

Date in Mind

Saturday, June 10th, 2024, 10:00 pm. New York.

They had never even seen the car coming. Bella and Charlie had left the restaurant. They were eager, and wanted to tell Bella's mom the good news. They were engaged, happy. The snow had poured too much. Charlie had too much wine. Bella drove. The driver, drunk off whiskey, slid over the median. The driver's red truck swerved in and out of the yellow line. The black car drove through the snow. The truck only had hit the driver side. Bella's head cracking through the glass on the headlight of the truck who hit them. Glass shattered encasing them. The airbags didn't deploy. The car and truck spinned in circles on the icy road until they struck a tall oak tree. The drunk survived. Charlie had a broken arm and whiplash. Bella would be rushed by a helicopter to get to the hospital in time. There would be a lot of blood and hours of surgery. Her surgery took place in St. Joseph's. Many of her bones in her body for the most part remained intact. Her brain wouldn't be so lucky. She would eventually be transferred to the Psychiatry department. The Psychologist, Dr. Dale Nahnsen, would be assisting Bella in restoring her memory.

Tuesday, August 24, 2024, 10 am. St. Joseph's.

"Bella, I am going to hypnotize you, ok? When I snap my fingers, you will fall asleep. When I snap them again, you will return to the night of your accident. I want you to tell me everything you can possibly remember. When I snap again you will wake." The old Psychologist explained this in their padded room. He rubbed his temple, and snapped his fingers, once, then, twice.

“Lipstick can go outside the lines, right?”

I took my ruby red lipstick and while looking in my small makeup mirror, smothered my face with it. It was Saturday, June 10th, 2024, and I wanted to look the best for my date. I think it was a date. I know I'm in my New York apartment, but it doesn't seem all there. I see my mirror and make up, but the rest feels grey and foggy. I remember the brush.

I grabbed a little pink brush and started to rip through my strawberry blonde hair.

“Mama always said I never brushed my hair enough.”

The brush fell, it seemed to disappear from sight. I sighed, then took a blue scrunchie, or maybe a red one. I think I was doing my hair. I looked at the mirror again.

“Perfect!”

I started to walk around my apartment, drifting, floating, it seemed so large. The bookshelves stood so tall compared to me. A framed paper hung on the burgundy wall and my eyes wandered over the words.

“Cum Laude...”

The psychologist leaned forward in his chair, gripping his bony knees in anticipation for her remembrance.

Her head fell forward, then she went back into hypnotic spell. That memory was lost.

I looked out my huge glass windows. The street lamps were lit but there was just movement and color. It was probably busy outside. People are always watching. Maybe some of them could see me. Maybe some knew me, my full name.

“Which is?” the psychologist asked.

Bella shook her head. “Then I saw a car.”

A black car shining its lights through my apartment. A man. Black hair. With Sunflowers. He peered in the window. I hid behind my couch, embarrassed. The man laughed. Ding Dong. I remember staring at the gold round door knob, thinking about how maybe this would be a big night for me, maybe. I took a deep breath and swung the door open.

The man smiled broadly, showing a little dimple on his right cheek. “Hi Bella.”

I remember I looked at him from head to toe. Rich velvet suit, or maybe a dress. I do remember his amber eyes that stared in anticipation.

“Hi, Charlie.”

He took my hand, kissed it tenderly and said, “You look ravishing.”

“You remember Charles?” the Psychologist asked, lifting an eyebrow.

“Sssssh, you’re not listening to the story.” Bella spat. The psychologist sighed, and raised his hand motioning her to continue.

The restaurant, packed with bodies, with eager people, wanting to eat. Maybe Saturday was date night. We walked straight in and the hostess immediately gasped and rushed us to our table.

“Well don’t you know who your date is? He is a famous...” the psychologist started to project, but Bella continued with her hypnotized story.

“What a quick wait!” I exclaimed.

“Anything for the best.” Charlie whispered, clutching my hand.

I remember that Charlie moved the cushioned chair away from the table and I sat. As Charlie’s back hit the chair, the waiter came with a large bottle of Pinot Noir.

I downed the wine glass, and licked my lips, “I like how wine feels on my face.”

Charlie smiled, revealing his dimple, and dragged his pointer finger over the white table cloth to my hand. His hand grasped mine and he continued to move his finger in a circular motion on my wrist.

“Did I mention how marvelous you look?”

“Can we get chicken wings?”

The waiter brought us a lot. Steak. Mozzarella sticks. Creme Brulee. The shiny white plates underneath the food were touching edge to edge, covering the maroon tablecloth. It all seemed to merge together.

“Will there be anything else?” the waiter hesitantly asked.

“This is marvelous. Thank you.” Charlie spoke.

The waiters left. Charlie turned to me. There was barbecue sauce. I remember him being nervous. I noticed the dab of sweat on his forehead. He kept grabbing his coat pocket constantly as we were sitting. There was his eyes though. Everything else seemed still. It was just him and me.

“Bella, I want you to know I will always be here for you no matter what. You are the absolute love of my life. I cannot imagine life without you and I cannot wait to marry you.”

I smiled.

Bella started to cringe, groaning and moving her head side to side. She started to dig her nails into her temples.

“You know what happens after you guys leave dinner.”

“I can’t. It’s a blur.” Bella squealed in discomfort.

“Tell me. What do you remember?”

