

Pretty Flowers

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A few document files of unfinished assignments from middle school, photos from vacations back when my parents were together, and an empty folder labeled Katie and Michelle: these are the kinds of things I found on the hard drive of my Windows 98 computer

It was my therapist's idea to turn the machine on and explore it. She thinks there might be something in there to trigger my memory, or at least make me want to remember something. Following the suicide of my mom a few months ago, social services took me in. After analyzing me, my extreme sleep habits, and shitty grades, they sent me to a loony bin instead of my father, who lived miles away. Also, they noticed I have no recollection of the first ten or so years of my life.

"Do you know who that would be?" my therapist asks, leaning over my shoulder.

I shrug. "I don't know any Katies. Not in my family, anyways."

"Maybe she was in the part of your life you don't remember."

I close out of Windows Explorer. "Maybe I'm not supposed to remember her, then."

Later that day, I'm lying in bed like I usually do, and the name Katie keeps bouncing around my head. As it floats around the seemingly empty space, it starts to have a melody. It's just a few notes at first, but after a few hours, I can start humming a few seconds of it. It's a simple little tune, something one could play with just one hand on a piano.

The next day, I head into my therapist's office, still humming the tune. Being the nosey bitch she is, she asks about it.

"I don't know," I tell her. "It just randomly popped into my head last night."

"Maybe something we found yesterday triggered it." I could care less, but she seems to care more. "I know you avoided your mother's room when we searched your house yesterday, but—"

"I'm not going to snoop through my dead mom's stuff."

"You might find something that will help you remember your past."

"I don't want to remember it. I just want to sleep."

"If we search your mother's room, we can end your session early today."

Getting out early will mean more time to sleep, and that is enough to make me oblige.

Once at the semi-abandoned house, I lead my therapist to the one room I haven't visited in years, even before my mom offed herself. I open the door to reveal a messy bed, clothes strewn all over the floor, and a cluttered nightstand. "Nothing triggers my memory. Let's go."

She enters the room, though, and looks over everything. She then stops at the closet, and points at a lone box on the top shelf. "Can we look inside this?"

I sigh and roll my eyes, but grab the unlabeled box. Opening it, I'm actually surprised to find numerous photo albums and video cassettes. I'm afraid at first to open any of the albums. I dig through the tapes instead, reading the labels: Katie's First Birthday, Katie's First Dance Recital, Bringing Michelle Home, Katie and Michelle Play Piano.

For some reason, this last one piques my interest. I hold it for a while, and my therapist asks if I want to watch it. I take the tape into the living room, pop it into the VCR, and turn the television on. The video opens to a little girl, probably the age of six or seven, facing the camera in front of a piano. On the bench, there's a much younger girl.

“What are you going to play for us today, Katie?” a woman behind the camera asks. She sounds vaguely like my mom, but a lot livelier.

“Pretty Flowers!”

“Who wrote that song?”

The girl smiles proudly. “Me and Michelle did!” My heart skips a beat when she says my name. The girl on the bench turns around and smiles, too. Is that little me?

Katie then sits down next to possible me, and starts plucking at the keys. Immediately, I recognize the tune as the one stuck in my head. As I stare at the television, my mind goes into some kind of overdrive. “Katie’s dead...” I remember.