

Perspectives



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Red

Amelia Moulis

One year. It seems like just yesterday. My therapist says that the one-year mark is the hardest, but I don't know how you can put a time-frame on pain like this.

The sun shines through my window; 6:01 and the birds start up; it's the same every morning. It's like the whole world has kept going while I stayed in the same place. But, somehow, I still manage to get up every morning. This morning is different though ... so I stay in bed until the phone rings.

'Hi, Ma.'

'Hi, Love.' How is it that, with just two words, someone can extinguish such fear and vulnerability? 'Do you want me to pick you up on my way out?'

'I need to get some —'

'I bought a bunch for you as well.'

'Thanks, Ma.'

'I'll see you at 7:30.'

As I slip on the sheer floral dress he gave me for my 20th birthday, Mum pulls up, right on time, in her new red car. Red is his favourite colour so there are two red bouquets sitting in the passenger seat as well. Ma sits next to them, white-faced, with her hands clasped so tight on the steering wheel I think she might break it but she gathers herself quickly and applies her usual deep-red lipstick. She's dressed in her favourite black dress, such a contrast to my colourful dress, but appropriate all the same. We embrace as I get in the car and, even though it's such an awkward position, I feel secure in her arms and break into uncontrollable sobs. So does she.

She drives with such extreme caution that, by the time we get there, I am overcome with frustration. The men at the gate know us and let us pass with a sympathetic smile as we continue to the heart of the reserve. As we inch closer to our destination, I wish Ma had been more cautious. I'm not ready to be here yet.

I glimpse his spot, but cannot see much through the small congregation of his friends. My heart is beating out of my chest. The car crawls to a stop and I sit and wait while Ma coats her lips with more red. We get out of the car and walk towards him together. I focus on the ground in front of me and concentrate on stepping one foot in front of the other. It isn't easy.

So much has changed since last year. Everything has changed. If only I could tell him that, if only I could let him know how much I love him ... if only I told him how important he was to me. I should have known. My therapist says it's normal to feel like this, but what *is* normal? This isn't normal. No one should have to go through this. I don't want to be here. Everyone else wants me to be here, but I don't. I can't.

I turn and run. Faster and further and harder with each step until my vision is so blurred with tears that I fall and lie there in a ball on the ground. He was so full of life. He was such an inspiration. Of course I think that; every little sister idolises her brother, but this was different. Everyone knew he was amazing; why didn't they tell him that as well?

I'm crying so hard I don't hear Ma until she lies down beside me.

'Shh, it's OK darling.'

'How could he do this to us?'

'I don't understand it either, baby.' She tries to say it normally but her voice breaks and I can tell she's crying too.

I don't know how long we lie there, maybe a few minutes, maybe an hour or two but we get up when the time is right. We wipe the leaves and grass off each other and Ma applies another coat of lipstick. She offers the tube to me, but I prefer my lip balm. We walk slowly and the steps come more naturally now, even though my legs still feel like jelly. When we reach the car,

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we pick up the bouquets again and I start the journey towards his headstone, weaving through the other graves.

The crowd has thinned out now and it's just me and him, like old times. I place the flowers at his feet and lie on the ground beneath his headstone. My arms stretch over the cold ground where he lies as an odd feeling of peace flows through me. It's as if he can feel my pain ... as if he's trying to say sorry.

Tears roll silently down my cheek. Never let them see you cry. That's what he always said. Maybe that's why the first sign only came that morning when I found him. His body stripped of life and his sheets stained with red. I close my eyes and let the tears fall as the warmth of the sun penetrates my clothes.



Amelia Moulis wrote this in 2008 when she was in Year 11 at Lauriston Girls' School in Victoria.