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# Loss

Loss tastes like the bite of spinach you couldn't swallow. Cold, damp, and entirely unfeeling, it slithers around and around but refuses to go away. It seems to grow with every passing moment, with every instant, with every breath. You always liked spinach, too. This seems to add insult to injury. After you spit it out into a piece of paper towel and wad it up tight, you throw it into the trash, hoping it will sink deep enough that it can't come back—not now, not ever.

*I am sitting at my grandma's kitchen table, the sun is shining through the window in perpetual springtime, and everything is bright. My brother and I—we are six and nine, we are eight and eleven, we are always here—read the Sunday Funnies. Grandma reads the paper. She doesn't miss a day. There is lemonade on the table, and crackers. There always is. Grandma complains about the weather; it is too hot, or too cold. It always is. I have the funny feeling that we are removed from time, as though all the clocks have stopped. In one hundred years, or however long forever is, we'll still be here. Me, just finishing Peanuts, my brother, scouring the fridge for sweets, and Grandma, sitting quietly with the paper, creating room for all the comfort a little silence can bring.*

Nothing is permanent. Nothing goes away. That's what loss is all about, isn't it? While you're getting out of the shower, you feel it again for a moment, in a cold gust of air from a window not closed all the way, and you briefly remember so many colors you seemed to have forgotten. You try to hold onto them, but they're gone, even further than before.

*I am three years old and eating a bagel while Grandma tells me a story about squirrels. This, too, is a ritual that has been repeated since the dawn of time, since she moved here from*

*Michigan. The stories fly out faster than I can ask for them, and in some ten years when we sit around the Thanksgiving table, joking about how Grandma can never tell a story just once, I will remember the squirrels.*

When standing outside, loss climbs into your jacket, wholly uninvited, and chills you to the bone. It fills you with the knowledge that winter can last forever, the horizon of spring unimaginably far away.

*I am five years old and we hike together. The hills we climb are mountains as far as I'm concerned. I am ten years old and she drives my brother and me to mini golf. "Goofy Golf" we call it, and eat hotdogs and soft-serve ice cream afterwards.*

At night you climb into your bed to discover it is coated in a thin sheen of grey-white loss, of particles that settle on the bridge of your nose and right behind your eyes, stinging you.

*I am fifteen, my brother is twelve, and my sister is four when Grandma begins to complain that everything is too dark. All the lightbulbs in the world cannot amend it; it gets worse and worse every day. The doctors pronounce it Macular Degeneration. I pronounce it unfair. Her car gathers dust. Her newspapers pile up. The easiest of tasks becomes colossal, and I force my tears away. There are four of us regularly gathered around her table now, but she does not read the newspaper. I no longer read the comics, either, so we talk. And, oh, the stories she tells!*

Pots and pans and clothes drying on the rack become monstrously terrifying as you tiptoe around, wondering what new form of loss you'll run into. You are not safe in this house. You are not safe in this life. You wonder if you'll be safe anywhere.

*It is spring once more, and her last poem is dedicated to my sister, now almost five, who dances in church. We know of the cancer, but do not know that this our last Easter together. The universe knows, though, and the fruit tastes sweeter than usual.*

You push open the door and the air cracks your lungs open like a book with the word "loss" scrawled on all the pages. The blinding white sky is ruptured with naked tree branches howling loss through them in the wind. The very ground beneath you seems to shake with the weight of it all and you are pulled to your knees before you have time to collapse. Nothing is permanent. Nothing goes away.

*Cancer becomes chemo becomes weakness becomes hospitals becomes pneumonia becomes the end. I do not know where to put the sadness, and I begin to envision it overflowing from household items. It takes a while for me to notice that we're having a very pretty fall. Once I notice, I force myself to drink in every inch of it, force myself to see every last thing in the world. I watch the trees change color, the skies thunder and clear, the air crisp and freeze, and most of all, I watch my sister dance, anywhere and everywhere.*

You take a breath. Then another. Then another. You open your eyes. You're back in the kitchen standing over the trashcan, loss sinking to the bottom like a stone. The freshly washed glasses on

the counter seem to sparkle with a new sort of magnificence. As quickly as it arrived, loss is gone.

*Photos and videos, now, are all that remain. Well, almost all. There is also an old wooden table, bearing an infinite lifetime of memories: grooves and scars from age, rings from sticky cups of lemonade, and if you look close, the imprint of a hundred meals eaten, and a thousand newspapers read.*

Nothing is permanent. Nothing goes away.