GRIEF and THE GUY IN THE LUGGAGE RACK
Grief is an inevitable part of life, but that doesn’t make it any easier when someone we love dies. This zine explores some ideas about the varied, volatile and intense experience of grief in relation to *The Guy in the Luggage Rack*, an aerial comedy by She Said Jump that fuses circus, clowning, puppetry, and storytelling.

This zine contains plot details! Feel free to read in advance of watching the performance if you’d like a sense of what to expect, or to wait until after the show if you’d rather avoid spoilers.

Written by Lesel Dawson and Rachel Hare
Illustrated by Anna Millais
Our experience of grief is as unique as we are.

We all experience and express grief differently. Our response to a bereavement reflects who we are, our relationship to the person who has died, and our usual coping mechanisms. There is no right or wrong way to grieve, but most of us feel a need to have our grief seen and acknowledged. We need to find ways of expressing our feelings and to be loved and supported by others as we process what has happened. As David Kessler observes in *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*, ‘There is no greater gift you can give someone in grief than to ask them about their loved one, and then truly listen’ (p. 47).

*The Guy in the Luggage Rack* tells one story of grief. It introduces us to Daisy about a year after her mum’s death and explores her complex relationship with the Guy in the Luggage Rack. When we first meet Daisy, her sole focus is survival. She just wants to get through each day without falling apart. She also feels pressure to ‘move on’, ‘get over’ her grief, and be ‘absolutely fine’. But the Guy in the Luggage Rack has other ideas. What is the solution? Can Daisy really escape him?
It is natural to want to push grief away (or lock it up in a suitcase!)

Grief shatters the way we see ourselves and our life, transforming our safe, homely environment into somewhere alien and unfamiliar: everything looks the same and yet everything is utterly different. Grief can therefore feel like the Guy in the Luggage Rack – an awkward, unwanted guest who has moved in uninvited.

It is natural to want to protect ourselves from pain and there are times when repression is a necessary form of survival. Like Daisy, we might feel that the only way we can get through the day is to turn away from grief, blocking out our memories and the things that remind us of our loss.

And yet, however hard we try, grief generally won’t just ‘go away’. Sometimes, the more we turn away from it, the more we find ourselves surrounded by objects, people and places that trigger painful memories. We feel our grief in our bodies and sometimes experience flashbacks which wrench us back to the moment of our loved one’s death. When Daisy ignores the Guy in the Luggage Rack, he finds increasingly elaborate ways to make his presence felt, creating distractions or clinging to her so tightly she can’t breathe. He doesn’t want to hurt her, but he needs to be seen. He wants Daisy to acknowledge him and reconnect to her memories of her mum.
Objects can help us connect with the people we love who have died.

Objects can take on new meanings when we are grieving. Like Daisy, we might find that seeing things we associate with a person who has died reminds us again and again that they are no longer with us. But these same items can also provide ways of connecting with our loved one. Known as ‘linking objects’ by psychologists, they can become what Julia Samuel calls ‘touchstones to memory’, sparking powerful sensory memories and providing tangible ways for us to connect to the person who has died, renegotiate our relationship with them, and make their absent presence visible in our lives.

Daisy’s ‘touchstone to memory’ is her mum’s coat. Although it initially feels too painful to look at, the coat eventually allows her to access a memory of her mum outside the painful flashbacks of her death. The memory is ordinary in many ways: a moment of togetherness by the sea with a shared bag of chips. And yet recalling it suddenly floods Daisy with the feeling of her mum’s presence and love, and with that the weight of everything she has lost. It allows her, at last, to feel her grief, and begin to process her mum’s death.
'We can't go over it. We can't go under it. Oh no! We've got to go through it!'

(Michael Rosen, *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt*)

When Daisy remembers the day with her mum by the sea, she opens herself to grief. This is a painful but necessary process, as it is only by feeling the sadness of loss that we can adjust to what has happened to us. As Julia Samuel explains in *Grief Works*, ‘pain is the agent of change’: although it can feel unbearable, it is through grief that we ‘find a way of living with a reality that we don’t want to be true’ (p. xix, xvii).

