



Who's Watching

by Elaine Araujo-Oliveira

He sits in front of his computer to watch the news. He barely blinks. He stares at his “altar,” eyes wide, letting the news drip into him like a slow, poisonous IV. Each headline tightens something inside him. Each panel of shouting strangers rewrites him a little more. He doesn’t notice the change, but everyone else does.

The social life he once had, borrowed from his wife, evaporates. Invitations dry up after his “honest opinions” begin detonating at gatherings, parties, and even funerals. The dead deserved peace; instead, they got his unfiltered commentary. His wife endures the stares, the whispered, “Is he okay?”—the quiet blame that somehow lands on her.

At home, he contributes nothing. The kids orbit him like cautious satellites. He doesn’t help with homework, dishes, or life. He only helps the news by watching it.

A rare invitation arrives from a not-so-close friend. His wife deletes it before he can see. She tells people he’s depressed, which is kinder than the truth: he’s become an extension of his office chair. The cushion has molded to him. The smell has, too.

His glasses get thicker. His world gets smaller. The house grows quieter around him, except for the constant hum of outrage from the screen. He believes he’s staying informed, “fighting misinformation,” though he hasn’t fought for anything real in years.

He doesn’t watch the news anymore. He just sits there, while the screen watches him fade.