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Thin Tentacles of Loss

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.
"Sometimes. I feel like I'm not even here; like I don't even exist,' she says."

Cover Page Footnote

This prose is available in The Angle: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol2002/iss1/25
"Sometimes, I feel like I'm not even here; like I don't even exist," she says.

He browses through the pages of his paper, glancing briefing at her. He though she had been reading, but now he notices her book is lying demurely at her side, book-marked at the same unsubstantial juncture it has been at for weeks now. "Oh, come on honey. You know that's not true. Nothing could happen around here without you."

Her fingers trace the outline of a speckled sculpture she created years ago; dust echoes along the edges of her calloused fingertips. The pages of his paper turn.

"Do you ever feel that way, Eli? Do you ever feel as if you're just some automated machine, going through all the habitual aspects of life?"

He sighs, folds up the paper and turns toward his wife.

"Everyone feels that way sometimes. You just gotta go what you gotta do and find some time to do the things you want to do when you can."

"What if you don't know what you want to do?"

He runs his fingers through his hair harshly. "Why do you always do this," he says, "Why do you always have to be so over-dramatic?"

His slight intake of breath, vague sag of his shoulders, and small movements of his hands, tells her this is not what he meant to say: at least not out loud anyway. His left eye twitches ever so slightly. "Why are you on the same page of that book all the time? You used to read books like that in an hour."

She leans back in the unyielding wicker chair, draped with the decorative throw no one ever uses. The scattered objects on the walls direct her on a journey of his life: the framed belts from karate, the first dollar he ever made, the gilded picture of his parents,
the diploma making him qualified to go to work every day and do the same thing over and over and over. All these things add up to something, she knows, but she just can't figure out what.

Is this a life? Trophies and remnants and old videos to remind you that events didn't happen the way you remembered them.

She always hated that. The way the videos caught people on the sidelines cringing at the way someone spoke to their child or looking lost when they were supposed to be looking found.

They never seemed to really represent the memory anyway, but it had become some kind of cultural icon to have your child's life on video: just because you could.

But what she always remembered what the way the focus was always on who was standing in the way of the camera and how half the time that should have been spent opening presents or responding to miraculous goals was too often spent shepherding kids out of the way of the shot or keeping your eye fixed to this tiny fragment of what was really happening in front of you.

What she hated most was the way having the camera there changed everything. And she wished it would just all go back to being done and enjoyed while it was happening instead of being relived over and over and over again in some fractionalized, posed, off-setting rendition of what was real.

"Marie, where are you? What are you thinking?"

She glances back toward her husband. His paper is gripped in this left hand, waiting to crawl back up in front of his eyes. The remote control is lying inches away form his comfortable grasp, conveniently places so no one has to even rise to invade the room with Technicolor tantrums thrown off by the 28" television. She wonders when it became about having things instead of doing things.

"Never mind, Eli, I don't know what I'm talking about."

He shakes his head as she turns away, standing slowly. She walks softly toward the
kitchen and the glow of shimmering utensils.

"If this is about that abandonment issue," he adds haltingly, "... you've got to know by now, I'll never leave you."

She pauses imperceptibly, eyes resting on the glistening Cuisinart that was used once and now exists only to take up counter space.

She is tracing the dusty outline of the speckled sculpture of her memory, created years ago, and remembering the feel of wet clay on her hands and her indifference to the grainy chunks getting stuck in her hair, wiped on her jeans, and smudged on her left cheek, as the curves form themselves beneath her slippery mind.

"You already have" ... she breathes ... "You already have."

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