Grief has a force and momentum of its own. When she lets herself feel it, Daisy is overwhelmed by an intense and volatile emotional whirlwind, thrown about by her feelings like a boat being tossed on a stormy sea. Losing her bearings altogether, she spins above the ground, scared and disorientated. She alternates between allowing and resisting this process, at different times ignoring or fighting the Guy in the Luggage Rack. It is only when she feels that she might sink completely that she is finally able to answer her friend’s phone call and admit that, in reality, she isn’t ‘fine’ at all. And being able to accept and express where she is brings its own kind of relief. She is able to acknowledge the Guy in the Luggage Rack, making space for him in her life.
We don’t ‘get over’ grief – just as we don’t ‘get over’ love – but we can make room for it.

In *A Manuel for Heartache*, Cathy Rentzenbrink talks about ‘grenade moments’ when some unexpected trauma slices our life in two like a guillotine: our old life is on one side of the blade and we are now facing a new life which can seem ‘unknowable and unthinkable’, even ‘unliveable’ (p. 21). The death of someone we love is one of these ‘grenade moments’. Our journey beyond it isn’t linear and will never take us back to where we used to be, but, as Rentzenbrink observes, ‘There is a world on the other side of the guillotine. It’s not the one you know and the undamaged version of you is lost in time. But there is a life to explore and a new version of you is waiting to walk into it.’ (p. 22)

We don’t ‘get over’ our grief – and often we don’t want to. But this is okay. The goal of grieving is not to let go of our relationship with the person who has died, but to find a sustainable way of continuing our bond with them. Perhaps we bake the cake our gran used to make us, visit the lake we used to visit with our sister, pick up stones along the beach like our best friend once did, or wear our father’s watch. Just as our experience of grief is unique, so is our response to it. But whatever we do, these activities will help us externalise our ongoing relationship with the person who has died and carry them with us throughout our lives.

Daisy’s life doesn’t go back to what it was, but she finds a way of carrying on that allows her to remember her mum and make space for the Guy in the Luggage Rack. She is able to live alongside her grief – not as her enemy, but as one of life’s inevitable companions.
Lesel Dawson is an Associate Professor of Literature and Culture at the University of Bristol and the Arts and Culture Lead for the Good Grief Festival. She is writing a book about creativity and grief.

Rachel Hare is a PhD student at the University of Bristol researching fainting in early modern drama, funded by the SWW DTP. She is also Research Associate on projects about creativity and grief.

Anna Millais (www.annamillais.co.uk) is an artist with a Masters in Illustration from Camberwell College of Arts. Her work explores facets of grief, death and the human condition.

She Said Jump (shesaidjump.co.uk) combines the silly and the serious to create performances for indoor, outdoor and digital spaces. Using uniquely designed aerial equipment, we draw on theatre clown, circus, dance, mime and puppetry to tell important stories in a playful way that pack an emotional punch. We also collaborate and curate work with other artists.

The Guy in the Luggage Rack is a devised show, created by the company and collaborators...

Artistic Director - Maisie Whitehead
Performers - Maisie Whitehead & Malik Ibheis
Rigging / counterweight & stage management in rehearsals - Laura Haynes
Rigging / counterweight in performance - Edd Livesey-Casey
Composer & sound designer - Wayne Walker Allen
Creative mentor & outside eyes - Alex Harvey, Ockham’s Razor
Guest director & outside eyes - Stephen Sobal
Words & Story development – Maisie Whitehead, Lizzie Muncey, Rebecca Moul, Lesel Dawson
Design – Maisie Whitehead & Malik Ibheis with consultancy from Max Dorey (props & puppet) and Alex Harvey (aerial luggage rack & rigging)

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More from She Said Jump...

When Grief Came to Stay is series of short films by She Said Jump and friends, created during the pandemic. From a misunderstood vampire to a helpful postman to a monster in dark corners, the films each explore a different face of grief... the good, the bad and the ridiculous. Watch the whole series at www.shesaidjump.co.uk/whengriefcametostay or scan the QR code:

If you have been affected by any of the issues in this performance and zine or would like further information or support, please contact Cruse Bereavement Care (website: www.cruse.org.uk; helpline: 0808 808 1677). For more information about supporting grieving children, please contact Child Bereavement UK (website: www.childbereavementuk.org; helpline: 0800 02 888 40).
We would love to hear what you thought about *The Guy in the Luggage Rack & this zine*... scan the QR code for a link to our online feedback form (via google forms).