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The Last Fairy Tale

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The Last Fairy Tale

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The Last Fairy Tale

Plastic Blades

Underwater. The sun is a hazy golden orb far from reach. If you swim down, it's quicker that way. Every thing is circular. Swim down far enough and you will be flying among the clouds. It's okay though. You can still breathe in the water. Air. Water. It's all the same.

I'm flying through the sky when Chris wakes me up. Dressed and downstairs with a bowl of cereal and a glass of chocolate milk. Channel surfing through the morning news, I finally settle on C-SPAN where some no name reporter is asking some grey-haired White House correspondent idiotic questions. After turning the volume up, I plug in the coffee maker for Chris. The morning sun glares through the window over the sink and I turn on the garbage disposal. When Chris walks into the kitchen I'm dropping freeze dried marshmallows into the churning disposal. Clovers, pots of gold, rainbows, and red balloons. Supposedly the blades are made of plastic, but I can't help but wonder if it would eat my finger if I stuck it in the hole. I start to stick my spoon down the drain. Just to see what would happen, when Chris leans over me and turns the disposal off.

"You know you aren't supposed to run that with the water off. Did you remember to take your medicine today?"

"Yes."

He stares at me. I hope he hasn't been counting my pills lately. I knew I should have flushed them. Take note, and don't forget again.

Sonata No. 11

The bathroom reeks of smoldering hair and skin. I stare at the girl in the mirror, and her blue eyes peer back at me from an oval face framed with brown hair. Sandpaper tears run down our faces. Mozart blasts from the portable stereo perched on the bathtub ledge and dances around the small room, bouncing off the tiles. The stereo sits next to a half empty bottle of wine. Chris is outside, pounding on the door, shouting my name. Press down and count to fifteen. One Mississippi, two Mississippi...

Lift the curling iron from your arm, leaving behind a searing red line. Close your eyes and pick a new spot. Wash, rinse, repeat. The mirror girl mimics me, but everything she does is backwards. I hear Chris fiddle with the door knob, but the lock holds. Then he is gone. By the time the next sonata begins to play he is back and removing the knob. He pushes through the door and grabs the curling iron away from me, pulling the cord from the plug at the same time. He drops the appliance on the floor and as it bounces on the tile he leads me out of the bathroom. Flecks of burnt flesh cling to the curling iron. The girl in the mirror is gone, and I can't remember why I was in there.

Chris is on the phone. I can hear him talking frantically. Sitting on the floor next to the bed, I pull some gauze from the cabinet of the side table. On the surface of the polished cherry wood table is a stone jar with 'Hopes and

Dreams' engraved on the front. It was a birthday present from Chris after we got engaged, back when I was sure that he would save me. That he would be my prince. That we would live happily ever after. I take it down and place it in front of me. I keep antibiotic ointment and first aid cream in that jar. I finish dressing my burns and Chris walks into the room. He runs his hand through his short dark hair and tells me that we are going for a drive.

Road to Hell

He looks at me and reaches over the console to touch my wrist. The scars on my arm are a background for the angry welts and burns. I withdraw from his light touch; pull down my coat sleeve, and he notices that I seem to shrink into the grey upholstery of the passenger seat. His eyes fill with pain as we drive into the hospital parking lot, my forest green duffel on the back seat.

"I'm not doing this to be mean. I worry about you."

"Just so you know, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I hope you enjoy the trip."

"Isabelle," he exhales as he says my name. His mouth gapes open like a fish's but he doesn't say anything further. He hasn't called me anything but Izzie for years.

The hospital waiting room is a sickly pea green. Chris scratches away at a clipboard, filling out the entrance forms. I stare at an ant crawling across the grey carpet. I lean forward and Chris momentarily forgets the paperwork as he watches me pick up the tiny insect. I beam up at him and feel the corners of my eyes crinkle as I give him a toothy grin. Exposing my crooked lower teeth as I bring my thumb and index finger together.

"Did you hear that?"

"Hear what, Izzie?"

"I made him scream," I reply as I wipe my fingers on the beige chair I was occupying and Chris goes back to his paperwork.

