

Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Jewish Bride*, 1665-1669



****First Question First****

What is *your* immediate reaction to this artwork?

Trust it. Write about it. Use the guide sheet for help.

Continue reading for another perspective and journal questions.

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Our self-identity can be our touchstone, our role and purpose in life. If one way in which we define ourselves is in relation to another, what happens then when our loved one dies? Are we no longer “wife” or “husband,” for example? For 20, 40, 60 years we may have rested much of our existential anxiety on the pillow of marriage. Whatever life brought to our doorstep was jointly experienced and seen to. Talking over morning tea. Planning at the dinner table. Being witness to each other’s lives. Practicing loving up close.

Over those same decades we may have been mother or father, daughter or son, sister or sister/friend. We feel inextricably woven into their lives, their lives into ours. We are each other’s go-to humans. Who we check in with, who we check in on. We know just by tone of voice how the other is really doing. And whether or not we need to drive over, even if they say, “I’m fine.” We locate a part of ourselves in them, not lost, but rather the love that binds. Their death brings reconfiguration, reorientation. We might hear ourselves trying on new labels like “widow” or “orphan.” Or maybe we begin to tire of any small word that even tries to describe a lifetime of hand on heart.

Q.) Alongside grieving your loved one’s death, are you feeling the loss of your cherished identity as spouse, parent, sibling, child, or friend? Write about this. Who were you in relation to your lost loved one?