Bella stopped moving. She closed her eyes and repeated this slowly and methodically:

We had never even seen the car coming. We had left the restaurant. We were eager, and wanted to tell my mom the good news. The snow had poured too much. The snow seeped into my shoes as we got into the car. Charlie had too much wine. I drove. I focused on the white and yellow lines of the road. The driver, drunk off whiskey, slid over the median. The driver’s red truck swerved in and out of the yellow line. The black car drove through the snow. The truck only had hit the driver side. I remember my head cracking through the glass on the headlight of the truck who hit us. Glass shattered encasing us. The airbags didn’t deploy. The car and truck spun in circles on the icy road until we struck a tall oak tree. The drunk survived. Charlie had a broken arm and whiplash.

“And then?” The psychologist persisted.

Bella started to shake and scream and claw at the padded room. The psychologist became worried, so he snapped his fingers again. He put his hands together like he was praying and rested his chin on his thumbs.

“Do you remember everything now?” the psychologist asked, perplexed.

Bella looked around, then looked in confusion at the man with the grey beard.

“Who are you?”

“Can you tell me what happened next?” the psychologist asked, scratching his grey beard.

“It’s too much...I can’t find my lipstick,” Bella responded, her gaze was locked on the padded ground.

“This woman you described in your story, it is you. You are Bella. But the women you described...it’s like a different version of you. You wouldn’t behave like that would you?”

“I don’t know.”

Tuesday, August 24th, 2024, 11am, St. Joseph’s

A middle aged woman walked into a hospital. Her strawberry blonde hair, streaked with grey, fell in front of her distressed face. The walls and ceiling are coated with white tiles. Her boots clicked through the hallway. She looked up at the sign: *Psychiatry Ward*. She sighed and entered. A doctor in a pristine white coat greeted her. He loomed over her, but his face was full of sympathy and little wrinkles.

“How is Bella?” the women asked.

The doctor looked at her, his eyes were heavy with dark purple bags underneath, and he took a deep breath, “Mrs. Joel, can you follow me, please?”

He led her through the hospital. Nurses in scrubs hurried pass with clipboards and carts of medicine. Their eyes were focused until they caught sight of Mrs. Joel, then their eyes showed remorse. The doctor took her to a room labeled *Observation Room*.

The room was still covered in that same white tile, but there was a large window separating each part of the room.

“She won’t be able to see you,” the doctor explained. “But I need you to understand: your daughter’s brain damage is extremely serious. The crash damaged key parts of your daughter’s brain. I had talked with the psychologist earlier and he said it seems like she’s misinterpreting memories and doesn’t remember most names and faces. All she talks about with the psychologist is the night of the crash and according to her fiance, she is misinterpreting her appearance, her demeanor, and not only that she is forgetting key parts of herself. She doesn’t know her name, she doesn’t know she’s a Brown Professor or that she...”

The doctor’s words turned into mumbles as Mrs. Joel walked toward the window. Bella sat in a cushioned room with the old psychologist with a grey beard and in a brown suede jacket across from her. Her strawberry blonde hair was tied in one ponytail on the side of her head. She was laughing, rolling all over the cushioned ground. Her hands were tied to the ground due to her excessive hitting herself earlier. The doctor said sometimes she lashed out out of anger. Her eyes twitched from side to side rapidly, she was not stable.

“Can I hear her?” Mrs. Joel asked. A tear dangled from her chin.

The doctor halted his speech in surprise. He nodded and flipped a switch next to the window.

“Can you tell me your name?”

“Who knows?” Bella exclaimed, rolling to the left.

“You started to remember before, when you were hypnotized. Your name is Bella Joel. You are a Brown University professor. You have a mother named Alice Joel. You have a fiance named Charles ‘Charlie’ Rossen. You are at St. John’s Psychiatry Ward in New York.”

Bella tried to free one of her wrists from the ground but to no avail. She asked “Did you know that lipstick can go outside the lines right?” as if she wasn’t even listening to the psychologist. She started to move her finger in a circle on the floor.

The psychologist shook his head.

“I like how wine feels on my face.”

“Can you tell me more about the accident?”

Bella stared at the ground. Her smile fell. “We just went in circles...circles...circles.”

Mrs. Joel pressed her hand on the window. A parade of footsteps exploded behind her and the doctor. The door swung open to reveal a tall man with olive skin and jade black hair. He barged through the door.

“Charlie?” Mrs. Joel gasped as another tear fell to the ground. “I thought the doctor told you to rest. You shouldn’t be here. You shouldn’t see her like this.”

“Is she here?” he asked, his hands and voice were shaking

The doctor nodded. Sadness overflowed in the room. Charlie walked solemnly to the window. Bella continued to move her hand in circles. Charlie turned to Mrs. Joel.

“Mrs. Joel, I should have been the one driving. We went to dinner that night and my goodness, Bella looked so beautiful. She was in that red dress she wore for Christmas. We ate lobster and drank too much wine. We talked of literature and our

future. She's so smart, Mrs. Joel, so much smarter than me. I mean she's a Harvard graduate for crying out loud and now... she can't remember her own name. She can't remember the best date we've ever had. She can't remember that I proposed. She barely remembers me!"

Mrs. Joel hugged him. The tears fell on to her jacket. She said nothing at first. Her embrace was enough. She stroked his back in silence for a while. Eventually, she looked at him.

"Maybe you should talk to her," she quietly suggested to Charlie.

Charlie nodded. He walked over to the window. Bella was still chained to the floor and the psychologist was still talking to her. Charlie rubbed his eyes and took a deep breath.

"Bella," Charlie whispered. "I know you can't hear me, but I am here. I will always be here. I should have been the one driving. I should be the one in the hospital. Just please, please, come back to me."

The tears ran down to his chin. Mrs. Joel placed her hand on his shoulder. The doctor turned the speaker on when Charlie was talking. As the psychologist talked to Bella, she took her pointer finger and continued to move it in circles on her hand. She looked up at the window. She smiled.

"Charlie?"