Oddity

Have you ever had a dream so weird, so bizarre, that it could only have been real? I don't know who the man with the grey eyes is. I can never remember the rest of his face, only those haunting grey eyes. I wish I knew who he was. Most nights I dream about him, he is trying to kill me. I tried to tell Chris about my dreams once, before we were engaged. But I couldn't make the words come out. Instead, we discussed the weather and my coat.

It's beautiful out, he said. So why do you wear a coat? It's odd.

"My coat has nothing to do with the weather," I replied. It's the odd things that keep people from looking too closely. If they don't look, they can't get close. And there's no risk of getting hurt.

He thought for a moment. But if there's no risk of pain, then there's no hope for love.

Apparently he thought I was odd. However, three weeks later he proposed to me and I stopped wearing my coat when it was nice out.

Swallowed Alive

The ward has long cavernous hallways. I worry that I'm going to be

swallowed alive here, and the only one who will know is me. The orderly walking next to me is yapping on about something, but I have bigger concerns right now. I have to watch the hallways. A girl with a ratty blanket wrapped around her shoulders traipses around, dancing from doorway to doorway, staring at me. The blanket, a filthy mauve color, drags along on the floor behind her. We can hear someone scream at the end of the hallway, the sound bounces off the plaster walls and echoes on the tile floor. The girl grins at me and skips off. This place is going to drive me insane.

Ward E

Pine Valley Hospital. Ward E. The women's psychiatric ward. Exit signs hang over locked doors, over filthy windows. Fake plants and cheerful colors. A pleasant prison. The orderlies wear blue scrubs and the nurses wear purple. Most of the walls are a pale pink, like you would paint a nursery. The whole scene looks as if an Easter egg threw up all over the ward.

The plastic vegetation tries to obscure the fact that the windows are bound by iron. Even the dirt for the tropical plants is fake; the only thing real is the baskets they sit in. The plants are something that could never exist, they are as if something grown from a magic bean. Glass isn't solid. I read that somewhere. Or maybe it was on TV, I don't remember. Hundreds of years from now that glass in the windows will have melted down, oozing and covering the window sills. Yet those bars will still be there, rust ridden, yes, but still there.

None of the furniture in the recreation room matches. There are three couches, two arm chairs, and four various tables. It all looks like something that came from Goodwill or somewhere similar for the same low price. Most of the chairs are a variation of some sort of floral pattern. One couch has been worn and battered almost to the point where it is a floral lump in the middle of the floor.

There are twenty-three of us living here at the moment. There is a range in ages as well as in diagnosis. No one is supposed to know theirs, but some are much easier to figure out than others. You can tell who the anorexic ones are, the schizophrenic ones, or the mentally deficient ones. It's constantly loud here. But it's not the good background loud that I prefer. It's more of a hectic loud. A busy loud. It makes my thoughts race and I wish I were a kid again. Mom and Dad fought a lot. It was a hectic loud. My sister and I used to make a fort and hide until everything was over. We had her little record player in there with us. We would play Mozart.

Snow White

"Do you think there's such a thing as happily ever after?" She doesn't even bother looking at me. Her almost black hair is blocking her face from my view.

"I used to. Maybe it's still out there. Who knows?" I watch as she stares out the window. I unpack my duffle and gently place the clothes Chris folded for me in a dresser drawer. Thinking of what he said when he handed me my duffle and turned me over to the orderly.

This is only for a little while. I'll come and visit every week. You need more help than I can offer you. Please don't be mad. I love you. He kissed my

forehead and watched as I was led away.

I wake up to Chris kissing my forehead; he's standing over me and brushing the hair from my face. The light rain falling outside taps gently on the sliding door to the balcony. The blue ocean rocks and the yellow sand blows in the wind. We're in the Bahamas and tomorrow is the last day of our honeymoon. My mouth tastes like sleep and our bed smells like sex. He kisses me on the mouth and while my tongue dances with his, I pull him back into the mess of covers. At that moment time stops, and for the rest of the day we stay in bed.

