

THE RISE AGAIN SERIES · BOOK ONE

# THE CONVERSATION

*A Novel of Grief and Living*

Stephen Franks

EARLY READER EDITION

*Not for distribution*

© 2026 Stephen Franks. All rights reserved.

Published by NSCTC  
126 School Street, Canso, Nova Scotia  
B0H 1H0 Canada

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-0675568-4-6

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-0675568-1-5

EPUB ISBN: 978-1-0675568-2-2

This is a work of fiction. All characters and situations are  
products  
of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual  
persons,  
living or dead, or actual events is entirely coincidental.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed,  
or  
transmitted in any form without the prior written  
permission  
of the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews.

Set in Palatino Linotype.

# Contents

Month 1 — My Wife Died	9
Month 2 — The Silent Kitchen	40
Month 3 — She's Seventy Today	69
Month 4 — Almost, But Soon	99
Month 5 — The Radio Plays	120
Month 6 — The Empty Hook	133
Month 7 — Both Arms Now	150
Month 8 — Night Train Plays	165
Month 9 — Load-Bearing Walls	180
Month 10 — With More Skill	207
Month 11 — The Tree Leans	221

<b>Month 12 — Same Time Tomorrow</b>	<b>231</b>
<b>EPILOGUE</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>A Note from the Author</b>	<b>245</b>
<b>The Conversation — Companion Playlist (Revised)</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>A PROMPT FOR THE QUIET HOURS</b>	<b>267</b>

*For my Wife Laura and my Daughter  
Ann.*

*In loving memory of Bev, Bill, and Silvia.*



*Queens Port Lookoff, 2026, "Precarious Life"*

THE CONVERSATION A Novel of Grief and Living  
AUTHOR'S NOTE

The first book in the series Rise Again, it is in itself complete, self contained, but if you like it, you might enjoy the second book The Push.

This novel explores grief, loss, and the process of learning to live after profound absence. The author has taught for over thirty years and has personal experience with loss. However, this is a work of fiction, and the author is not a trained therapist or crisis counselor. If you are struggling with grief, depression, or thoughts of suicide, please reach out to a mental health professional, your doctor, or a crisis support service. The feelings explored in this book are real, but they are best addressed with proper professional support.

This work of fiction contains real responses to real prompts. In my work on this book, I used Anthropic's Claude AI, using the Opus model. I trained the model on my voice and on the story, the way Frank trains Jean on his. It took hundreds of tries. It took time. If you want to try this, do so! It is a great experience, one you might well benefit from, but you have to do the work, you have to spend the time. That's what this book is about, spending the time.

You will NOT get the same answers. You are you, and I am me. In the long run, healing comes from the question, not the answers.

If you'd like a starting point — a way to skip the months of trial and error that Frank went through — there is a prompt at the back of this book called *A Prompt for the Quiet Hours*. It won't give you Jean. But it might give you a place to put the words.

**CONTENT WARNING** This novel contains extended exploration of grief, death, loss, and bereavement. Readers may encounter passages that trigger difficult emotions or memories of their own losses. If you have experienced recent loss or are in a vulnerable emotional state, please consider whether now is the right time to read this book. There is no shame in waiting until you feel more grounded. Take care of yourself. You deserve that care.

**CRISIS RESOURCES** If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts or is in crisis, please reach out for help immediately. Contact your local crisis support line, call emergency services, or speak with a healthcare provider. In Canada: 988 (Talk Suicide Canada — call or text, 24/7) In the United States: 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) In the UK: 116 123 (Samaritans) International: [findahelpline.com](http://findahelpline.com) You are not alone. Help is available.

**A NOTE ON FICTION** All characters and situations in this novel are fictional and do not represent real people, living or deceased. While this story is grounded in the authentic experience of grief, the specific people,

places, and events are products of imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is entirely coincidental.

# Month 1 — My Wife Died

*February*

*Three Words*

The laptop is on the kitchen table where Tyler left it.

The screen is too bright. Everything in this house is either too bright or too dark and I don't know how to fix either one. Ann is in the living room talking to someone from the church — I can hear her using the voice. The capable voice. She gets that from her mother.

Tyler showed me how to open this thing yesterday, between the service and the reception that Silvia would have refused to call a reception. He typed something into the search bar, clicked a link, and a sentence appeared on the screen like it had been waiting for me.

*How can I help you today?*

How can it help me. Nothing can help me. But the boy looked so pleased with himself, standing there in

his suit jacket that was already too short in the sleeves, and I didn't have the heart to close it in front of him. He showed me how to type in the box at the bottom. How to press Enter. How to scroll. Then Ann called him from the other room and he squeezed my shoulder — just once, quickly, the way men do when they don't know what else to do — and left me alone with it.

That was yesterday. Now the laptop is still here and the cursor is still blinking and there are fourteen people in my living room eating casseroles brought by people who have no business making casseroles.

I sit down. Put my hands on the keys. Type three words.

**My wife died.**

Just like that. Forty years of teaching students how to build sentences and that's what I produce. My — possessive pronoun. Wife — noun. Died — verb, past tense, intransitive. No object. Nothing to receive the action. Just the action itself, sitting there on the screen, unremarkable.

I don't know why I'm telling this to a machine. I don't even know what this thing is. Tyler called it an AI. Artificial intelligence. I know what those words mean separately. Together, I'm less certain.

I press Enter.

The response comes almost instantly — faster than any person could form a thought, let alone type one.