



Acceptance is a Hoax

By Hannah Choi

A short fictional memoir about one's experience with grief.

“A single person is missing for you, and the whole world is empty.”

— **Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking***

Introduction: An Awful Amount of Amens

Eloise was not a patient person.

She was a stubborn and ill-tempered girl.

She was:

The kind of girl who would take out the cookies from the oven before the timer went off.

The kind of girl who would leave without the food if the restaurant took too long.

The kind of girl who would skip to the end of the movie because she couldn't bear a minute more.

So when three years had gone by and the grief still lingered, as if it were an ink stain on a white t-shirt, Eloise couldn't help but think there was something so awfully, atrociously, abysmally, abominably wrong with her. She was sick of waiting for the stain to fade away.

Eloise was fifteen when her best friend passed away. She had known it was coming, everyone did. Linda was diagnosed with sarcoma cancer at the beginning of that year and tragically, it had eventually spread to every crevice of her body. Eloise's frequent visits to the hospital during the three months prior to Linda's death, started off as hopeful and optimistic. They made plans for when Linda would be free of bed rest, like taking pottery classes and trips to Paris, where Linda would be able to see the works of her favourite artists. But as the days blurred into weeks, Linda's complexion became rather ashen. Still, though she was severely ill and had only two to three weeks left, Linda was so very pretty in Eloise's eyes. Where Eloise was sharp and fierce, Linda was soft and gentle. Her eyes were kind, a dark brown the same shade as her hair that had once been long, lips that were a light peach, not full but certainly not thin, nose with no distinct feature but a perfect fit for her oval face, and between her light straight brows was a mole. Since the day she had access to mirrors, Linda had wished night and day for the mole to miraculously vanish, but the more she looked at it, in reflections and photos, she came to grow fond of it. It gave her character and perhaps, made her unique. Linda was like that - she was able to accept the world of imperfections. It was common for people to say Linda's presence brought comfort and familiarity. Her appearance was not the only thing that exuded a gentle aura but also her whisper-like voice.

As death crept closer and closer around the corner, Linda's voice and consciousness began to fade. Eloise and Linda's conversations soon reduced to tender squeezes of each other's hands and meaningful glances, filled with love and understanding every time their eyes met.

It was a chilly Autumn morning when Linda passed away. Eloise and Linda's sister, Lisa, did not make it in time to the hospital to be there with Linda in her last moments. After the funeral, her body was cremated, along with her most precious belongings - a polar bear plush gifted from Eloise, Jadon Doc Martens Linda never had the chance to

wear and several art supplies, paint brushes, canvases and pencils that were once impossible to see Linda without.

Linda's funeral was nothing like what Eloise had expected. When Eloise thought of a funeral, she imagined it would be at least a few hours long. She pictured several people going from tears to laughter while listening to the stories being shared and of course, a eulogy. Eloise was obsessed with sentimental speeches. Whether it was at weddings, funerals or graduations, she strongly believed that sentimental speeches were one of the few things in life that highlighted the importance and beauty of words. So when the funeral finished within thirty minutes with no stories and eulogy, Eloise was undoubtedly upset. Instead, the whole thirty minutes was filled with prayers and songs about heaven. Eloise felt that rather than honouring her best friend Linda, the funeral honoured God.

But even though she was upset and felt that it was unfair to Linda that the funeral was so brief, Eloise understood. She understood that religion provided comfort for the others who had loved Linda and that it was maybe the only light that shone through the darkness of loss and grief.

The moment she stepped out of the church, Eloise ran to the bottom of the stairs and slumped down on the cold pavement, into a crouch. She buried her face into the palms of her hands and from the top of the stairs, Lisa could see Eloise's shoulders bobbing up and down as if she were shrugging repeatedly. Lisa felt sad for Eloise just as much as she felt for herself and her parents, so when she trudged down the stairs to where Eloise crouched, she expected to see a teary face when Eloise looked over her shoulder, up at Lisa. But tears were nowhere to be seen, neither was a frown. Instead, Eloise was grinning. Lisa's eyebrows furrowed as she crouched down next to Eloise.