Sometimes I can't tell reality from the web of fairy tales people spin around me. The people here can't be real. And I swear there are ghosts in the halls at night. Footsteps and giggling echo up and down the corridors. It's at night that I know that there is no prince. No white horse. The girl I share a room with is seventeen. On her third suicide attempt her parents locked her up. She's failed at everything. And I kind of pity her; she couldn't even kill herself right. I wonder what her name is. She sleeps like Snow White in her glass coffin, with her dark hair laid out on a white pillow. Waiting for happiness to ride up and take her away.

Prince

Chris came home from work one night right after my mother died to find me locked in our bedroom with a bottle of cheap vodka in my hand and a knife from the kitchen in the other. When I told him the man with the grey eyes was in the house, he searched every room. When he found nothing in his search, he didn't believe me and I was promptly lectured about being drunk. He loves me, but he never understood. He shouldn't have been late that night.

I said something along the lines that it was better to be a drunk than to sleep with my secretary and cheat on my wife. I found out later that his secretary was actually a man named Mitch. But at the time I didn't know any better, and Chris didn't like my accusation too much. I took a blanket and my bottle and slept in his car that night. He drove a Mustang then. The next day my sister said I should go easy on him. She's worried that I'm going to drive him away like Mom chased away Dad. She also suggested that I stop drinking. She also thought we should do something nice for Mom, as her birthday was coming up soon and neither one of us had been good daughters lately. I hung up the phone and haven't talked to her since.

Best Price Around

"Isabelle Myers." The nurse stands behind me. I ignore her. To my left I can hear the girl with the blanket giggle. "Isabelle Myers."

"What?" I lean my head back, resting it at the top of the floral couch that probably came from Goodwill. The nurse looks irritated and hands me a tiny paper cup from a wooden tray she's carrying. I used to put ketchup in cups like this at Wendy's. Now I want French fries. I look at the colorful pills rolling around in the cup. Green, blue, yellow. "What's this?"

"Your pills. Do you need water to take them?" She gives me a half assed smile and starts to offer me a small plastic cup of water.

"No I don't need water. I'm not taking them until I know what they are."

"Now, Isabelle. The medication is on your chart. You can discuss this with your doctor later. Take the pills." Her fake smile is gone and her green eyes flat with indifference.

I put the pills in my mouth. Ignoring the bitter medicine taste I stash them under my tongue and fake swallowing. The nurse continues to stare at me with those flat eyes until I grin at her and open my mouth. I consider asking her to find me some French fries, but the pills would have fallen out of my mouth, and the jig would have been up. Once she walks away to harass someone else, I slip the pills from my mouth and into the seat cushion of the couch.

The girl with the blanket walks up to me and lies down on the couch. Lies down on me. Her filthy, dark blonde hair spreads out on my lap like a skirt. A greasy blonde skirt.

"I saw that, Ms. Eesabelle" She grins a crooked smile up at me; she hisses the first part of my name like a snake. Suddenly she sits up and looks serious, the sing-song tone gone from her voice. "I'll give you two cigarettes for each pill. You won't get a better price anywhere else."

I eye her to figure out if she's serious or not. She slips six cigarettes from her pocket and sets them on the couch. I slip my hand into the cushion and pull out the three pills. She stashes them in her pocket and nods to me.

"It was nice doing business with you, Eesabelle. I'm Margie." And with that she scurries off.

Night

I don't sleep at night. Bad things can happen in that darkness, so it's best to stay awake and keep a look out. I used to have Chris to help keep me safe at night. I would be curled up next to him, his arm slung haphazardly around my waist. I'd press my cheek against his chest. It's always been that way since the first night.

But at Pine Valley they do room checks after lights out. If they find you awake they give you a shot to make you sleep. Snow White warned me, and Margie told me all she knows about them. She says that they give her the shot and then she wakes up with cigarette burns or missing underwear. One morning she woke up pregnant. Margie is a schizophrenic. While she might not be the most accurate source for information, she runs her little hobby out of her room. Crazy, but a decent business woman. Apparently she used to be a lawyer before she was diagnosed. Her prices are high, and her demands are odd, but she's always willing to trade pills for things she wants. Nail polish, cigarettes, cookies. If you want pills, you go to her. Everyone knows, but no one says a word. I suspect Snow White has visited Margie's stash.

