

## Living a Memory

My veiny hand shakes like a fragile flower as I grip the plastic teacup. Steamy fingers from the hot liquid curl up into the air. The skin on the back of my hand looks like a crumpled up tissue. My gaze drifts to the stark walls, their colour is lifeless. A small picture of a kitten playing with a ball of pink wool hangs on the wall by my bed. Hours of sunlight have sucked the colour from its fur. Limply hanging over the window is an overly bleached piece of cloth that serves as a curtain. I'm supposed to like it here.

A sharp pain slices through my stomach and my body tenses under the thin pastel sheets. Scorching drops of tea spill onto the blankets as my hand shakes violently. Quickly, I set down my cup and rub my eyes. Finally the stabbing in my abdomen subsides, and I open my eyes. My fingers reach for the thin silver band that dangles from my boney wrist. *Emma*. That's my name. My gaze rapidly searches the room until it lands upon a heavy chest that sits beneath the window. My pulse slows as I stare at the box, taking in its dark wood, and tarnished bronze latches.

My legs protest as I shift myself off the narrow bed. I feel the box drawing me closer. I hear it whispering into my mind as a drowsiness settles over me. My aching knees groan as I sit before the chest, hands running over the smooth engravings in the wood. A swan balances a star on the tip of her beak while music notes flow from the mouth of a robin. The pictures seem to come to life under the tips of my iridescent fingers.

As I open the heavy lid, the musky smell of tobacco washes over me, bringing back images of my father. I take a deep breath and reach into the darkness, feeling my fingers close around the first mask. Cradling it in both hands, I take in the swirls of red and yellow paint that creates the face. Pink cherry blossoms bloom across the cheeks while a silver paint lines the eyes. Gently, I press the cool inside of the mask to my skin and pull the silk string over my hair. A white flash fills my mind as I feel the image slip before my eyes. Then I feel warm air on my neck as I open my eyes.

*Wax lazily runs down the side of the low burning candle as the flame flickers, casting a golden light across the creamy pages of my book. My hand rests on my lap, the skin smooth like the cheek of a porcelain doll. I reach up and feel my long locks of chestnut hair slip between my young fingers. A smile plays on my lips as I take in my childhood sanctuary, the teddy bears that line my bed and the ocean blue walls that were my home.*

Reaching behind my head, I feeling the string, and pull off the mask. The memory slowly drips from my mind leaving me alone in my prison.

The second mask is in my hand before I know it. Painted forest creatures dance over the wooden jawline. Taking a gulp of breath, I submerge into the past.

*The smell of tobacco fills my nose as I watch my father staring at his reflection. My five year old chin barely reaches the counter as I watch him rub shaving cream onto his face until he resembles Santa Clause. A warm light fills my heart as I move to his side, watching him drag the blade over his cheek,*

*leaving a trail of smooth skin in its wake. I reach to tug on his arm when I feel another searing pain cut through my chest.*

Tearing off the mask, I fall back onto the floor, clutching the mask in my hand. The air in the room is thick as I struggle to pull myself up. Pulse racing, I collapse onto the bed, my body sagging with the effort. As my eyelids start to flutter, I reach under my pillow and pull out the third and final mask. Its soft blue face brings tears to my eyes. I feel my lungs clog as my heart pounds in my head. Smiling one last time, I gently press the mask to my face and close my eyes.

*The birds chirp happily as the soft grass pushes against my back. The air is crisp and full of life. As if in a dream the trees above me become blurry and the colours melt away. The wind plays with my hair as my vision goes black, leaving me alone in my mind.*