FLASH FICTION

Nothing

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"change8" by Cynthia Yatchman

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It felt odd feeling nothing. But that was all there was left. Nothing. Emptiness consuming me from the inside and enveloping me on the outside. Wherever I stretched my hand, I could not get a purchase on anything. Blankness. Nothingness.

I knew there was a world. People living in it. And yet it was something I would never again be able to embrace. I thought it might hurt. I thought I might regret it. But I felt nothing. Had lost nothing. But there was nothing I had gained either.

I opened my eyes to explore this world around me. It was all there. Black and white. Who said you could not divide the world? It was all so plain. So clear. And yet it was nothing.

My eyes surveyed the silhouettes moving above me. No one paid attention to the body lying on the ground — motionless, seemingly sleeping. Were silhouettes all we were? Shadows of ourselves? A nothing after the everything, but that could not have been everything. My life before was just a flicker in my memory — fading — losing importance.

What did it matter? Nothing. It was a fleeting life. So easily broken. And I had given it up freely. My everything for nothing. That was the deal. But it had been broken.

I could feel something rising inside me — bubbling to the surface. It felt familiar. *Felt. Felt. Felt.*

Liar. Liar. This was not nothing. I could still think, feel, be: without being.

Slowly I got up and tested my limbs. They seemed to work the same as before. Still I felt different. Without restriction. I looked down at myself. But there was no me the way there had been before. What used to be the person I had called myself was still lying there. Motionless. Sleeping. But never to wake up again. Everything for nothing. That had been the deal. A broken promise.

Now that I was here, what was I to do? I stepped over the form on the ground and moved away from it towards the water's edge. I could see the waves crashing against the cliffs, but I heard nothing. Not the seagull's cry above me nor the water breaking below. I could not feel the wind against my face that was stirring up the chaos underneath me. That was different.

A shadow moved past me. A human form. Their steps were silent. What should there have been? Shoes crunching against gravel.

A girl was staring towards the water just like I had done a moment before.

"How easy it would be to leave all of this behind. Just one step." Surprised, I turned my head. But the girl's lips had not moved.

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“I’m so sick of it. What does it matter?” I looked the girl over. Still she had not spoken. They had not been her words, yet they were. The ones no one ever got to hear. No one except for me.

“So, you want to leave this world?” I asked, my eyes not leaving her. A visible shudder went down her spine but she did not turn to me. Her thoughts had been mine. Before relinquishing everything I had called life.

“Are you sure?”

I had been. And at the same time I hadn’t. No one knows what happens when you take this step. No one returns. No one can go back once they had decided.

I could see the girl’s body trembling faintly as her eyes tried to penetrate the water’s surface, to discover what lay beneath.

“How will it feel? Will it be quick?” She took a step forward, closer to the edge. Her hands were slightly shaking but her legs were still, waiting for one step, forward or backwards.

“How will it feel afterwards?” I asked. “Will you regret the decision? What are you leaving behind?” I stepped closer, embracing her from behind, my arms close to her neck. My eyes followed hers. The shaking of her body had intensified. I could feel her heart beating against her chest, faster. Then I felt everything.

Pain. Aching. Guilt. Fear. Panic. Soaring pain tearing through me. A heaviness smothering me. Claws gouging where my heart used to be and pressing ever tighter.

“They don’t deserve this.” The girl’s lips were quivering. I could feel the motion travelling through her to me. The sharp burning was intensifying.

There. A tear. The wet thing running down her face.

With an abrupt movement the girl turned, moved through my embrace and away from the cliff.

“No.” Such a simple word. But I had not been able to say it. I had said yes — without hesitation. The corners of my lips rose as I watched her disappear in the distance.

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