When Lisa turned her head and stared at Eloise intently with curiosity, all Eloise said, was:

“That was an awful amount of fucking amens.”

Lisa broke into hysterical laughter while Eloise continued to smile.

Part One: The Fear of Forgetting, Fading and Fleeting

The first time Eloise had cried was not when she saw Linda's lifeless body laying on the hospital bed, but a few hours later, right before she got ready to sleep.

It was the moment she saw her reflection in the oval-shaped mirror that was attached above her rosewood vanity table - the side of it was wholly covered in engravings of quotes from Linda and Eloise's favourite movies, shows and books.

Watching herself blink, watching her chest heave up and down with every breath, watching her hair change shape when her fingers brushed through them, we're all reminders that everything was real.

Linda's death was real.

But there were no signs of sorrow in the eyes that stared back at her. Yes, they were swollen and red, surrounded by thin lashes, damp from her tears that glistened under the yellow light, but the eyes that stared back at her, presented *fear*.

It was like the dam that held in all her fears had finally broken down. Fear after fear flooded Eloise's mind as she frantically wiped the tears off of her face with the mellow mustard sleeve of her sweater. The one thing she feared more than anything in the world (except for slimy snails) was forgetting. She feared that the memories of her and Linda would soon fade into nothing as if the memory had never existed. Eloise sat cross-legged on her bed as she scrolled through the photos of her and Linda on her phone. Eloise's nail bitten finger hovered over one video in particular. Before she pressed play, she squeezed her eyes shut and made an attempt to recall every single detail of that moment:

Linda was wearing a navy nightgown.

I was wearing a matching nightgown but in Pale Pink.

We were laughing about a drawing of Mr Kane (terrible torturous textiles teacher).

She was over at my house for a sleepover.

It was late at night or early in the morning.

What did we do earlier in the day?

The drawing looked like...

Linda's laugh was like...

Eloise gasped. She had forgotten what Linda's laugh sounded like. The airy squeals and sudden snorts that would only encourage their laughter further was no longer a sound she could remember. The sound she once adored had fled from her memory. Eloise's hand splayed white as she gripped her phone tighter. In desperation, she heavily pressed her thumb against the play button and watched the video attentively. Only a few moments ago, her plan was to examine every still in the video, in hopes of the imagery to cause forgotten memories to float back to the surface of her brain, but the moment she saw Linda's smile, heard Linda's laugh, nothing else mattered. Relief coursed through her veins as her ears were met with the blissful and once familiar sound of Linda. It had been so long since Eloise heard Linda's voice when she was in full health. Conversations with Linda in the last weeks of her life were filled with strained whispers that were followed by fits of wheezing and coughing. Eloise didn't like seeing such little life in someone she loved so much but she knew her pain couldn't compare to the extent

of Linda's. *She* was the one experiencing it first hand after all. In the video, Eloise's exaggerated imitation of Mr Kane's mannerisms seemed to be the cause of Linda's bellyaching burst of laughter. One of which would be embarrassing if she were in a more public setting. A laugh that Eloise would have made fun of her for was now one of the most beautiful things, she believed, that she would ever hear. Not caring about the other parts, Eloise edited out the rest of the video, leaving only the clip of Linda's crazy squeals and snorts amid her laugh. After switching off the lamp beside her bed, her phone accompanying it on the floor, Eloise slipped under the covers.

Frantically going over every memory of her and Linda in chronological order, Eloise's eyes fluttered shut, mind drifting into a vast sea of adventures that were a thing of the past.

Part Two: The Death of her Dreams, The Debut of her Displeasure

One week had gone by since the death of Linda Linetti. Surprisingly, the death of her best friend did not stand in the way of her studies or daily routines, but it *did* stand in the way of her dreams.

Eloise found joy in academics.

Her absolute dream was to attend a high ranking university, preferably one ranked first to twentieth worldwide. Either studying during her free time or burying her nose in books from essays about anthropology to fantasy books with romance subplots, everything about Eloise screamed 'studious'. But achieving highly in academics was not the only thing she dreamed of. No, she also dreamed of living in a two-bedroom flat with Linda, a place that included a built-in library for herself and an art studio for Linda. She dreamed of lounging on the couch that would sit in the corner of her library, with a paperback copy of 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo', while she listened to Linda softly hum 'Radio Ga Ga'.

