



## A Year After Henry

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One year after Henry Munroe's sudden death at age 41, his family is still reeling from the loss. So is Evie Cooper, a local bartender...and Henry's former mistress. While his widow, Jeanie, struggles with the betrayal, his overbearing mother is devising plans to hold a memorial service on this awful anniversary. And to make matters worse, she might even invite Evie. With her trademark wit, Cathie Pelletier has crafted an elegant, uplifting portrait of the many strange and inspiring forms that grief and love can take in the journey to overcoming loss.

## A Year After Henry Details

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### **Sue D. says**

As the one-year anniversary of the sudden death of 41-year-old Henry approaches, his parents plan a memorial service. His widow, brother, son, and mistress are dreading this service, each of them struggling with the loss and the changes it has brought to their lives. The book is an honest look at grief, showing us where each main character is in their recovery and how each finally finds peace and is able to move forward. Filled with heart and humor, this is an uplifting, character-driven novel showing that life can go on after loss, with likable, believable characters in a small town setting.

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### **Linda C. says**

Jeanie Munroe finally gets up the guts to confront her husband, Henry, about his extra marital affairs, until she finds him dead of a heart attack in the bed beside her. Henry loved burgers and bacon and much to her dismay, left Jeanie's questions unanswered.

A Year After Henry his family is grieving and struggling to understand why. Henry's mother is planning a memorial for her beloved son and mailman. Henry's brother, Larry who lost his job teaching at the local high school, has taken over Henry's postal route. He's holed up in his bedroom at his parent's house however, refusing to come out and deliver the mail. Jeanie is stalking Henry's mistress, Evie who works as a spiritual portraitist and part time bartender. The anticipation of Henry's memorial service is driving them all to the brink. Or is it forcing them to face their personal shortcomings head on?

I love Cathie Pelletier's quirky characters who find themselves in bizarre situations in small town, Maine. Her style of writing is straightforward and down to earth. Just like the Mainers I know. Although the situations the characters find themselves in at first glance appear unrealistic, the farther into the book you read, the more you will understand why they acted as they did. And in the end all becomes right in the world.

A Year After Henry is laugh out loud funny, unusual and heart wrenching all rolled into one. If you are looking for something to lift your spirits, Cathie Pelletier's work will bring a smile to your face.

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### **Douglas Lord says**

Three people living in the same Maine community wrestle with their lives after the sudden death of Henry Munroe, a charismatic shitheel whose charm and magnetic personality resonated far beyond his control. Pelletier uses the one-year run-up to Henry's anniversary memorial service to define each of these three finely drawn individuals through their life struggles. Henry's tightly wrapped wife Jeanie is primed to unspool, prone to sitting in her car smoking and drinking while watching Henry's mistress's house. "It had been a long year," she thinks. "Twelve godawful months that she had to be firm and steady for the children."

Henry's thoughtful, if centerless, brother Larry delivers mail—and reads it, too (though not in a prurient way) while he waits to see if his teaching job will be reinstated. The book's center is Henry's mistress Evie, a bartender who also draws portraits of the spirits of the departed. She comes to realize that "...all the dead want is for the living is to know that someone is watching, someone is taking note, someone is nearby, so that the living will never have to hurt alone." At times the writing gets a bit, well, girly: Jeanie wonders if her mother-in-law could give her "...a recipe that would tell her how to mix the anger with the grief, how many teaspoons of bitterness with how many teaspoons of sorrow"?\* But Pelletier also fills the book with truisms, as when a sage-like character comments on the kind of woman who "...will beat on a man until he lifts a hand to protect himself and the next thing he knows, he's in jail for assault and battery." VERDICT Driven by a tight focus on dynamic character growth, Pelletier's people are a marvel, so real that (just like you) they aren't always terribly likeable.

\* If any cookbook has that it'll be Steven Raichlen's *Man Made Meals: The Essential Cookbook for Guys*.

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### **Sharon says**

I have read all of Pelletier's books and was so disappointed when it seemed that she had stopped writing. I was excited when *One Way Bridge* appeared after an apparent hiatus. Her characteristic wit and zany characters were back, so I was thrilled when I realized she had written a sequel. Instead of the quirkiness and humor I associate with her books, this was one dark read. A very good but very dark read. I was reminded of *The Weight of Winter*, the third in her *Funeral Makers* trilogy. I had a hard time liking any of the characters, but then the subject was the one-year memorial for a selfish, self-absorbed man who had loved himself as much as everyone else. I was disappointed because I had anticipated the sequel to be a funny book but it's a very serious treatment of family, community and loss. If you like Anne Tyler, then I think you'd like Cathie Pelletier.

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### **Mary Lou says**

*A Year After Henry* isn't Great Literature, but it was a satisfying treat between elaborate meals. It's an engaging look at grief, and its impact on individuals, and family relationships.

