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In The Silence of A Memory

On a routine walking path, I opt for the clearer fork where I’m not called upon to greet leaping dogs, meet-up moms with legs like licorice dressed in black athleticwear pushing strollers and shouting, “watch out” to their spring vacationing kids pedaling bikes. I endure a mental exercise in finding calm beneath a percolating desire for a respite.

The asphalt has ended, and so do the day’s calling minutes, before my feet step onto gravel, a bumpy road that ends in innocence of the park’s spring landscape, a thicket of bleary green tips circumnavigating an open patchwork of dandelions plotted like yellowy polka dots in emerging grass. It is an evolving scenery of living things: picnic benches begging for gatherings, jungle gyms painted in primary colors waiting for the embrace of little limbs, and sand boxes corralling plastic playthings ready for small footprints.

In the distance, on the opposite side of where I stand, a narrow river strolls through a sparse forest of oaks and pines in their leafy births. The mid-day has turned its brightest, the sky, its bluest, promoting energy sent from the heavens.

I cannot find rest or ease from shifting on a seat of uneven planks of distressed wood. Distractions keep pace like any good shadow does. Interruptions like lightning bolts

spark as I home in on the intrusions—screeching little voices and scampering feet, the crackle of electricity wires surging through tall poles, the smell of new wood from the field house, damp earth, oranges, and a dog’s bark—like a great horned owl to a tiny mouse or a busy beagle to a rabbit. The disturbances have canceled the silence I have come seek.

In the wake of clouds clipping tree canopies, gusty winds shift from the west to the north, slicing through the rooted frames of the honeysuckle and jiggling the perfume of tiny white blossoms, adding sweet currents to the air. Soon, the sun draws her shades, dimming the light of the spring’s dewy sparkle.

My cheeks prickle from cooler breezes and a blooming memory in color and motion.

In the distance where the river halts by a road at the top of a T, a well-rounded woman dressed in a short black skirt hugging her curvy hips slides into the driver’s side seat of a midnight blue Catalina that is stopped at the end of the road. A stripe of ruffled white silk peeks through her matching short jacket where three large shiny buttons strain to stay closed. She plucks one key from a ring of rustling others, turns it in the ignition, causing puffs of exhaust to burst from the tailpipe then lingers before disappearing into the shifting air. She pauses, leans into the rearview mirror, and glances at her reflection before dabbing with an index finger the corners of her crimson-stained lips. Her head turns this way, then that way, giving a light touch to a chignon of champagne hair before sliding Jackie O sunglasses covering eyes blackened by eyeliner and mascara, to settle on her nose.

She reclines, exhales, and smiles.

Her stare is affixed, as if she is watching a memory she once made long ago replaying on a darkened picture window of a Cape Cod. A smile and a brushing away of the past in a single tear on her cheek returns her to the present. She backs out of the driveway, and I tag along, rushing with the blast of acceleration to a secluded corner where I sit on a leveled tree stump, anxious for more telling.

Brakes squeal and gravel pops from a slow roll of car tires as the woman parks, parallel to the ambling river. With a snap of the door handle and a shove with her elbow, she opens the car door, steps out, and chases her wayward ivory raincoat hems as the winds take it with a shift of her body to standing. Her black stilettoed heels wobble when navigating the pebbly ground, until she stops, inhales to expand her chest, exhales to relax her taut shoulders bringing her into the moment. While I wait among the weeping birches and blackberry bushes embraced by the river’s banks, a boy’s voice is carried, tucked inside the water’s ripples. She giggles in anticipation, clasps her hands to her heart in knowing, then sweeps the air with an open hand in crescendo as the softness of the grassy edge welcomes a pontoon boat. He hurriedly wiggles his naked thigh over the settled boat, and the rubber burps. The boy’s bare feet stomp overgrown weeds, then dance lightly on gravel before extending his short-sleeved arms to embrace the softness of his mother’s bent stockinged legs. They are united in sight and soul, breathing in unison as she pushes wet hair from his moist forehead revealing green eyes of color, of life. His dimples pop, and his cheeks rise in laughter while he holds tight.

He is of her.

I wipe trailing tears from my face and hold clasped hands to a heavy heart, wishing for more moments, eager to pull strands of connection to him now, here. But the vision of him, the binds of longing, the ache of loss fades into the diming backdrop.

Children scamper to their awaiting mothers as they fold picnic blankets, stuff empty juice boxes and nibbled remains in half-filled sandwich bags into their canvas totes. The electric wires hum, the dogs cease barking, and a curtain of rambling, misty fog rolls upon itself, tumbling silence into a faded vision. In the noise there was the silence of a memory.