

Remember Me

In the psychiatric unit, I keep asking to speak to you, and the nurse keeps telling me that you are no longer alive. I keep asking to speak to my sister, and the nurse tells me that I don't have a sister, I never had a sister, and I should stop asking to speak to my sister. I ask to speak to my brother. I ask to speak to my father. The nurse tells me my father was just here yesterday and I refused to speak to him. *Remember? There's your father. That man over there. See him? In the corner, he's waiting to talk to you.* When I see him, I ask to speak to you, and he tells me you are no longer alive. I keep asking to speak to my sister, and he tells me slowly, calmly, I don't have a sister, I never had a sister, and I should stop asking to speak to my sister. I ask to speak to my brother. I ask to speak to my father. The man tells me he is my father. I ask him to speak to you. He keeps telling me that you are no longer alive until I ask to speak to my brother. The nurse tells me that my brother was here two days ago and I refused to speak to him because of what he was telling me about you. *Your brother will be here tomorrow*, she says. Now is tomorrow. *There's your brother. That man over there? See him? Go to him.* Waiting in the hall, he's ready to talk to me. When I ask to speak to you, he says the police never found you inside the rustic bedroom where we're young and poor, holding each other in the dark, our nakedness illuminated by moonlight.

A pond stretching over soft green grasses, where in mossy water we swim with children whose faces resemble our own. A window over the kitchen sink overlooking the woods like a fairytale, beyond the woods and the frozen pond, the snow of distant mountains edging sky in the psychiatric unit, where you keep asking to speak to your mother, and the nurse keeps telling you your mother is no longer alive. You keep asking to speak to your sister, and the nurse tells you that you don't have a sister, you never had a sister, you should stop asking to speak to your sister. You ask to speak to your brother. You ask to speak to your father. The nurse tells you that your father was just here yesterday and you refused to speak to him. *Remember? There's your father. That man over there. See him?* In the corner, he's waiting to talk to you. When you see him, you ask to speak to your mother, and he tells you that your mother is no longer alive. You keep asking to speak to your sister, and he tells you slowly, calmly, you don't have a sister, you never had a sister, and you should stop asking to speak to your sister. You ask to speak to your brother. You ask to speak to your father. The man tells you that he is your father. You ask him

to speak to your mother. He keeps telling you that your mother is no longer alive until you ask to speak to your brother. The nurse tells you that your brother was here two days ago and you refused to speak to him because of what he was telling you about your father. *Your brother will be here tomorrow*, she says. Now is tomorrow. *There's your brother. That man over there. See him? Go to him.* Waiting in the hall, he's ready to talk to you. When you ask to speak to your father, your brother says your father has been telling lies about our first pets, two terriers, basking in the glow of hearth light, near a window framing misty morning.

In the mist called time, a grandfather clock with a large golden pendulum and heavy gleaming weights, the faces of the sun and the moon, the stars and the planets, moving with the clock's hands. Through the mist, I see our great-grandmother's day, when our family's houses were built to last, the pine floors women swept, hewn by the callused hands of fathers. Men had rough hands from building cradles and coffins. After a house was built, keeping the inside clean was women's work. Women had to keep house or else the house would go away. In order for a girl to become a woman, she had to learn of the body and its mysteries by caring for the sick in the sickroom and the pregnant in rooms of waiting. She nursed the newly born and the dying. Girls were trained to wash linens and to wash bodies, to sew curtains, to cook, to make beds and to scrub and polish and dust and varnish. Boys went with men to work fields. Their dreams scattered like cottonwood seeds in summer.

Staring at the cottonwood seeds drifting outside the windows of the psychiatric unit, she keeps asking to speak to her father about the year of our wedding, the house we bought with borrowed money, and the doctor keeps telling her that her father is no longer alive. She keeps asking to speak to her sister, and the nurse tells her that she doesn't have a sister, she never had a sister, she should stop asking to speak to her sister. She asks to speak to her brother. She asks to speak to her father. The nurse tells her that her father was just here yesterday and she refused to speak to him. Remember? There's her father. That man over there. See him? In the corner, he's waiting to talk to her. When she sees him, she asks to speak to her father, and he tells her her father is no longer alive. She keeps asking to speak to her sister, and he tells her slowly, calmly, *You don't have a sister, you never had a sister, and you should stop asking to speak to your sister.* She asks to speak to her brother. She asks to speak to her father. The man tells her that he is her father. She asks him to speak to her brother. He keeps telling her that her brother is no longer alive until she asks to speak to her father. The nurse tells her that her brother was here two days ago and she refused to speak to him because of what he was telling her about her father. *Your brother will be here tomorrow*, she says. Now is tomorrow. There's her brother. That man over there. *Go to him, waiting in the hall.* When she asks to speak to her father, he says, *See him?*

After the riot in the violent ward, she is one of the shirtless women rejoicing bullet holes into an American flag because they have realized there never was an America like the America that they were taught to believe in. When they visited the graves of soldiers to understand why, their grandmothers said it was impolite and unamerican to mention to girls who didn't know their fathers were shadows.

In the shadow of her father, in the psychiatric unit, the shadow of her mother keeps asking to speak to his sister, and the nurse keeps telling them his sister is no longer alive. Her father keeps asking to speak to his sister, and the nurse tells him that he doesn't have a sister, he never had a sister, he should stop asking to speak to his sister. He asks to speak to his brother. He asks to speak to his father. The nurse tells him his father was just here yesterday and he refused to speak to him. *Remember? There's your father. That man over there. See him? In the corner, he's waiting to talk to you.* When he sees him, he asks to speak to his sister, and the man tells him his sister is no longer alive. He keeps asking to speak to his sister, and the nurses tell him slowly, calmly, he doesn't have a sister, he never had a sister, and he should stop asking to speak to his sister. He asks to speak to his brother. He asks to speak to his father. The man tells him that he is his father. He asks the man to speak to his sister. The man keeps telling him that his sister is no longer alive until he asks to speak to his brother. The nurse tells him that his brother was here two days ago and he refused to speak to him because of what his brother was telling him about his sister. *Your brother will be here tomorrow,* she says. *Now is tomorrow. There's your brother. That man over there. See him? Go to him. Waiting in the hall, he's ready to talk to you.* When he asks to speak to his sister, his brother says, *Remember me.*