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| Elizabeth Gilbert |  |
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I AM WILLING

Dear Ones:

This picture of me and Rayya was taken one year ago today.

This picture was taken on the morning of our commitment ceremony — a day on which we bound our hearts to each other forever, in front of a small circle of friends.

What does “forever” mean, when one of the lovers has terminal cancer?

That’s simple: It means FOREVER.

Six months ago this week, Rayya died.

People keep asking me how I’m doing, and I’m not always sure how to answer that. It depends on the day. It depends on the minute. Right this moment, I’m OK. Yesterday, not so good. Tomorrow, we’ll see.

Here is what I have learned about Grief, though.

I have learned that Grief is a force of energy that cannot be controlled or predicted. It comes and goes on its own schedule. Grief does not obey your plans, or your wishes. Grief will do whatever it wants to you, whenever it wants to. In that regard, Grief has a lot in common with Love.

The only way that I can “handle” Grief, then, is the same way that I “handle” Love — by not “handling” it. By bowing down before its power, in complete humility.

When Grief comes to visit me, it’s like being visited by a tsunami. I am given just enough warning to say, “Oh my god, this is happening RIGHT NOW,” and then I drop to the floor on my knees and let it rock me. It’s a full-body experience. To resist it is to be brutalized by it. You just bow down — that’s all you CAN do — and you let this thing roll through your heart and body and mind, in all its vehemence.

How do you survive the tsunami of Grief?

By being willing to experience it, without resistance. By being willing to feel everything. By being willing to accept the unacceptable.

The conversation of Grief, then, is one of prayer-and-response.

Grief says to me: “You will never love anyone the way you loved Rayya.”

And I reply: “I am willing for that to be true.”

Grief says: “She’s gone, and she’s never coming back.”

I reply: “I am willing for that to be true.”

Grief says: “You will never see her walk in the door again.”

I say: “I am willing.”

Grief says: “You will never have access to her wisdom again.”

I say: “I am willing.”

Grief says: “You will never hear that laugh again.”

I say: “I am willing.”

Grief says, “You will never smell her skin again.”

I get down on the floor on my fucking knees, and — and through my sheets of tears — I say, “I AM WILLING.”

I am beginning to understand that Grief is not the same thing as Depression. Depression is unwilling. Grief is a MOVEMENT — catastrophic and mighty — that you ALLOW to rock you and spin you. Depression is refusal to feel. Depression is a refusal to move, or to be moved. Depression is resistance, and resistance is futile.

I am not depressed, in the wake of Rayya’s death. I am DESTROYED, but I am not depressed — but that’s only because I am willing to be destroyed.

I will live on, because I am WILLING. I am willing to take this life on God’s terms, not mine.

Love’s terms, not mine.

Grief’s terms, not mine.

I am willing to surrender to the reality that I will never understand any of this. I am even willing to accept that I may not ever fully heal from the loss of Rayya.

Grief says: “You may never recover from this”

And I say: “I am willing.”

This is the job of the living — to be willing to bow down before EVERYTHING that is bigger than you. And nearly everything in this world is bigger than you. Let your willingness be the only big thing about you.

My friend Martha Beck officiated the commitment ceremony last year for me and Rayya. I will never forget what she said on that day: “True love always liberates the beloved.”

Six months ago, I had to let Rayya go. It wasn’t up to me. It was brutal, and I was willing. I bowed down and wept. God’s will, not mine. But Rayya belonged to God before she belonged to me. She NEVER belonged to me, actually; I just loved her. And true love always liberates the beloved.

I am willing.

Two days ago — on the six month anniversary of Rayya’s death — Martha wrote me a letter. She said, “The spark of absolutely unique, inimitable energy that showed up as Rayya is no longer in form. I can’t wrap my head around it. What is she doing now? What is she BEING now? Death is every bit as common as life, and both utterly baffle me.”

Me, too. I am completely fucking baffled. I don’t understand Life any more than I understand Love or Death or Grief.

But I am willing to be here for the duration of the mystery. I am willing to be rocked by every last tsunami.

I don’t know what Rayya is doing or being now. That is not for me to know. I only know that I will love her forever. And I know what I am doing and what I am being:

I am willing.

Onward,
LG