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God in Small Things (Melinda Johnson)

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Photo by Dee

Cemetery

One day this winter, I saw a perfect stranger lose his glove. He walked quickly across a busy intersection where I was waiting in my car for the red light to turn green. As he neared the sidewalk on the right side of the intersection, a black glove fell out of his backpack.

He didn't see it fall. He strode briskly up the hill. My mouth opened instinctively, and I had a flashing mental image of myself leaping out of the car to shout to him. "You lost your glove! It's on the sidewalk behind you! Come back and get it!"

Then the light turned green and I drove on, impelled by the cars behind me. But I couldn't shake my concern about his glove, or my feeling that I should have told him, somehow, what had happened to it. I knew he would arrive at home, or at some other destination, and he wouldn't know what happened to his glove. Perhaps several hours would pass, even a day, before he reached into his backpack and discovered it was missing. To him, it would be gone forever.

But it isn't gone. I know where it is. I, a sentient being, know that it still exists. I know exactly what happened to it. But he doesn't.

It's a problem I can't solve. I don't know his name or where he lives. I don't know where he was going. I wouldn't even recognize him if our paths chanced to cross again. I wouldn't know he was the person I could approach with my story about what really happened to his glove. There are realities that no amount of urgency can transcend.

A lost glove is a small thing, easily replaced and then forgotten.

But this small loss stayed with me. I don't like loss. I wish it was not part of the created world. I love, and therefore, I fear loss.

Yet what kept my attention on this lost glove was not so much the reminder of my fear as the startling knowledge that to me, the glove was not lost. I saw what happened to it.

The man who owned the glove did not.

Perhaps all loss is like this, suggested that inner voice which creates moments like this one and uses them to shift my perspective. He can no longer find his glove, and he does not know what happened to it. But this does not mean the glove ceased to exist. Someone, a real person, knows where it is. The glove's existence does not depend on his knowledge of it. It is the same with death, isn't it? You can no longer see the person who has died. But Someone can. You are not the origin of life. Your knowledge is like a room without windows. What is outside the room exists, no matter how much you cannot see it.

It's true of all the parts of life we turn away from and step around. They are real. Real people are living through them, living all the way through them, moment by moment. Even death can be lived through, and when it ends, Someone knows where we are.

By Melinda Johnson

Melinda Johnson is the blog chief of The Sounding at Orthodox Christian Network and the author of Letters to Saint Lydia released by Conciliar Press in 2010. Melinda created the popular «Orthodox Writers, Readers, and Artists» series, which first appeared on her blog, Saint Lydia's Book Club, before moving to The Sounding in early 2012. The Sounding features daily posts by more than 20 Orthodox writers, exploring every aspect of our Orthodox faith at work in everyday life. Melinda earned a Master of Arts in English Literature from The College of William and Mary and worked as an editor specializing in projects for non-native English speakers before becoming a full-time writer.