

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. But now, with Casey and Brady grown and Nate gone, this solitude feels permanent.

I don't have anyone to tell, "Turn the music down so I can think" or "Shut the game off, it's time to eat." There's no one to ask, "Can't you guys leave me alone for five whole minutes?"

Life shifts after losing someone you love.

Now, when a friend complains about her job, outwardly I sympathize, but inside I'm thinking: "Do you really believe your bad day compares with the fact my husband is dead?"

The other day, a co-worker told me 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?"

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. He was hunched over and needed a cane, yet strutted with determination. The constancy of his morning walk inspired me. I searched for him every day and when I didn't see him, I worried.

On my first day returning to work as a widow, I passed my same little old man. Anger and resentment erupted at the sight of him. 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 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

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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 was returning to normal—if not by leaps and bounds, by inches.