Ordinary

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

"The water felt warm against her aching body. As she drew in a breath of jasmine and wildflowers, she laid her head back in the white bubbles that rested on the old ceramic of her bathtub. But the bubbles weren't really white, she thought to herself, as she lifted a handful up to her face. They were really more like many multicolored transparent spheres that were so very delicate and full of beautiful fragrance. There were hues of pink and lavender and subtle hints of gold that would show when she turned her hand to the light, and this made her smile, because it was ordinary. The perfect spheres of color that disappeared as quickly as they formed, had made her long for ordinary times. And she almost wished she could become one of these bubbles, to float and glisten with color and then disappear with a hint of beauty. If only it could be that ordinary again."

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TWO YEARS AGO brings her thoughts to a day when her life was ordinary. She was a writer of sorts, and a good writer at that, but nobody seemed to notice this about her. She didn’t get paid much for her pieces, just enough to survive. But that was O.K. with her, because she actually preferred to fancy herself as a thinker. She could find thoughts in something as ordinary as a cup of split pea soup with its thick green waves of cream and pink bits of ham. She could find something new and exciting there. To her, there was always something interesting in this world. Only nobody ever saw it but her.

Mostly, everyone she saw lived bland and simple lives, something that she could not bear. They got up, went to work, came home, patted their children on the heads, watched T.V. and went to bed. Their lives were empty to her. No thought, not feeling. Just empty, and this made her feel alone. She couldn’t find anybody
interesting to her, like what she could find in ordinary things. They seemed flat, and to her there was always a difference between being ordinary and just being simple. So she went on her way finding companionship only with her thoughts and with the ordinary.

Some people thought her strange. But that didn’t bother her. She thought her life to be exciting and that was all that mattered to her. So the only thing she did that was bland in her life, was to buy her favorite magazine every month and read its glossy sheets cover to cover. That was enough.

And as she reached for the magazine that strange day, with it’s cover of multi-colored artwork, she smiled to herself, knowing that in this picture, there would be new places to explore in her mind that afternoon. This excited her, and she was already deep into her own thoughts, when she was abruptly bumped by one of the simple people on the street that day.

She was annoyed to be taken out of her thoughts, and gave this man a look to explain how she felt. Ignoring his apologizes, she reached into her beaded wallet for the change she had collected for her magazine over the last month, only to see that he was insisting on buying it for her. She shook her head in protest, and pushed her change at the man behind the counter, but the simple man who’d bumped her was too quick with his dollar. She nodded to the simple man without a word, picked up her magazine, and simply walked away.

She was glad to be away from him, and back into her own world. This was where she was the happiest. She didn’t need to speak to people, for they had nothing to offer her anyway. So she walked briskly down the gray, cracked pavement, always being sure not to trip on a pothole, through the garbage filled city streets on her way to the place she loved best.

She would only nod to certain people she passed, and that was only if she saw in their eyes a hint of an understanding for the ordinary. There were many, and none she wanted to stop for. So she would just walk on
and watch and think. As she stepped off the curb toward her special place, she noticed a glove on the street. She was pretty sure that it had not been there long, because the delicate pink frays of wool were still quite clean. She stopped to look at it awhile, not sure whether to pick it up. Though she wanted to have it, to think about it, she was afraid. What if the owner came to get it while she was reaching down, and they wanted to talk to her? She didn’t want them to talk to her, for she knew she would be disappointed by what they said. But the pink had a color of a rose petal, and the thumb looked like it had been chewed by an insistent owner and she found herself once again floating into thought. When she found things like this, they were important to her. They were her friends, part of her thoughts.

She reached down and snatched it up and looked to make sure no one had seen her. And then she went on her way through the crowded streets to the place where she could think the best. It never seemed to take long for her to get there, but she knew it was a long way. A simple person would have taken a cab, but not her. She was not in a rush.

She came to the park on the west side of town, and she walked thought the thick wet grass of the knoll. She walked past the large oak that watched over the lake and she followed the trail to her place. She passed some joggers on her way, and found herself annoyed that they would be here, but she knew the further she walked that they would disappear, for not many came this far into the woods.

She saw her large sitting rock and the calm immediately followed. She walked up to it and breathed in the fragrant pine air and sat sown where the rock was worn away. She always thought that someone else must have sat here once. Maybe a long time ago. For she knew that she couldn’t have worn this away all by herself in such a short time, and that made her feel good. She knew that there must have been another great thinker like her that sat at her special place. This idea made her not feel so
alone.

She reached into the pocket of her tattered coat and pulled out the pink glove carefully. She picked away the lint balls it had picked up and the gum wrappers from the day before. And she looked at it. She turned it over in her hand and put her palm on it to see if it was a match. She wasn’t surprised when it wasn’t. That was the way it was in her world. And she began to think.

