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The Weight of Remembrance

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The Weight of Remembrance

Anna Denos

I remember how it felt when you came home at night. The pastel glow from low-burning candles filled the room and the atmosphere of peace enveloped the house like a blanket. I recall how my brother and I leapt off the sofa and ran towards the entryway, bare feet padding across the cool carpet. We raced to you, each silently yearning to be the first one swept up in your arms, the first one whose face was tickled by your ginger whiskers. I remember the feeling of tranquility in the air around us, so tangible now in my memory, though then only a common thing.

I remember how you loved your art, the food you crafted with your hands. We sat at the old kitchen table and watched as you worked. Your big, black apron concealed your prominent stomach, the trademark of any true chef, as you diced, drizzled, and stirred. I recall the medley of aromas—the sweet scent of caramelized onion, the subtle undertones of butter—that awoke the beast in my stomach, drawing out a round of impassioned growls. I can see your pride as you placed the steaming risotto on the table, and my excitement as the first bite entered my mouth.

I remember the days you had off from work, when the snow whirled down in thick flakes that caught on your eyelashes and melted on my tongue. I picture my brother and me piling onto the old metal sled, feel the air swooshing from my lungs and my insides sloshing to the beat of your footsteps as you dragged us down the packed and slippery road. I remember your face, ruddy and flushed from the cold but with eyes bright as you watched us frolic about in the white twilight glow.

I remember the dances you took me to. I can picture the lights, the flowers, the warm red hues bathing the room like the blush of a harvest moon. I look back on the cheerful faces, recall the woman with the scarlet lips telling us where to stand. The camera's flash was bright,

but my smile was genuine, the expression of a heart at complete peace with life, a life that knew no sorrow. You were beside me, your joy telling a story in the crinkles by your eyes. So strong, so protecting—I remember you like that.

I don't remember the hands that shook, the eyes that saw the world through a haze. I don't recollect the pill bottles on the counter or the corks, stained with the lifeblood of a thousand grapes, buried in the trash. I don't remember the sharp odor of liquor spoiling your breath or the biting remarks you hurled in my mother's face, but I sensed them working in our home, felt the tranquil atmosphere shrivel and wilt in their heat.

I don't remember the words that were pronounced as they laid your body in the ground that smothering afternoon. A sea of black surrounded me, a shroud of darkness worn by people whose names I did not know, whose sympathy I could not accept. We stood together with heads bowed towards the grass and tears leaking from reddened eyes. You were not there to hold me. You would never be there again.

I do not remember those first days without you. The endless weeks are painted black in my mind, scribbled over with a Sharpie until only the vaguest of outlines peek through. I watched as the summer of my seventh year melted into the ceaseless drip of autumn and the sun wrapped itself in its dreary winter cloak. The world was making ready for the season ahead. Perhaps I was making ready too.

I remember the things you said to me the night I never dreamt was to be our last. Your once strong face was worn, etched with scars from battles I did not know you had fought. Battles you did not know you had lost. You spoke to me then and your words were tender: "I love you, Sissy B." I can picture the way you smiled, how you bent down to gently kiss my face. I remember you now, I remember you like that.