Bird

I love the feeling after a cigarette. The nicotine soaring through your blood. However, I hate the way my mouth tastes after. One thing Chris never understood is why I smoked anyway. Light up. Inhale. Exhale. Repeat until the glowing tip is introduced to the filter. Perhaps it's stupid, but every cigarette brought me one step closer to cancer. Closer to death. Smoking and drinking were the only way I knew how to kill myself. They were the only ways that I actually had the guts to follow through with. They have a porch for us. It's right

off the main room, the 'Recreation Room'. I used to be able to kill myself damn where I pleased. Now I get to kill myself in this tidy little cage. There's a rocking chair and a bench. The bench is for us. Implanted in the middle of the bench is a dented metal ashtray overflowing with cigarette butts. Every time I'm out there I think about jumping the fence. I wonder if I could fly away. I wonder if I could become a bird and break free of this cage.

At Pine Valley, you aren't allowed to have lighters or matches. Patients who have been labeled as 'self destructive', like me, must be monitored at all times. They check on you as you watch TV, they make sure you eat, they follow you into the bathroom, they check on you every half hour at night, they light your cigarettes. Kind of ironic actually. I'm not allowed to do anything alone, to the extent that they watch me slowly die.

Sometimes I feel as if I'm about to float away. Walking through the mostly empty corridors of the ward, I noticed that they opened the windows today. Sunlight that would normally be blocked out because of the excessive filth on the glass was finally able to stream through the open windows. I could only put my arm through the bars before an orderly noticed me and shooed me away from the window. I wonder what ocean I would have ended up in.

Butterflies

"Evil and sin come in the form of butterflies."

"What?" We are sitting in the recreation room. The old catatonic woman sits like a grasshopper in a navy armchair, the fabric worn almost to the stuffing. Some of the other patients are positioning her in a rather rude manner and laughing hysterically when she stays that way. Eventually the orderlies will shuffle over to chase them away and put her back into a normal sitting arrangement.

"Evil and sin come in the form of butterflies. The variations of butterflies are the different evils and sins of the world. Will you look out for the butterflies?"

"I will." The television blares in the background. Some cartoon that two patients are screaming and clapping at.

"Don't let them get you. Beware of sin and evil. Be---"

"Isabelle, it's time to meet with Dr. Branson." The short blonde orderly beckons me from her windowed office. I stand up and walk towards the orderly as, keys jingling, she steps out of the office to escort me to the therapist. I really should learn her name, but I honestly don't care that much.

"Stay away from the butterflies..." Margie curls up under the ragged blanket, hiding her eyes with her left hand.

The Joke

He actually wants me to say something. This is stupid. I hate him. His bald head reflects the florescent lights back at me. Blinding me. Instead I focus on the patch of fraying carpet at my feet.

"Well, Isabelle. Our time is almost up today, is there anything you want to say?"

Silence. I guess I should say something.

"I heard a joke on TV the other day."

He stares. His round form fills the oversized desk chair he sits in, and whenever he shifts his weight, it creaks like it's about to collapse. I ignore him and continue.

"A boy is in an elevator with a woman. He starts sniffing the air. Then he turns to her and asks a question. 'Can I smell your feet?' he asks. The woman looks bewildered. 'No you may not. Why would you even ask such a thing?' she says. Then he says, 'Oh. Then it must be you---'"

"Isabelle. There's no need to finish. Margie told me that joke yesterday. There's no need for such vulgarity, and obviously the television needs to be supervised more closely." He pauses and stares at me. "Do you want to talk about anything else? How have your dreams been since you got here?"

Now it's my turn to stare. Shifting my eyes to the framed pictures he has on his desk, I stay silent. He has two kids and a skinny brunette wife. One of the kids plays baseball. The other is posed in front of a piano. I don't know why he faces the pictures away from his side of the desk. Maybe he just likes to show off how normal he is or something. I bet he drives an SUV.

Crazy

We are all just living life through a string of softly spoken lies. Chris comes to visit me twice a week. He brought his sister once, but she never came back. Which is fine with me, I never liked her much anyway. I found out later that she was trying to get him to divorce me. Something about me being crazy was creating a bad environment for him. Like I was doing it on purpose.

