**Without a Trace**

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Interminable water flows into my glass. It splashes, gurgles, and behaves like normal water, but the level doesn’t rise. I wait. I’m doing it properly, the same way everyone else does, but it no longer works for me.

My cup remains empty.

Describing my perplexing disorder also has its challenges.

“I don’t get it,” says Julia. “Is there a hole in the glass?”

“Not that I can see. I can’t explain it. I’d like to demonstrate. May I?” I gather a pen and a blank piece of paper that I spotted on her counter when I came in. Writing on someone else’s paper seems so intrusive. Julia doesn’t object. My hand hovers, hesitant to leave its mark.

I write, *English is my mother tongue*, in thick, blue, deliberate, loopy, cursive words, each disappearing as I write the next one.

“Is there ink in the pen?” my friend asks.

“Yes. See?” I scribble out a messy atom into the top left corner. It’s there. It’s visible until it’s not. The question is, did she see it? That's what I really want to know.

Julia’s eyes are no longer focused on me. She picks up the remote and turns on the TV before getting her full laundry basket and placing it beside her on the couch.

This has been happening to me a lot lately.

It started a few weeks ago when I flew back to my hometown for my high school reunion. The anticipation had been gratifying. Remembering my abundant social life, back when I had meaning, and my life had promise. The feeling vanished during the gathering.

“I’m sorry, I don’t remember you,” they said.

“But I sat next to you in Geography. And we were in band together. I played the clarinet.”

“I just don’t have a great memory. It was a long time ago.”

“I was Johnny Franklin’s girlfriend.” I had hoped that Johnny would be there, but he didn’t show.

“I remember Johnny! That guy was hilarious. I heard he has a radio show now. For sports, I think. I thought Emily Pringle was his girlfriend.”

“That was in grade twelve. I was before that,” I said repeatedly. It was true. I was there.

But they always saw someone more interesting to talk to and moved on.

When I returned to the city, I looked forward to going back to work. I had never been happy about a Monday morning before.

“We had a meeting last week to review employee performances,” my boss said. “No one could remember a significant contribution that you’ve made. Half the people in the room couldn’t remember you at all.”

She had the paperwork ready to go. “I’m sorry,” she said. “It’s nothing personal. You didn’t do anything wrong. We just need to cut back, and you didn’t stand out.”

I took the subway home. A plastic bag filled with my personal effects sat at my feet. At one stop, a man got on and sat on my lap. He sat directly on top of me. I froze, unsure if it was an attack or a thoughtless joke. No one was laughing. No one seemed to notice.

“Excuse me,” I said. “You’re squishing me.”

He startled to his feet, bewilderment plastered to his face. “I’m sorry. I didn’t see you.”

I thought about apologizing. He looked genuinely confused, and it was clearly my fault. But by the time I decided to ease his discomfort, he was in a different seat, scrolling through his phone.

I wouldn’t say I’m getting used to it. My impermanence happened gradually. It was hard to perceive at first and not the kind of thing one would see coming. The absence of effect is painful to bear.

Julia was my last hope. She hadn’t answered any of my calls, but when I showed up at her door, not only did she recognize me, she invited me into her apartment.

I’m not ready to give up.

She’ll notice if I help her with the laundry. When I attempt to ball two matching socks, they escape my hands and fall back into the basket. I try harder. After spreading a t-shirt perfectly flat on the floor, I fold each side in approximately two inches and stack the sleeves. Then, more precisely than ever, I turn it into a tidy square.

The next step worries me. It’s where things tend to unravel. Without a word, I place the shirt neatly on her pile. Julia picks up the t-shirt and shakes it out. Then, in one swift motion, she flips the sleeves in and plops the shirt on her stack while tucking its bottom under its top.

There’s no point saying goodbye. She won’t remember.

Standing on the curb outside, the traffic blurs by in both directions. It’s tempting to scream, but I wouldn’t want to alarm anyone. This disorder poses no immediate danger.

I’m not going to starve.

Whenever I eat, the fork goes in my mouth, and I can taste the food. It breaks apart as I chew. The lump presses against my throat as I swallow it down. But my plate never clears. Not by eating what’s on it. Only by scraping the food into the garbage. Hunger is never a problem, but I also never feel full.

I don’t think I’m going to die. Death is a significant event. One that people acknowledge, even if only briefly. I don’t think I could achieve that.

Decades left to live without making an impression is daunting. I’m not a ghost. I can make things happen, but nothing of importance.

The main source of distress is my incomprehension. What did I miss? What did I fail to do that led to this fading into immateriality?