Pros:

I liked all of the main characters, despite their flaws. They were human, well-developed, and believable. The ending was tidy, but it worked, so I'm okay with that. Tidy isn't necessarily a bad thing. The supernatural element was almost more comforting than creepy, and it was easy to buy into.

Cons:

The occasional four-letter word was tossed in. They were unnecessary, but infrequent and not used gratuitously, for the most part.

There was a gratuitous, but very minor, side story involving love letters between a lesbian couple, and a character's physical response to reading them. It's like the movie industry that throws in superfluous "adult material" just to get the PG-13 rating to attract a wider audience. Unfortunate.

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## Trudy says

"There will never be anything man-made, there will never be a rope, or a net, or a wire cable invented by the best minds that will ever be stronger than love."

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## Sonya L Moore says

I grabbed this book as a filler - for me that is the spot in between serious books or when I have finished a book that makes me think long afterward about its plot or characters before I jump over my head into another that takes all my energy and attention. Boy did Cathie Pelletier fool me into thinking her novel was a quick-read, a light-weight, to be read and easily forgotten. From the first chapter which introduced the "Survivors" (those who survived Henry's death but also those who survived their time with Henry as he 'whirlwind-ed' through theirs), I found that I was caught by their stories and then captivated by the author's writing. Those of you who know my requirements for a really great read, know that the characters can be as deep as an ocean and the plot as thick as molasses, but if the writing is not lyrical, descriptive, just breathtakingly beautiful, then it is just a good read. This was great and I am busy trying to jam copies of her other books into my TBR stacks without toppling the whole mess over. But so what? As long as hers manage to fall to the top I will be fine.

Plot: Henry the shining star, youngest son, philandering postman has been dead a year and his grieving parents are planning a town-wide memorial in his honor, which has his wife (who woke to find him dead beside her), his latest mistress (who has fallen in love with his older brother, Larry) and Larry (whose wife has left him for a basketball coach and taken his son) in a turmoil.

Amazon:

"Nobody walks the knife-edge of hilarity and heartbreak more confidently than Pelletier."—Richard Russo

In her exquisite new novel, acclaimed author Cathie Pelletier presents a witty and refreshingly candid portrait of grief, intergenerational conflict, and the impact one person can have on those he loved.

Bixley, Maine. One year after Henry Munroe's fatal heart attack at age forty-one, his doting parents, prudish wife, rebellious son, and wayward brother are still reeling. So is Evie Cooper, a bartender, self-proclaimed "spiritual portraitist," and Henry's former mistress. While his widow, Jeanie, struggles with the betrayal, Henry's overbearing mother is making plans to hold a memorial service. As the date of the tribute draws closer and these worlds threaten to collide, the Munroes grapple with the frailty of their own lives and the knowledge that love is all that matters.

With her trademark wry wit and wisdom, Cathie Pelletier has crafted an elegant and surprisingly uplifting portrait of the many strange and inspiring forms that grief can take in its journey toward healing.

Reviews: Review

"Pelletier is expert at taking familiar types in familiar settings (much of her work is set in her native northern Maine) and not disturbing that sense of familiarity but rather fully inhabiting it. " - The New York Times Book Review

"Pelletier's writing bristles with sharp descriptions and her story hums along at a satisfying pace, drawing the reader in with sympathetic and utterly believable characters." - Publishers Weekly

"Sensitive yet witty, Pelletier's (The One-Way Bridge, 2013) wise examination of one of life's most tragic episodes brims with hopeful understanding." - Booklist

"A Year After Henry is a great look at the effect people have on each other and how difficult it can be to get on with your life after they go." - Boston Herald

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### **Melinda says**

For some reason, the books I've read lately have all had some sort of common thread--dead spouses, dead spouses' mistresses, messages from the other side, etc. *A Year After Henry* falls right into that pattern. Because I've been reading so many similar books (purely by coincidence), I was a little burned out by the time I came to this book.

First off, though, I have a pet peeve that really doesn't have anything to do with the book or the author. The summary given for this book is a bit misleading. While I wouldn't call it a bait and switch, I will say that the book I read was not the book I was expecting based on that summary--however, that is probably a good thing.

I did enjoy Pelletier's writing. I felt that she successfully rounded out her characters and conveyed their place in the grieving process--after all, this book was all about grieving. My favorite character, and one of the main characters, was Henry's brother Larry. Like the other two main characters (Jeanie and Evie), Larry is dealing with the grief of losing Henry, but also with the grief of losing his previous life. I believe there was enough there about Larry that Pelletier could have written just about him.

