



The Shore

by Jamie Stewart

Grief is SO unpredictable. It's like standing in the ocean—but facing the shore. I'm not admiring the beautiful coastline as one would imagine. I am standing there soaking wet—water dripping into my eyes, fists clenched, body shaking and tense. A permanent grimace is on my face. My knee and elbow are cut open, and a pink mixture of water and blood dissipate into the ocean surrounding me. I am standing there waiting—waiting for the next impact—the next wave to hit. In anticipation, I do my best to ground my feet by digging them deeper into the sand below me. I try my hardest to steady my body and brace for what I know is coming. It's a futile effort at best. I have no idea when it will hit or how big it will be. It might simply make me stumble or cause me to lose my footing for a moment. It might be tall enough to hit me square in the back—its impact causing me to break the surface of the water and go under for an instant. It also, however, could be one of those rogue waves that are big enough and strong enough to fully consume me; one of those violent and ominous-looking waves, where more white is visible than blue. Each time this wave ruthlessly knocks the wind out of me and sucks me under to tumble uncontrollably in

its core. It slams me violently against the rough ocean floor, causing my body to tear and bleed. Once the water retreats, I find myself on all fours—gasping for air, trying desperately hard to find the energy to stand and once again—face the shore. A baby shower invite arrives in the mail days after my son’s death—WAVE. A cashier casually asks, “Do you have any children?”—WAVE. My favorite show just had a woman’s baby die—WAVE. Just needed one item at Target. It’s right next to the baby section—WAVE. An instagram pregnancy announcement—WAVE. An email titled, “Congrats! Your baby is one week old today.”—WAVE. Someone tells me, “At least you didn’t have time to get attached.”—BIG WAVE. Lowering a tiny casket into the ground—ROGUE WAVE. Sometimes the sets are on top of each other, and sometimes, they are more spread out. But one thing is always constant—the promise of the next wave. It’s a brutal cycle where all that is predictable is its unpredictability. As time goes on, the waves will most likely get further apart and give us more room in between to dry off a bit and maybe even catch our breath. Eventually, we will have time to admire the beautiful coastline before the next one hits. But for now—they are right on top of each other. I am thankful there are two lifelines in these waters. The first is quite obvious—the love and support of our community. As a family, we are in these waters together. Some waves knock us all down, and some take us out one at a time. But we have our arms linked, which makes us stronger and able to help each other stand. The second lifeline is not obvious to all but significantly more important. It makes my heart heavy because everyone is staring at a shore of their own in some capacity or another. This lifeline offers hope, and grief void of hope is far too dark and desolate a place for anyone to exist. Without this lifeline—there is NO HOPE. Right now, my family and I are facing the shore. We are bruised, beaten, cold and tired. We may tumble, gasp for air and bleed, but regardless how aggressive the wave, we will always find the water’s surface. How? Because we are wearing life jackets. JESUS IS THE LIFE JACKET and paid a very high price to equip us with such a priceless gift. This season feels so dark, even with the promise of hope and Heaven. But I know in my core this is not the end of our story. I know the Author of this book. This life is temporary, and He built us for eternity. I know in the end we will all be together and whole. In the end Jesus wins and so do we. But until that day, equipped with the grace of God, we will continue to stand ... and face the shore.