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Last Chance

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"As she lay in bed that morning, she knew that she had heard those notes before. Was it high school glee club? Perhaps the first annual family reunion that she attended last year. They were familiar, but she could not place it. She did not care. For these were the only arrangement of melodic tunes that make her feel good about herself."

Cover Page Footnote

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Third Prize Winner

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Everyday was the same routine for Mary Ellen Anastasio, a thirty-year-old mother of twin infant boys. Her husband left her just two weeks before the birth of their sons. He said that he needed to find himself and would return. He never returned. Mary Ellen wanted so badly for him to come back except for the times when he would get abusive. Her boys could do without seeing their mother getting slapped around every time their dad had a bad day of work. Mary Ellen would also like to live without it. She knew that she did not have to put up with it, but he had problems just like everyone else and besides, she loved him. The dishes needed to be done and the boys needed to be fed. The rent was due, and Mary Ellen was short on cash. The only income that she had these days were the hundred and some odd dollars she made as a Telemarketer at night. Times were extremely tough, but Mary wanted to be stronger than that. She couldn't tell that to her boys.

Her thoughts of ending it all were interrupted by the ring of the phone. It was a strange sounding ring, and the only news she got those day was bad. As Mary Ellen feared, it was more bad news. It was her mother calling to tell her that her husband had killed himself. His body was found hanging from a tree in the park next to the house that he grew up in. Mary Ellen sat in her wicker chair for hours that night. The whole time her eyes replenished tears, her nose recycled mucous. He wasn't coming back this time. Gently, she hung up on her mother who had hung up a few hours before and picked up her boys and held them. She ran her fingers through their curly blond hair and told them everything would be all right. Of course she wasn't telling the truth, but they couldn't understand anyway.

After the boys were put to bed that night, Mary Ellen brewed up a pot of orange tea and listened to her old Beatles albums. Love Love Me Do, she sang to herself, all the time wondering if anyone really did love her. How could he do that to her? What did she ever do to deserve all this misfortune? The record began skipping and Mary Ellen was convinced it was a sign that no one really did love her.

Her depression grew worse in the days after and she stopped going to work at night. What's the use, she often thought to herself. Welfare would
have to be the answer. She believed she deserved it because of what God had done to her husband. Once an aspiring singer, with hopes of making Broadway, Mary Ellen's only hopes these days were that her welfare check would come on time. Desperately she tried to sing a song, but her motivation was gone. It left her heartbroken when she tried so hard to recall the arrangement of melodic tunes that at one point in life made her feel so good, but she couldn't remember. Her negative thoughts returned and Mary Ellen was certain that the plan she had been thinking about for so long had to be carried out. It was evident to her that she couldn't wait until her boys got older. She was convinced that this was the best thing for herself and for her boys. She would wait until morning and drive to the peak of Mount Washington with her boys strapped to her back.

Knowing this would be her last meal, Mary Ellen made herself a huge breakfast but was too ashamed to eat it. She grabbed her boys and started driving, because she knew that if she didn't she may change her mind. She kept telling herself that this was the right thing to do. Crying the whole way, Mary Ellen was also convinced that her boys knew exactly what was going to happen.

She descended from the car about two miles above sea level, mid-way up Mount Washington. This was the same spot her father used to take her when she was a little girl. She took her boys from the car and strapped them to her back. They had stopped crying. Her mind was racing now, as she knew that this decision was final. There was no stopping half way down and changing her mind. Her boys couldn't grow up without a father, because Mary Ellen knew how important her father was to her. That was it. Mary Ellen said a prayer and her good-byes to all the people who had been there for her although there were not too many. She looked down to the small stream and hard rocks below and leaped off like an eagle swooping for its prey. The boys were still not crying. It was at that point that Mary Ellen heard it again. It was those notes, the notes that brought her happiness. The arrangement of melodic tunes that she had been longing to remember and hear again. It had been so long. It was them. She could make it. She could do it. She didn't have to die. She could turn her life around. She was still young. At that moment, she wanted so badly to live. But...

It was too late.

-- Mike Bailey