My biggest complaint with this book was with the handling of the character of Evie. She was interesting--a pot-smoking medium / bartender who was Henry's one time mistress. However, she really didn't fit in to the overall scheme of the book they way a character carrying that much weight of a book should. I wish Pelletier had either tied her in more to the stories of Larry and Jeanie, or minimized her role in the book.

Overall, I would say this book is fine, but not exceptional. It might be a book I would recommend to someone who might relate to its subject matter, but probably not to anyone just looking for an entertaining book to read.

*I received an electronic copy of this book in return for an honest review. I received no other compensation for this post.*

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### **Chaitra says**

I liked it better than I thought I would, given that sappy stuff isn't really my thing. It helped that there's not much sap, and it really does have a clear understanding of grief, and of the absence of it, and the guilt involved. That, and the characters are wonderful. Not a single one I wanted to slap, even if they did things I didn't necessarily agree with. It has problems though. The ending is rather too neat. There's some repetition and facts get gradually updated in a way I didn't like. For example, (view spoiler). And it's got a bit of the paranormal, which I didn't mind, but which I wasn't expecting either. So, better than I expected, but not that

much better. 3 stars.

*I received a copy of this book for review via NetGalley.*

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### **Shelleyræ at Book'd Out says**

It has been a year since forty one year old Henry Munroe unexpectedly passed away. While his mother arranges a memorial service for her 'golden boy', Henry's wife, Jeanie, is stalking his ex mistress, Evie, his teenage son Chad is drinking and smoking pot, and Henry's brother, newly divorced and unemployed, is sleeping in the room they shared as children. *A Year After Henry* by Cathie Pelletier explores the process of grief, loss and letting go.

Each of Pelletier's characters are struggling to come to terms with the emotional aftermath of Henry's demise, as well as the changes it has wrought in the direction of their lives. As the memorial service approaches they are forced to confront their angst and reconcile both their love and ambivalence for the son, husband, father, brother and lover they have lost.

Jeanie is the most conflicted character as her husband's death occurred just as she had mustered the courage to confront him about his history of adultery. This complicates her mourning process and she develops a mild obsession with one of his last lovers, Evie.

I was surprised by the paranormal aspect that Evie brings to this story. It is not really a significant element, but allows Pelletier to explore another facet of grief. Evie is a local bartender and Spiritual Portraitist whose brief fling with Henry haunts her, especially as she realises she is falling in love with his brother Larry.

Larry misses his brother despite having always lived in Henry's shadow. Henry's status as the family golden boy is only elevated by his sudden death, particularly in contrast to Larry's messy personal crisis which includes being forced to move back in with his parents after his recent divorce, and being fired from job as a school teacher.

A low-key character driven novel, there are flashes of humor and pathos in this poignant story of grief, loss and letting go. *A Year After Henry* is Cathie Pelletier's 11th book.

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### **Amy says**

3.5 stars

I've been surprised by the negative reviews for this book. No, it isn't "great," but it deserves better notices than some of what you've seen.

The central motif is grief. There are different forms of it in this book, with different characters mourning in

different ways - if not for different things.

Jeanie is the widow, so she mourns her husband. But her grief isn't so much about the absence of Henry as the absence of the love and trust in their marriage. Henry dies before Jeanie can confront him about his infidelity, and her frustration is palpable, even a year later. She can't truly say goodbye to him because she has no answers. Why did he cheat? What happened to the love they shared?

Evie, too, mourns Henry, but in a different way than Jeanie. She was Henry's mistress, and she mourns the man he could have been. One night as she watches him sleep, she sees him truly relaxed, truly at peace, and she realizes that the Henry he projects to everyone is not the real Henry. He's a creation fabricated to gain attention and adulation. What - who - could Henry have been if he could have been himself? But what Evie mourns even more is the loss of her relationship with Henry's brother Larry. Evie loves Larry, but he can't - he won't - commit to her as long as Henry's shadow overtakes him.

Like Jeanie and Evie, Larry doesn't mourn his brother's death as much as he mourns the life he had before his brother died. He was married, albeit not terribly happily, but his beloved son lived with him. He had a job. Now, a year after Henry, he's struggling professionally, emotionally, and even physically. He has lost everything.

Henry's parents, too, mourn, as does his son. Only one character seems to truly mourn Henry, though; the rest mourn what they lost as a result of Henry's death.

Cathie Pelletier tells the story through the perspectives of Jeanie, Evie, and Larry, three middle-aged people who have been stuck for the year since Henry died. Each needs a breakthrough: Jeanie needs to free herself to miss the parts of Henry she loved, Evie needs to let go of the guilt of participating in Henry's infidelity, and Larry needs to stop feeling as if he must replace Henry. Each attempts to manage grief differently, whether by freezing their hearts or smoking pot or hiding in their parents' house.

All the while, Henry's parents plan a memorial service for him on the year anniversary of his death. Neither Jeanie nor Evie nor Larry wants to attend, though.

