of the book, lessons are pronounced about grief; however, these are somewhat superficial in comparison to the vulnerable material that preceded them.

"Stupid and horrible things have altered my life forever," Toelle-Jackson notes, "and it's unfair that those events happened." Still, she sifts through her heartbreaks for hope. *Boldly into the Darkness* is her emotive spiritual memoir about loss—and about the search for divine understanding.

JEREMIAH ROOD (June 13, 2022)

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