

Daisy

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Last night, my mother visited me. The plastic crunching underneath the stale sheets of the hospital bed kept my eyes open as the sun fell asleep. There was a knock on my room's door marking the seventh hour of the night. *Come in.* I pushed down on the steel railings that guarded the sides to scoot my body, limbs quivering, preparing to deliver my confession.

Rachel, I'm gonna be honest, I have had no—

It wasn't Rachel in front of me when I finally gained consciousness of my surroundings. *Mom?* Her hair was gray with streaks of silver laced through her long locks. Her face was aged, sagging and stressed. But her eyes were the same golden orbs I'd inherited. She was wearing her favorite mauve dress she wore every Sunday decorated with florals that reached to her ankles. It used to be roomy on her waist where it now fit snug.

You look—I searched for the word—*healthy.* Her head hung as she scuttled across the tile floor to the cushioned chair in the corner covered in blue vinyl with tears at its seams. Her fingers traced the gashes from the front of the seat to the hinges of the arm rests before parking herself. She placed her hands neatly in her lap as her legs crossed in the same movement. Her face turned solemn once settled and I watched her while a past life flushed my mind.

I remember the first time we were here.

Fistfuls of lollipops and rubber gloves filled with air. I named the first one Amber after my first best friend. The nurse had let me draw on Amber's face. Dad always dressed me in bright colors for our visits. Obnoxious yellows and nauseating shades of pink—mom's favorite color.

You never liked the food.

Noodles swimming in water with a dollop of tomato paste in a styrofoam bowl. White rice shaped in a circle with microwavable orange chicken dropped on top. Dad and I always snuck in a pastry from the bakery mom most adored when we visited on Saturday mornings. When she fell asleep, I swore she'd moan to be bathed in the chocolate sauce that was drizzled on all of their deserts.

There was no privacy.

Nurses and doctors in and out as they pleased. The toilet slid from the surrounding cabinet like a pull out trash can. I had my first period there. Mom noticed a blotch of red on my crotch and called everyone out of the room. I bought my first tampon from the vending machine in the bathroom down the hall.

They finally let you go home.

A squeaky wheelchair begging for oil and a suitcase of underwear aged from the time mom was here. She was enveloped in the knitted blanket I made for her birthday with a satin scarf tied around her bare head. It was the first time in a while she'd seen daylight, her eyes squinted when the outside air touched her skin. Dad dabbed his hanky under his eyes while I pushed mom to our minivan.

It'd been so long since you were home.

Welcome banners hung from the garage door and streamers laced through the banister. The neighbors lined the sidewalk and family poured into our house. Mom met my boyfriend for the first time. The next day, she walked in on me on top of my boyfriend. She didn't knock and that night, I broke up with him.

I remember when you had to go back.

Repacking dusty bags and meal prepping dinners for the week. This second time was longer than a week. I curled up in mom's lap as we drove to the place I'd begun to call her prison. The top she would soon be dressed out of was soiled in my tears.

You said it was getting better.

Rising graphs and doctor's notes I took as good news. The everyday headaches and frequent panic attacks every time my phone rang. My university was only 10 minutes from the hospital. I took the distance from her over every full ride. My weekends—no, every second was consumed by Daisy.

There was no time.

One week and attorneys and papers and marriage licenses. Unsealed promises that had all the doubt and uncertainty and fear. The ceremony was in mom's hospital room. Her and dad were our witnesses. The honeymoon was spent at her bedside and I cried every second of it.

They finally let you go.

Flat lines and cold skin. I held her hand when she left and I squeezed when I knew she was gone. Three minutes before, I'd told mom I was pregnant. She always wanted to be a grandma. The three minutes following mom's departure, I prayed she'd become everything you were. And then I said goodbye.

Another knock ricocheted off my room door. I peered at the familiar figure in the corner before speaking, soaking in her presence. "Come in." I inhaled deeply and through my mouth, letting it all out.

"Violet, your family is here to see you," Rachel entered, inviting the artificial light in and holding the door open to the hallway.

"Mama!" Daisy hopped into the room, jumping up onto my bed and wrapping me in her arms. My cheek pressed against the top of her head as she nuzzled into my chest. The warmth of her body radiated to my heart, making me squeeze her even more. I pushed her back to take in her face and those golden orbs of hers.

"Your hair hasn't grown back?" she asked in her sweet voice that squeaked

when she asked a question.

“I told her it would take time,” dad stood behind Daisy, clutching her shoulders over my hands. I sent him a soft smile, mouthing thank you.

“I’m going to need some of your magic pixie dust and then maybe, just maybe, my hair will grow back just as beautiful as yours,” I ran my hands through her dark waves, which felt like silk on my fingertips. From the corner of my vision, a blur of a body shifted. Mom moved behind the clump of people gathered around my bed. Daisy was speaking and dad was talking, but all I could do was watch her leave. When she reached the door, passing Rachel, she looked out into the room. She searched the area before catching my gaze. *I love you.*

A soft smile rose on her face. And she walked out of the room.

“Did you sleep alright honey?” dad asked, breaking me from my trance with the door. A pressure built in my throat but no tears gathered in my eyes. I swallowed the lump, leaving last night behind.

“I dreamt of Daisy,” I said, briefly meeting his eyes before looking down at my child curled up in my lap. I pet her hair, brushing my icy hands against her face, allowing them to rest there.