

Nothing

By Charlie Agriogianis

They couldn't find the last picture they had taken with their mother. It was always supposed to be in the same place, taped to the side of their desk, just one glance away. But suddenly it was... missing, yeah missing. They had been busy for the last few weeks? Months? And could easily get distracted but it's not like they wouldn't notice it fall or something. And it wasn't like anyone else had been in their apartment to mess with it lately. They began to search everywhere. Under every strewn about piece of clothing and around every dirty dish and take out box. They jostled around their heaps of papers and cursed how out of shape they were as they peered under every piece of furniture. They searched for hours, never feeling any closer or further, looking over every inch of this space that had basically encapsulated their entire recent life. Each bit rooted through multiple times until they couldn't convince themselves they were stupid enough to have missed it any longer. Absolutely nothing found, beyond food wrappers and coins. It was gone.

They stumbled over their upturned furniture and belongings, telling themselves they would clean it up later, and got back to the work they had now fallen even further behind on. That night they struggled to sleep. Overflowing with incessant thoughts about what past them knew they should have done but didn't. Followed by thoughts about what current them should be doing but doesn't.

The weeks droned on. Their queue of tasks at their job surprisingly getting smaller. The feeling of relief this gave them was slowly replaced with concern as it dwindled further and further. Soon mounting to dread as it got down to the single digits. Ticking down one by one until they found themselves staring at a blank list without any idea what to do. This turned to full on panic when their many questioning emails were met with a resounding silence. They thought about what could have happened. Were they fired? What did they fuck up this time? Did something happen to the office? They thought about how there would be some form of communication if they were canned. They thought about how tired they felt. They thought about how little they cared about their job. They thought about all the things they used work as an excuse for not doing. They flopped down on their couch, turned on the TV, and gave up on caring.

They occupied themselves with things they used to like, and things they told themselves they did like. They watched, they read, they played. They contemplated the great things other people had made and how often they once told themselves they would do the same. They thought up ideas. They even put some of them to page. Chapters getting to be half written before being stored away for new fleeting pursuits, shoved to the side in exhaustion, or thrown out in hatred. They gave up and went back to doing anything else. Engaging in the wrong things for too long and the right things for not long enough. Their desires coming to feel like a stack far more imposing and insurmountable than what their job presented them. A billion things for them to do, but them never able to do the right one.

They were increasingly unable to find things they knew they had. Their well-stained college sweatshirt, their barely holding together journal, things that used to mean more to them. They convinced themselves that was just par for the course in this mess they lived in. They thought it would all turn up eventually, well after they needed it, and be lost again shortly after. Occasionally they checked their email in the hope that their boss would give them something to do, even if it was just another pointless meeting that never seemed to end. At least then they could fail to meet someone else's expectations instead of failing to meet their own. But that release never came before they stopped checking to save themselves the pain of trying.

Eventually they found themselves looking over their old messages. Group chats organizing weekend events that now only remain as faint memories of enjoyment. Birthday wishes from relatives their mother used to nag them to message back. Late night conversations filled with understanding, anger, happiness. Feeling.

In their scrolling they got stuck on one message they forgot about. Right below an exchange between people that hadn't really existed for quite some time. A good highschool friend asking to meet up. Telling them about updates in their lives and ending with a joke that felt like a nostalgic slap in the face. They looked at the timestamp. Three weeks ago, at the edge of not being awkward to respond to. They typed up a message that asked too many questions. Do you remember this funny anecdote? How is your mom doing? How is this friend? They thought up a place and time they could meet up and put that in there too. They thought about how to edit it. They thought about how this would come across. Maybe three weeks was too long?

They thought about having a conversation and explaining how little they had going on. They thought about the weight they had put on. They thought about the last time they met, an eternity ago. They thought about them asking about mom. They held the delete key until their stupid drawn out response was all gone.

Then they absorbed themselves in something pointless that they had done far too often so they could at least be free from their own thoughts for a while.