He asks me stupid things. Like if I've been taking my medicine, how the other patients are, where I want to go when I get out of here. No. Crazy. I don't know. But of course I can't tell him that. Instead I start to blabber about how I want to go to Colorado when I get out. I don't know why. I really have no desire to go anywhere near Colorado. It was just the first place that came to mind. Maybe I really am crazy. Instead I tell him that I've gotten better about medication. That the other patients are a bit odd, and sometimes share stories about who stole whose jell-o at lunch a few days ago, or which orderly has a date for the upcoming weekend. And of course Colorado. Of all places.

His visits start to blur into monotony. He comes every Tuesday and Thursday. When the visits first started, I tried to ignore him. It was his fault I was there in the first place. He never should have left me. But he wasn't trying to shove me off on someone else. If he had been he wouldn't have come to visit me, he wouldn't have called me. Sometimes he brings me stuff, sometimes he doesn't. I don't mind, it's nice to have someone who isn't female or a shrink around. It's nice to have him around.

The ward has a room where we can shower or take a bath. It reminds me of a giant locker room, only without the lockers. Showers line the back and left wall and in the middle of the room sit five large, Victorian style bathtubs. The tubs are old, their claw feet clinging to the yellowing tile. One time when I took a bath here, I tried to sink down. To get to the sky. Unlike the ocean, you can't breathe the bath water. You only get a mouthful of soapy water. The bitter, clean taste made me gag and cough. The nurse looked up from her magazine and Snow White peeked out from behind a shower curtain. I've only taken showers since.

Dr. Branson once asked me why I thought I could breathe water. He asked if I knew the difference between dreams and reality. I told him I did. It wasn't a complete lie.

Rapunzel

Mostly I sit in the corner and ignore everyone. The nurses get mad at me because I steal their pens and draw on the floor. They say something about creating more work for everyone, but I'm not really listening. One nurse has decided to 'help' me quit smoking. She's taken away most of the cigarettes that I got from Margie. Since the nurse has taken to confiscating my cigarettes, Margie has stopped bothering to buy my pills, so now I take them sometimes. She's afraid the cigarettes will link her back to the pills and her little hobby will be discovered. The nurse, maybe her name is Cara, is young. She reminds me of Rapunzel. She braids her long hair and then pulls it back into a bun. I want to ask her to let down her hair. I want to know if it will reach the ground from one of the windows. We are on the fourth floor. Maybe if she leaves it out the window, a prince will come along and take her out of the ward. I don't understand how she could work here. Most of us patients can't stand living here, but we have no choice in the matter. The other patients say that she's new to the profession and some of the more normal ones like to act extra crazy around her. I think she is on to their plan, though. She told me once that she had worked at a hospital before this one. Whatever, I count the minutes on the clock and wonder about her hair.

I wonder if I still have a job. Probably not. I haven't been going for the past several weeks. I was a waitress. And now I'm here in the hospital. I wonder if they know where I am or if they just fired me. They probably fired me. I wasn't very good at it, and showing up drunk a few times doesn't bode well. It's surprisingly easy to forget someone who is never there. They say absence makes the heart grow fonder, but that's mostly bull shit.

I count the minutes and the days. I've been here for three weeks already. I pray that I'm not turning into a lifer like Margie or one of the people that have been stashed away like Snow White. I never did learn her name.

Take Note, Don't Forget

"I hear that you are quitting smoking. I'm proud of you." Chris looks at me. It's Tuesday. The first visit this week. This time he has brought me a Hershey's bar and a Weekly World News. I'm hopelessly addicted to trashy and ridiculous tabloids. I wonder what zany antics Bat Boy is up to this week. Maybe I'll leave it in the recreation room. You know, just to see what happens. These crazies will believe almost anything. Margie especially, and she's delusional enough to begin with.

"Cara is making me. You asked her to, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't ask anyone to do anything. And who is Cara?"