Having to deal with the death of not only her best friend but the death of her dreams left a gargantuan, gaping hole in the future she used to be so sure of.

It had been a dreadful day. Eloise was struggling to focus on her history task and for once in her life, she was not ahead with her assignments. Feeling hopeless, she collapsed onto her bed, lying on her side with her head resting on her hand as she scrolled through her phone. When she scrolled down to refresh, photos of Linda flooded her feed. Eloise blinked slowly, then began to go through the posts.

Photos of Linda as a child.

Photos of Linda at a bowling party.

Photos of Linda at her favourite cafe.

Photos of Linda holding her artworks.

Underneath all these posts were generic captions like:

'Rest in peace angel.'

'You will be missed.'

'I am happy you're in a better place.'

Eloise scoffed. These photos, these words people were using to show what Linda had meant to them did no justice for whom Linda actually was. The lack of sincerity and depth within their posts made it feel as if they were advertising Linda's death, advertising the fact that they were a friend or acquaintance of the dead girl. When Eloise called Lisa and asked her what was up with the sudden recognition of Linda's death, Lisa said that her family decided it was time to let people know.

A few minutes had gone by after the phone call when Eloise' phone started to buzz like a busy bee. Her inbox had never been this full before. She clicked on the message that appeared at the top, only to find the most ridiculous message she had ever received:

I just wanted you to know, Linda has passed away, I can't believe it.

Blinded by disgust, displeasure and disdain, Eloise clicked on their profile - it was Helen Haitzmer, the girl Linda had always disliked for constantly copying her ideas in art class - and pressed her thumb aggressively on 'block user'.

Who did she think she was to 'inform' Eloise of *her* best friend's death. I was the one who found out before everyone else did, I was the one who saw Linda's lifeless body, I was the one at her funeral, she wanted to scream.

Eloise opened all the remaining messages, replying kindly to the ones that said 'Sorry for your loss' and 'I'm here if you need me' and blocking the people who had sent her messages similar to one Helen had sent. The media presence of Linda's death made her absence feel abundantly artificial.

For several weeks people talked about Linda's death as if it were the hottest topic from a gossip magazine. The people who had shared their sob stories about how they knew Linda and how much she once meant to them on their social media seemed now to be doing more than fine.

People are allowed to mourn, it is a good thing that people are mourning over Linda, she deserves to be remembered, Eloise reminded herself.

But even then she selfishly thought: No one can mourn as much as Linda's family and I can.

People in Linda's art class, Linda's distant childhood friends, had lost a puzzle piece from their past. Whereas Eloise had lost several puzzle pieces from her past *and* several puzzle pieces from her future. More than once had someone come up to her and started crying, rambling on about how devastating it was that Linda was no longer alive.

If you're sad, imagine how I feel, she wanted to say.

It was as if a displeasure demon had possessed Eloise. For the weeks to come, bitterness would taint every aspect of Eloise' life.

Part Three: Humour Helped Heal Her Hate

One word that Eloise was often described as was “sarcastic”. Unlike Linda, her mentality and perceptions of life bordered on the line of severe cynicism. It was difficult for her to find pleasure or joy in such trivial things like looking up on a summer’s day and appreciating the blue sky, admiring the smell of gardenias growing in her front yard, taking immense pleasure in the sugary bliss of macarons, these sorts of things.

In simple terms, Eloise was a “party pooper”.

So it wasn’t a surprise when the death of her best friend became a way to amplify her dull, deadpan sarcasm. Of course, this kind of humour was not taken well by those around her. While some thought Eloise was being outright disrespectful, others simply didn’t have the capacity to respond to such raw remarks.

Eloise had been caught up in a conversation about university applications when she felt a sudden force come up her throat. Have I eaten something bad? No, all I had were light lettuce meals. Perhaps my period? No that can't be right, I had it last week. Before she could ponder any further during those milliseconds between the suppression and release of the unknown force, her mouth had already opened:

“I can just play the dead best friend card.”

Tangible tension tore through the room.

