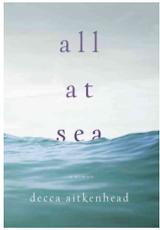


All at Sea



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This beautiful memoir had me weeping several times. The opening chapter describes in vivid detail the death of the author's partner by drowning on a winter vacation to Jamaica. He died in the usual tranquil bay outside their cottage after he entered the wild surf to rescue their small son, Jake.

Decca, a *Guardian* journalist and author, noticed both her partner Tony and son flailing in the water. She ran to the beach, dove in and swam out to them, whereupon her partner passed their son to her and she swam back pulling her son by the chin. She assumed all was well, and that the morning would just provide an embarrassing story that they would later share about this vacation.

But when she turned to look over the bay, she noticed that Tony was much further out than he had been, and he was fighting both the waves and the current. She almost swam out to him, but a friend stopped her and pointed to three men who were already assisting Tony.

Decca felt reassured, but Tony kept flailing. The men pulled him in, and on the beach, white foam poured from his mouth. A local doctor bent over him, and felt his pulse, but Tony had died. It seemed unbelievable to Decca because most of the time he had not been underwater. This made her recall a conversation that they had shared at a party about how you could drown in a teaspoon full of water.

The book is both a tale of how a mother explains to her young sons--one four, one three--that their father was dead and they would never see him again. It's also about grief. But what makes it so much more than a journey through the horrible period time after losing someone close, is that she also describes how she met Tony, and how they became a couple, even though she went to the best schools and he was a school drop-out, criminal, and ex-prisoner.

It's the story of two unlikely people who built a life together.

Decca finds being a single parent harrowing, especially when her sons are alternately angry and depressed. Jake blames himself for his dad's death. It isn't until Decca visits a child psychotherapist that she learns she must blame something for the death. Jake will not understand otherwise and will only blame himself. She tells Jake it's the sea's fault, and his face softens for the first time since the accident. She also tells both children how sorry, sorry, she is that this happened. And they feel relief at this too. Before she tells them this, the children believed that the adults around them were sad and angry and would remain so.

Decca also must deal again with feelings from her own childhood, her own loss of a parent--her mother who died of cancer just before she turned ten.

She shows how her family steps up for her, and helps her through this brutal time. One brother helps her plan the funeral at which they even hire a female guard in case one of Tony's ex-friends flips out and begins screaming. Another of Tony's friends tries to cheat Decca of money, saying Tony owed him a significant amount. And another blames her for not inviting close friends to the burial.

But Decca narrates the entire story with incredible detail and a close examination of what she is feeling and doing, not that she is proud of how she is handling everything: death, new parenthood, lack of a will. This true story will keep you reading. It will make you feel lucky about your own less troubled life. But don't read it on any beaches, as I did before swimming in the big pond, Lake Michigan, to our north, where it definitely provided me with some anxious swims.

Posted by Dory L. on September 7, 2016

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