Pelletier writes with atmosphere and wit, making you feel as if you are there with her characters. At various times you will want to shout at one or all three of them. They will frustrate you, make you laugh, and make you sad for them. These are flawed people, and it isn't always easy to read about them. It isn't always easy to like them.

The pacing occasionally feels off, but I wonder if that's a purposeful construct of Pelletier's. No one grieves at the same speed, so the fits and starts of this book may reflect that. Of all the characters, Evie's feels most problematic. She spends most of the book trying to find her place, whether romantically or otherwise. She's involved in a subplot involving abuse that felt disconnected from the rest of the book until I realized that it, too, is about surviving loss.

I enjoyed it. I didn't always like it, but I did enjoy this book.

### **Cheryl M-M says**

I think it is a home truth that we don't really know how much we and our lives are impacted by certain people in our lives until we have to do without them.

The death of Henry leaves ripples of waves in the lives of his family members, the local community, the people he connected with and the ones he kept hidden in the wings.

It is a year after his death and everyone is still trying to fill the gaps left by the sudden departure of Henry. His brother Larry is struggling to find his place after losing his wife and son after a nasty divorce. In his odd search for comfort he happens to find himself attracted to the one person, who has the ability to destroy what is left of his family.

Jeannie is obsessed with the secret life Henry had. She has this strange need to know why, and why that particular person. She spends her time placing the blame firmly on the living instead of on the dead.

Pelletier has also woven an important sub-plot into this story of loss, sorrow and guilt. The issue of domestic abuse and violent partners. The most important point the author makes is the way the abused is often treated like a liar, especially by other women when the abused is a woman. The abuser is more often than not a charming two-faced popular person, the type who doesn't fit the criteria of abuser in most people's heads.

Why is it so hard to believe someone in that kind of situation? Why does it have to happen again before someone steps in to help? What is it about abuse that make the abuser warrant more support and protection than the abused?

This is a tale of grief and how life goes on after the death of a loved one.

I received a copy of this book via NetGalley.

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### **Wynne says**

It is about grief and it is well written, quiet, true to the variety of ways that people grieve. Worth one's time

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### **Dana Monroe says**

I actually found a pre-release, uncorrected copy of this book at my busstop one afternoon and tucked it away to read between heavier reads. What started out as a quirky, funny story evolved into a wonderful tale of family, grief, heartache, humor and redemption in a small town setting that I can completely relate to. This was a surprise and a treat; I've never read anything by this prolific author before but will definitely start exploring!

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### **Kathy says**

*A Year After Henry* by **Cathie Pelletier** is an interesting glimpse of Henry Munroe's loved ones as the one year anniversary of his untimely death approaches. In the days leading up to the memorial service, everyone

is still grieving his loss but perhaps their biggest struggle is reconciling the new paths their lives have taken since he passed away.

Henry's widow, Jeanie, is saddened by her husband's death but her biggest regret is not getting the chance to confront Henry about his last infidelity with bartender, Evie Cooper. In the year since his death, she has become obsessed with Evie and she spends a lot of her time stalking Evie while trying to work up the courage to confront her about the affair. While Jeanie is wallowing over past mistakes, her fifteen year old son Chad is trying to numb his pain with drugs and alcohol.

Larry Munroe always lived in the shadow of his outgoing, gregarious younger sibling and in the year following Henry's death, his life is in upheaval. After losing his wife, son and job in a shocking divorce, Larry is now living back home with his parents in the same bedroom he and Henry shared as children. He is sinking into a depression that is more about the loss of his marriage and son than Henry's death. Larry also has an unforeseen connection to Henry's former mistress and this too plays a role in his growing despair.

In a sea of sadness, Evie Cooper is an unexpectedly refreshing breath of fresh air. As the "other woman" in Henry's affair, she is not cast in the best light but there is surprising depth to her character. Evie uses her gift as a spiritual portraitist to help the grieving cope with their losses. As a bartender at the local watering hole, she offers a sympathetic ear when needed but she is also willing to step in and find a solution to a friend's increasingly dangerous situation.

Of course at the heart of the story are the various memories of Henry. As each of the characters reflect on their respective pasts, a rather unflattering portrait of Henry emerges. Although people were drawn to him, he was rather self-centered and self-absorbed. As the memorial approaches, everyone begins to gain new perspectives on his role in their lives and they begin to make peace with not only his loss, but his flaws and imperfections as well.

While the plot of *A Year After Henry* is unique, the novel is slow-paced and the overall flow is interrupted by meandering thought tangents and superfluous details. The characters are fascinating and it is enjoyable watching them emerge from their grief and take charge of their somewhat out of control lives. **Cathie Pelletier** ends the story on a hopeful note as all of the participants say their final goodbyes at Henry's memorial service.

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