

Erin Shevlin

My house is haunted.

She died when I was sixteen. The impact, like the cancer, was slow and pervasive. I told myself I was dealing with it, coping, and maybe I was. I don't know why I felt like it was weakness to let my dad or younger brother see. That wasn't what she taught me, wasn't what she wanted. The hiding, that was all me.

Still, life continued to happen, upsettingly similar to how it had been before. There was no explosion, no watershed moment. I was home alone more. That was it. I don't mean to be cold, but we had prepared. It was just the little things that changed. We started eating dinner in front of the TV, something she would never allow unless there was a really important football game on. I kept growing, the grief got better, and soon I was graduating, leaving home for college like I was supposed to. Like I wanted to.

And I forgot him. I left him behind.

Four years he was here without me. Just the two of them in this house. And I didn't think twice. I'm older, it was my turn. He would have his time. It wasn't until I realized how unhappy he really was, maybe not even until I was calling 911, that I realized the full weight of what I had done.

He's getting better, I think. He's happier, I know that. All thanks to him, to the work he put in to make a better life for himself. But I think something broke in me. I am so, so terrified of losing him. I mean, all the time. I follow him around three steps behind just in case he wants to talk to me, to look at me. Is that better than when I forgot about him? I don't know. I sit in the room next to him so I can hear him breathe, cough, knock over a pencil, make all the sounds you make when you're alive. He gets up to come into the room where I am and I breathe, cough, open my computer, try to seem busy. I don't want him to know, but I know he does. And all that does is make it worse. It's a tense, unspoken game we play.

I hear his car pull into the driveway and I run to the window. I move closer to the door so I'll run into him, so he will have to run into me. I don't know how else to make sure he isn't alone.

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