She saw many things in that glove, and she felt herself want to write again, and as she looked around to see where she had put her bag of pens and paper, she saw him standing there a ways off in the brush. He must have known she was frightened for he put up his hands in protest to let her know he would not hurt her, and there were many words that were spoken, but she knew not what he said. She began backing away, looking for a place to run, but he had a kindly face and she relaxed a little just wishing he would go away. But he didn’t this man from the newsstand and he came closer, into her world, into her special place and that bothered her. He put out his hand and smiled and gave her his name. She nodded in understanding and then turned toward her rock to be left alone in her thoughts. He tapped her on the shoulder and she turned to face his stare. She looked into his eyes, and though she knew he was not like her, she didn’t turn away again.

He wanted her to speak to him, to tell him her name. But she could not, for no words came. They had not since she was a young girl, since the sounds of the world no longer were there for her, and he seemed to understand this when he looked into her eyes. He did not mind that she would never speak to him and he beckoned her to sit down with him by the water.

She felt strange being at her special place with someone else, but oddly it began not to bother her. He looked out on the water, and he seemed to be thinking, as she had always done. She began to wonder if this was his special place too, if he had been the one who had worn the rock away. And she felt calm again, and not so alone, as
she wandered into her own thoughts again.

They sat together by the lake that afternoon, until the twilight of the sun dipped down to touch the black of the water. Not a word was spoken. There hadn’t needed to be. And she knew it was time to go.

He reached for her hand, and she hesitantly gave it to him. He pulled her up gently, and smiled. They walked back down the path together that evening, into the white noise of the city. At the corner, he smiled, and nodded to her and then he walked away toward his own life and left her standing there.

As she walked home that night, she thought about him and she wondered about their afternoon. She didn’t expect to see him again, and that was fine by her. She walked past the Chinese grocery where their hands flailed wildly, but no sound came out. At least not for her. And she passed the familiar flower stand, just a block away from her apartment, and she bought herself a single red rose with the change she had planned to spend on her magazine.

When she got home, she drew herself a bath. One with bubbles and rose petals and she lit a single candle that she put on the faded yellow linoleum next to the tub. The water felt good to her, and the scent of the rose petals gave her solace. She was alone again in her world and she knew that this was the way it should be.

Sometimes they way things should be, aren’t always the way things stay. And though she tried to hold onto her life the way it had always been, her life was beginning to change. Every day she would walk to her special place through the same city streets of gray, and every day he would be waiting there, down by the water sitting on the rock. They never said a word to one another, they only nodded with understanding, and then they would sit by the water together caught up in their own thoughts until the sun bowed down it’s head to touch the glistening waters of the lake. It was always the same when they left. He would reach down and take her hand and gently pull her up. They would walk down the trail together in
silence, and then he would smile and nod to her before he turned to walk away to his other life that she knew nothing about. And she never cared to know.

But things began to change in their world of silence. It didn’t happen quickly, but came a little at a time. He began to put his arm around her as they sat and thought and she didn’t seem to mind. Sometimes, she would lay her head upon his shoulder and smell the cleanness of his skin. And he began to hold her hand as they walked down the trail in the evening and hesitated longer each time before he nodded good-bye.

It wasn’t that she didn’t notice the subtle changes of their days, it just seemed so natural. So as they became closer in their afternoons of silence, she felt calm, and even somewhat simple. She began to long for their afternoons together, and found herself writing in a way she never had before. When she looked at ordinary things, instead of the original thoughts she had always had, the ordinary things began to remind her of him. Her body began to ache for his touch, and she longed to smell his cleanness, and she found that her life had actually changed a great deal, when she realized that she had fallen in love.

He seemed to understand this when he looked into her eyes, and what she saw in his eyes was a reflection of all that she felt. They were always alone on their rock by the water, so they didn’t feel fear or inhibition when they finally made love. Lying on the bed of pine needles that had fallen from the tree above, she felt her mind expand further than it ever had before, and she almost thought she could hear the birds singing in the trees all around her. When she looked into his eyes, she saw an understanding for the ordinary and an understanding of her world without sound.

But he began to come to their place less often, once her stomach began to grow. And the afternoons he was there were again spent looking out over the water, lost in a world of thoughts now only their own. Though she had not been able to ask him why he stopped coming, she already knew, for the band of gold he took from his pocket
and placed on his finger the last time she saw him was all she needed to know.

Sitting now in the warm water, she saw what her life has become. Gone now are the days of writing and poetry, gone now are her afternoons of thought, gone are the days of ordinary things. The thoughts she once had, have been replaced now with a mop and a bucket, and a small envelope of money that is handed to her at the end of each week. This has become her way to provide for herself, and she now truly felt simple. But she collected the change that she could spare each week, and she kept it in a little box in the kitchen. And this made her happy, for she knew it would be spent someday by the little one in the crib by the bed, in her own world without sound.

--Katharine Farnam

**Angle Staff Submission Choice**

--Ann Gray