On *Turn Around: Edvin’s Story*

Therese Tungen, 23.01.2022

Translated from the Norwegian by Alison McCullough

When my son died, just six years and ten months old, I knew that I had to write about what was happening to us. And what had happened to him. I had to write in order to document it, to understand it better. The grief – if one could call it that from the start, when the situation was so shocking and filled with adrenaline – seeped slowly through the system, into my blood, into every part of my mind, into my bones. As time passed, I gradually understood what Edvin’s death meant – that my boy was gone, and that I would never see him again. This realisation was like sinking. First to a plateau, at the bottom of the sea. Then I sank even deeper. The grief was physical hurt, a pain that settled in my chest and gut.

Edvin’s death was so sudden and unexpected, we had no time to prepare ourselves. I’d spent all summer at a cabin with the kids, while my husband was in the city, renovating our apartment. Edvin would be turning seven in a couple of months, and thought I ought to make a start on finding him a birthday present. He was excited, looking forward to it. Then one evening, as he sat eating supper with his sister, he experienced a sudden headache, and just a few hours later, he was dead. The cause was a sudden cerebral haemorrhage. We couldn’t make sense of it. He was supposed to celebrate his seventh birthday in October. He was perfectly healthy.

Three days after he died, I wrote in my diary: ‘Edvin is dead. We are alive. We don’t want to die.’ Later, when I realised his death was final, when I understood just how much we had lost, my will to live became unclear. To move through the cold, grey winter was like walking through a boggy moorland, foggy, bleary and viscous, every step forward hard to take. Sometimes it was clearer; I felt firm ground under my feet, caught a glimpse of sunlight. Then the fog and the mud would return, and I could see no further than a step or two ahead of me.

*Turn Around* was written in the midst of chaos and raw grief. It was important to me that the book be this way. Not artistic, not too beautiful or painstakingly crafted, but with a structure that reflected our inner chaos. When Edvin died, time shattered. Time, which had previously been a kind of line that guided us onward from event to event, was now tangled into a knot, where past, present and future were the same place. Everything in our lives changed. My childhood, my nine years as a mother, our future – everything was changed now that Edvin was no longer with us. And what did I have to comfort myself with, as someone who believes in neither God nor magic? I found a certain comfort in the fact that I was not alone in having lost a child. I found my way to the Greek myths about Orpheus and Eurydice, about Demeter and her daughter Persephone; to the Norse myth about the beautiful and beloved god Balder, who is killed and sent to Hel. For thousands of years, people who have lost someone they love have struggled with the same powerlessness and desperation: how do you bring back the person who is now dead and on the other side? Some might attempt to haul them back again, but as the myths show, it (almost) never works. I found comfort in reading and listening to the stories of those who had lost children before me, because it gave me a sense of what might await me in the future; that brighter days will come, in spite of everything.

*Turn Around* was written over the course of the first year without Edvin. It is now a year and a half since he died.