They continued on their existence like this, in this sad box that was the whole of their experience. Little changing, nothing getting better. Why should they care about their job? Why should they care about relationships? Why should anyone care about them? They thought of all the best ways to make themselves feel like shit, until they became numb to even that.

It was when they noticed the TV was gone they could no longer ignore the fact that items were disappearing. A quick and quickly abandoned tally found that probably about half their belongings were gone. Though it was hard to tell with how much crap they had. They thought about if they should feel sadness about all the things that they lost. They wondered if there was something wrong with them for not feeling that way. They thought it was funny how even their stuff was abandoning ship. They couldn't bring themselves to try and find out what was causing this, let alone try and fix it. It was a problem for a future them to defer to a future them.

They lost all control over when they slept, passing out whenever they felt like they had dealt with the constant fatigue long enough. And waking up feeling just barely better enough to do it again. Time lost all meaning. Until eventually they woke up at who knows when on who knows when to find their apartment without a door. Their confusion was quickly replaced with fear, and then despair as they noticed all their windows were gone as well. No way out. They were trapped. They yelled and banged on the walls for help, more and more feverishly, until their hands were a mix of pain and numbness. But their pleas were met with silence. They thought about how they couldn't remember the last time they heard their neighbors.

They looked around them and saw things disappearing right in front of them. A table gone, everything on it clattering to the floor. A filled sink slowly losing its contents. Each piece of unwashed bedding vanished one at a time. They tried to call 911 but were met with the faintest beep before quiet static that felt crushingly loud. They went to dial someone... anyone. But as they did they found their contacts gone, and their numbers absent from memory.

They rushed to their computer and tried to type out a message in their last opened conversation, their highschool friend. But nothing came out as the keys disappeared beneath their fingers until they were eventually just smacking into their desk. They watched as the conversation closed and all the others slid up the screen as each was deleted in turn, before the computer itself went with them.

They went to slump into their office chair, collapsing onto the carpet as that was gone too. Everything was going faster now. Their book shelf was almost completely empty. The photos on the wall and the faces within them fading all at once. The papers and half filled notebooks scattered about all leaving. Before they knew it they were looking at empty walls, empty floors, empty everything. Seeking anything to focus on that wasn't their current situation they became absorbed with the paint on the walls, every lump and fleck, until even that was no more.

They were alone, though they guessed they had been for a while. Only now realising it. Just a body enveloped in nothingness. They were without anything left to keep them safe from their thoughts and memories, so they came flooding in.

They thought about every moment that brought them happiness. Moments with their mother. With their family. With friends. Moments that felt right. Each one felt for a brief moment before leaving forever. They tried to hold on to them for as long as they could, but all were eventually stripped from them. Seeping in between the good moments were ones of self doubt, pain, resentment. Until it was hard to focus on the good for fear of what was coming next. Slowly they were overwhelmed, more and more dread pressing in. They had to wade through the awfulness for some source of comfort, grasping it with every fiber of their being for as long as they could, before it was ripped away with greater and greater force. But the good became more and more fleeting. An infinity between instants of relief.

They felt more and more pieces of them going. After an impossible duration without even transient goodness they began to strain to grasp at everything, no matter how devastating. They thought that at least embracing the worst was better than losing

all of themselves. And even as their physical body seemed to be gone at this point they felt like every bit of them was fraying just trying to hold on to something... anything. They felt their attempts slowing. The tide swelling. They thought about how tired they felt. They thought about what it was all for. They thought about who cared. Did they even care? They thought about giving up. They thought about the reasons not to give up. They couldn't think of any, so they did. They became just an observer watching it all flow out of them. First faster, then slower and slower as less and less was left to take. They felt separate from even what little was left of them.

They thought about where they could be going.

What if they weren't going anywhere at all?

The last trickles of them dripped out.

And they just watched them go.

The final remaining drops.

Unsure how to feel.

Until there was...