Hugo, Eloise’s friend, sitting across from her was the first to laugh. Well, not exactly laugh, but really, the first to make a noise. Discomfort was plastered on everyone’s faces. Eloise was too busy revelling in the relief that she hadn’t just vomited violently on her classmates' laps. But when she noticed the harsh halt of conversation, scanning the room in search of a reason, a feeling that perhaps vomiting would have been the better outcome settled in her stomach. Despite the awkward shift in subject - something about whaling whales - Eloise stared down at her feet and smiled.

Similar occurrences permeated parts of her daily life. Each time she made a joke, abruptly bringing up the death of her best friend, the sense of satisfaction clicked into place, again. And again. And again. Eloise wasn’t ignorant of how people perceived her in those moments. No, she knew it was wrong of her to buckle them down in a seat with a buckle that didn’t unbuckle.

She knew that these people played no part in the suffering she would forever endure.

But what it achieved was far more valuable than mere entertainment.

For weeks after Linda’s death, it was as if people had forgotten the unaffected and unbothered persona Eloise had created for herself. Suddenly, they began to act as if they knew how she felt - as if her personal grief was a universal experience. Shared interactions between people resorted to sugar coated small talk and loud laughs became a thing of the past; apparently it was forbidden to show even the smallest hint of happiness to someone who was grieving.

Making light of possibly the worst thing that would happen in her life, allowed Eloise to minimise the ginormously grand emotions that accompanied grief into a single sentence.

Every now and then the displeased demon would drum against her chest. Especially when people would voice their considerate concerns about the insensitivity behind Eloise's humour.

'Horrible, hateful humour' is what they called it.

However, outbursts of anger were no longer her immediate response, but rather, a simple shrug, bathed in the reassurance of the knowledge that Linda would have thought of Eloise's remarks as wonderfully witty.

Part Four: Acceptance is a Hoax

I've always thought that I would eventually accept Linda's death. Adults are always telling me how time heals all wounds, and on my better days, I truly believed it.

I often envisioned myself waking up one day, with a shift in my heart that would grant me access to this magical ability to write down my personal definition of grief and then erase it. This, would then of course, dissolve any lingering trace of the entropic basket of emotions that danced around in my body since the day my best friend died.

5 Stages of Grief

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

While many believe that Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' model on grief is the most accurate an outline of grief can get, I personally think the fact that it's a set of stages from 1-5, proves the theory is inherently flawed. I understand that models are supposed to be simplified versions of things that are too large for us to understand, grief being a good example. I am also aware that my knowledge of the purpose a model is supposed to serve, contradicts my claim.

But I *just* don't think it will ever be possible for grief to be modelled.

Models are structured and often linear, as are the 5 Stages of Grief.

To me, grief is anything but.

Grief is erratic, arbitrary, unpredictable and quite literally, the epitome of internal chaos. Denial, anger, bargaining and depression were indeed stages I experienced but in no particular order.

It was more like:

Denial			<i>bargainING</i>
Anger			
	<i>Anger</i>		Bargainingbargaining
		denial	DeniaL
	anger	Depressionnnnnnnnnnnnn	<u>depression</u>
		<u>deep-pression</u>	denial
ANGER		angerangerangeranger	
denial			<i>ANGER</i>

For me, acceptance implies that I have become okay with Linda's death. I will never be okay with it. I shouldn't have to be okay with it. And I think that's okay.

Conclusion: A White T-Shirt No More

Eloise is not a patient person.

She is a stubborn and ill-tempered girl.

She is:

The kind of girl who takes out the cookies from the oven before the timer goes off.

The kind of girl who leaves without the food if the restaurant takes too long.

The kind of girl who skips to the end of the movie because she can't bear a minute more.

But she has realised, patience is a part of growth. A part of moving forward, and a part of letting go. Without patience, she knows grief would be a lifelong enemy.

Now she walks hand in hand with grief, on the way to work, on the way back home, she smiles at it before she goes to sleep, and greets it when the morning sun beams in her eyes.

The ink stain still remains after several washes. Coffee, sauce, soup, and other stains now accompany the ink stain. The ink stain no longer bothers Eloise. It no longer affects her the way it once did.