2015

Somebody that I Used to Know

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Gram always liked music. She didn’t sing much but would often hum or whistle. She would waltz around the kitchen to “Blue Suede Shoes” and “On The Road Again”. She was the kind of woman who always wore pantyhose and believed pink lipstick never went out of style. She was the epitome of refined domesticity.

On the day of my graduation from middle school, Gram had set a battered stool in the middle of the kitchen. As a little girl she would prop me up onto it to wash my hair in the sink and caress my hair into braids tied with bows. In commemoration, I wanted my hair in braids that day.

“We’re doing two French braids, right, Gram?”

“Yes, of course,” she said as she let out a smoker’s chuckle. She ran her spotted fingers through my hair. “How about a comb, though? Can I have a comb?”

I produced a comb from the bathroom down the hall. Then waited. And waited. I felt soft hands occasionally touching my hair, picking it up, moving it, and then letting it go. I remained silent. After a few moments, I realized she was no longer touching my hair at all. Was she done? I stood still for a few more moments unsure of what to do.

“Gram?” Silence. “Grammy?”

I looked at the floor and saw her white and blue Velcro’s backing away. Confused, I looked up at my bewildered grandmother. She had now backed all the way to the mauve countertop. Her lip quivered, the short pointed hairs beneath her nose prominent.

With a sense of panic I had never heard from my grandmother, she whispered, “I’ve forgotten how.”