"Cara. The nurse with the long blonde hair. She's making me." Please let her be real. Please don't let everyone else's craziness be rubbing off on me. For a moment I start to panic. What if I made her up? I don't want to be here for life.

"Do you mean Karla? She's the one who told me you were progressing

with that. She says that she's proud of you, and so am I."

Oh. I've been calling her the wrong name. The good news is that I'm not hallucinating. She's never once bothered to correct me. Why wouldn't she want someone to get her name right? Take note and don't forget.

Something of Value

We buried Mom five miles away in the woods. She wanted her ashes spread over the ocean, but I didn't want her sinking and watching me from the sky. She can't see me from three feet under the earth. Anyway, the only place she has to go now is China.

I went to visit her shortly after, as a way to apologize. But I'm worried that she isn't there anymore. I wonder if she left because she was mad at me. Or maybe someone with a metal detector thought that they found something of value. Well the joke is on them. They just found my mother.

They found Snow White in the bathroom one night. I heard her get up to leave, but I spent the rest of the night running away from the man with the grey eyes. Rumor has it that she overdosed. Margie denies all involvement, but her little store has been rattled out and she is required to comply with random room searches. Never once did I see Snow White have a visitor. Sometimes she got a phone call, but she always was more upset afterwards. I almost suggested that someone kiss her, Snow White wasn't dead, just sleeping. Hopefully now her parents will visit her. Hopefully they hadn't stashed her away for so long that they forgot about her. I found out her name when I heard the news. Her name was Leslie. And her happy ending never came.

Happy Ending

Summer came and went while she watched out the windows. She ceased taking the array of pills prescribed to her shortly after she started; instead she dropped them through the wire of the smoking porch whenever the nurse wasn't looking. Maybe they melted away, maybe the birds ate them. She never knew. After Leslie died, she shared her room with someone new. An anorexic girl who threw Margie's blanket over the fence on the porch. It took three orderlies to keep Margie from going over the fence after it. But maybe she just wanted to become a bird and fly out of this place. Izzie started to talk at her appointments. She stopped doodling on the floor. She sat with other patients. At a glance, she was recovered.

She was released as an outpatient in early October. She went back to work, and stopped starting her shift drunk. She was grateful to Chris, who had told them she was visiting her parents in Colorado. Never mind that her mother was dead and her father had walked out a long time ago. To say she magically got better would be a lie. Sometimes she wondered what happened to Karla or Margie, but more often than not, her thoughts would drift away from them as quickly as she thought of them. Three months later, Chris woke up to find her missing from bed. She was in the garage, the car still running and an empty bottle of rum on the concrete floor.

The funeral was short. Few people came, Izzie's sister and a few people from the restaurant. The priest said a few words before he handed Izzie back

over to Chris in a tiny wooden box. The mahogany cube with gold trim sat on the passenger seat of their Saturn. His Saturn. He took her to a nearby river and spread the ashes on the glass surface, and watched as the smooth river swept her away to the ocean. Soon she would be among the clouds. He smiled as he put the empty box back in the car. It's what she would have wanted.

She had left Pine Valley Hospital as she entered it. With no prince on a white horse, with no magic beans, and without a happy ending. Chris still loved her, yes. And yes, he remained loyal to her until the day she killed herself. But, he eventually moved on and became someone else's prince. Izzie was dead. Now he has a framed picture of a wife and kid sitting on his desk. The picture faces out.

ERIC CANZANO

Attachment

Soil, settled firm and content and
Hardened with assurance,
Nestles close to a flower's roots.
Cruel Circumstance,
Indifferent Circumstance,
Inevitably falls on the flower,
Wrenching its passionate body,
With petals streaked with embers of the fiery sun,
Rich with color's caress and wind's stroke,
Forever from its life source.
Soil lingers, thrown askew by upheaval,
Scattered and dug loose, cast out of native land
By abrupt absence of its labored fruition
That lay, from forces ignorant,
Naked and lifeless.
Chance of soothing rain
Mend the fragments to the earth.
Only this liquid grace will herald
Another sprout, another chute birthed
In the midst of decay,
Though it too be cast out
And soil begin its torment again.
What once be undoubtedly solid
In an instant, meet change.