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Chronic Nostalgia

Nostalgia was like a haunting phantom, a temptress I knew well. Her mellow whispers were like thick, sweet nectar to my ears, captivating me. She blankets me within the safety of recollections of a past that should have long been surrendered to the depths of my memories. My mind is veiled, my perception of the present obscured. I am chained to her, enslaved by her familiar embrace, having no choice but to remain and let all else fade into oblivion.

Sat on a white chair, my eyes glided from corner to corner, trying to occupy myself by watching the surrounding chairs and the strangers on them. I observed how some tapped their feet relentlessly against the floor or bounced their legs in a quick rhythm. Everyone was deathly quiet, yet the room was a cacophony of sounds: The rustling and crumpling noise of magazine pages being turned, the intermittent cough here and there, or the equally occasional sneeze and the rhythmic click of the clock that sat on the far end of the cold white room. The speakers in the far corner of the room kept repeating a name:

“Florence Bell... Florence Bell.” The voice seemed increasingly annoyed as it reiterated the name.

Someone must have forgotten their name, I thought amusedly. My musings were cut short by the fast approach of a tall, willowy woman, she seemed familiar, with soft eyes and long,

blonde hair. I thought she looked to be around her late 30s. She was pretty, but her beauty was shadowed by tired features and a disheveled appearance.

“Mum, didn’t you hear them call your name? I heard them all the way from the toilets.” the woman helped me up and I was forced to follow her as she clamped her clammy hands around my wrist.

She must be a little crazy, I concluded as she began dragging me. I looked towards the nurses, a pleading expression as this strangely familiar woman hauled me closer to her before we entered another, smaller white room.

The woman pulled a chair out for me and sat directly in front of me. I analyzed her every feature, her eyes, her slightly crooked nose, her thick long lashes and pointed eyebrows. Her face was long, thin and hollow. My chest hurt and I stared at her.

“Mum,” she called again, only now her voice seemed sweeter, as if she had realized something “Mum, it’s me Hannah.” I nodded, but my eyes still contemplated her before I responded.

“I know, honey, I know.” She smiled at me before turning to face the loud creak as the door behind me opened.

“Florence, Hannah.” Dr Barret’s eyes crinkled around the edges as he smiled. “So, tell me, how has my favorite patient been doing?” They both turned towards me as he sat down on the chair opposite us, a large desk separating us.

“Fine.” I felt obligated to say

“Still having very vivid memories of the past?” he asked, only this time, facing my daughter.

“Yes, she often slips in and out of it” she told him, I looked from her nervous eyes down to her pale lips as she continued to speak. I noticed her hands as she picked at the skin around her stubby nails.

A nail biter.

I looked down at my own nails.

I guess she got it from me.

“She’ll tell me and the nurse a lot of stories about when she was little.” Her voice was a soft, distant hum, like the grasshoppers in the field behind my house, Aggie and I used to lay there a lot. We pretended to be somewhere like Italy or the South of France. She’d tell me that one day she’d live there with some handsome, olive-skinned European. She told me I could come visit. I remembered her long, golden hair, how the tight ringlets fell against her shoulders. I always thought she was the prettiest person in the world. I recalled her milky blue eyes would squint against the summer sun and her skin would start to freckle around July. I remember how she called me “Flower” and how much I hated it. I wanted to be grown, just like her. I was 12 and she was 17 that summer.

I wonder how old I am now and how old that makes her.

I was cruelly brought back to a cold white room, the sterile light hanging above me was nothing like the sun.

“Mum?” a woman shook me lightly. I knew her, I knew I did. “It’s me Mum, Hannah.” I believed her, even if I didn’t remember, so I cleared my throat.

“Yes! Yes.” I nodded. I knew because her eyes were just like Aggie’s.

“Up you get,” she groaned as she helped me up, I must be old now. The thought unnerved me, I don’t remember getting old. “let’s get you home.” she smiled, leading me out of the room

into a larger room, a waiting room. Still as sterile as the one before. I followed the woman closely but stopped short when I saw a painting. The grass seemed so -- familiar.

“Aggie!” I called to her, “do you remember when we used to lay on the field behind the house and you’d tell me about Italy and the south of France? We’d stay there until Mum called us in for supper.” I smiled at the memory. She approached me slowly. She was smiling but it didn’t reach her eyes. Her hand touched my shoulder. I watched her, half expecting her to call me Flower.

“I’m not Aggie, Mum, I’m Hanna, your daughter.” My smile faded.