

The Little Things

by Adam Sifre

When the world is quiet, all your thoughts demand attention. At the moment the world held its breath, the deep blue sky staring up at itself from the glassy lake.

George dipped his hand into the water, enjoying the cool relief. Half the valley blazed green, awash in morning light. The world wasn't silent, of course. There was birdsong, the occasional splash of fish meeting food, and Janet's labored breathing.

This used to be my favorite time of day.

The boat rocked gently and the oars quietly bumped against the rings. His fishing pole lay between his feet. Now was the best time to fish. They were always biting at this time of the day. But for the first time in twenty years, he didn't care.

"Just this once. It will be fun."

God, he used to love fishing. One week a year he left everything behind — the office, Janet's mother, the television, the same tired conversations -- all of it stayed in Jersey. One beautiful week each year spent on the lake, soaking in all the peace and solitude that God and this world had to offer. A week to forget all the small, back-breaking weights that life saddled you with when you weren't looking. The lake was perfect -- just big enough for George to lose himself in.

"I don't see why we have to start so early. The lake isn't going anywhere."

They were quite a ways out. George looked over his shoulder, unable to spot the small cabin form here. He could make out the larger houses on the west side of the valley. Smoke escaped from a few of the chimneys. The old timers still cooked their breakfast over wood fires. George's stomach rumbled in sympathy. He had two scrambled eggs for breakfast, but Janet had taken a few large forkfuls off his plate, all the while insisting she wasn't hungry. Not a breakfast person, she'd been content to pick off his plate. Again.

"I don't care about fishing. I just thought some time alone on the lake together would be nice."

Stretching again, George tried in vain to crack his back and neck. He'd been cracking knuckles, toes, back and neck since before he had hair on his pecker and now was addicted to it as sure as a women were addicted to gossip. He found no relief today, however. His fingers kept cramping up and his neck twinged whenever he tried to turn to the left. *Damned arthritis.* If they were at the cabin, George would have had Janet walk on his back. That always seemed to do the trick. Janet hated the sound of popping joints, but she empathized with his pain and she was usually a good sport about it.

"I packed a lunch, turkey and swiss."

His stomach rumbled again and he wished he'd thought to bring the sandwiches. They were back on the porch. Turkey and Swiss wrapped in wax paper.

Careful not to rock the small boat, George cautiously stood and looked down at Janet. She was on her stomach, legs hanging over the boat, the yellow sundress bunched up around her waist. Her arms wrapped around the cooler in a protective hug, bound there by fishing line; her head resting on the top. She looked like she was making sure George didn't try to steal a sandwich before lunch. He smiled but it didn't last.

No sandwiches today, he remembered. Today the cooler kept only stones cold.

Blood trickled from where the fishing wire cut into her wrists and ankles, adding itself to the small puddle in the middle of the rowboat. She moaned just the slightest bit when George manhandled her so that torso hung over the side, the heavy cooler secured to her hands and chest with fishing wire and duct tape. She'd long since lost the energy to do much more.

Tears trickled down George's face, a few splashing on the back of Janet's windbreaker.

"So what should we talk about?"

He never asked for much, and karma had obliged. George was a piece of sandstone and life an unforgiving river. Nothing terrible

ever happened, but it wore at him nonetheless -- just the tiniest bit each day. It was just the way of things, he supposed. Until one day you woke up and there was hardly nothing there.

Except fishing. And the lake. A little echo of Eden; a memory of a life he'd never live. But sweet and no less dear for it.

He grabbed Janet underneath her arms and heaved. She hardly made a splash as she slipped over the side and disappeared.

The tears came free and easy and George let them come. She deserved that much, at least.

"Some things should never be shared," he whispered.

