

PARTY OF ONE by Clarice James
Excerpt from Chapter Four (350 words of an 80,000-word novel)

In years past, like most wives and mothers, I savored solitude. After all, interruptions from my children or husband were likely not far away. ~~because I knew I'd be interrupted soon enough by my children Casey and Brady or my husband Nate.~~ But now, Now, with Casey and Brady ~~the kids~~ grown and Nate gone, this solitude feels permanent.

I don't have ~~to tell~~ anyone to tell, to ~~“turn~~ Turn the music down so I can think” or ~~“shut~~ Shut the game off, it's time to eat ~~because supper is ready.”~~ ~~I don't have to beg Nate to stop flipping through channels or talking about work.~~ There's no one to ask, ~~“Why e~~ Can't you guys leave me alone for five whole minutes?”

~~This solitude is permanent.~~

Life shifts ~~Your whole perception of life is askew~~ after losing someone you love.

~~---~~ Now, when ~~A~~ a friend complains about her job, outwardly I ~~and you outwardly~~ sympathize, but ~~what inside I'm thinking: you think is:~~ “Do you really believe your bad day ~~at work~~ compares with the fact ~~that~~ my husband is dead?”

The other day, a ~~Your~~ co-worker told me ~~talks~~ about the fun she had seeing the latest blockbuster film. I smiled and said, “Wow,” but what I really wanted to say was, “Oh God, my husband is dead! Have you forgotten?” ~~You say “Wow,” but what you want to ask is: “Have you forgotten that my husband is dead?”~~ You order a salad, and when the waitress asks what kind of dressing you want, you might say bleu cheese, but what you scream inside is: “Oh God, oh God, my husband is dead!”

Prior to Nate's death, every day while on my way to work I would pass a little old man walking to the corner store for his morning paper. ~~Prior to Nate's death, for years on my way to work, I passed a little old man walking to the corner store for his morning paper.~~ He was hunched over and needed a cane, yet strutted with ~~a certain~~ determination. The constancy of his

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morning walk ~~His morning constitutionals~~ inspired me. I searched for him every day and when I
didn't see him, I worried. ~~I searched for him daily; I worried when I didn't see him.~~

On my first day returning to work as a widow, I passed my same little old man. Anger and resentment erupted ~~inside me~~ at the sight of him. I ~~felt~~ if he'd only died when he was supposed to, Nate would still be alive. My feelings were senseless, but that didn't change them—and. ~~And~~ I didn't want to change them.

(Question: We've just had this great emotional scene where she's relating what it's like to lose a loved one. Then this sentence. Since it's the 4th chapter, I don't know what's gone before, but this turning to normal seems rushed—too soon, after what we've just read. I think the little old man image is a great one, and you should definitely use this at some point, to show the reader this change, but am just wondering if this is too soon?) Weeks later, when I passed the old man and caught myself smiling, I knew my perception ~~of life~~ was returning to normal—if not by leaps and bounds, by inches.