

Mnemonic

by Miranda Loeber

Marie - late 20s - early 30s, a housewife

Cora - similar in age to Marie, unmarried, works an utterly uninteresting office job

Setting: Cora's kitchen. Cora is cleaning and washing dishes while Marie sits at the table, flipping through a newspaper.

Marie: You want to go to the beach this summer?

Cora: Hmm? Oh, sure. Last year was nice.

Marie: We could try surfing again. As long as you don't slip and cut your leg open this time.

Cora: What?

Marie: You know. You needed - well, I don't know how many stitches you got. A lot.

Cora: What are you talking about?

Marie: That's when you got that scar.

Cora: Oh... right. I didn't remember.

Marie: Hmm. Yeah. I guess you wouldn't. Sorry, I just always forget, and, well. What's it like?

Cora: The scar?

Marie: No! I mean. What's it like, forgetting?

Cora: I don't know. What's it like remembering?

Marie: That's a stupid question.

Cora: Your question was stupid too. We should go to that Thai place tomorrow. You know, the one with the noodle thing you like? You could bring David and - *(she searches for a word)*

Marie: And...?

Cora: No one. I don't know why I said that, there's - no, there's no one else. I just felt like there was another name on the tip of my tongue.

Marie: Well - no. There isn't anyone else, just me and David. Anyway, stop changing the subject.

Cora: There was no subject to begin with.

Marie: I want you to tell me what it's like.

Cora: There's nothing to tell.

Marie: The moment your memory wipes out. What is it like?

Cora: I don't know! I don't remember it.

Marie: Oh. Yeah, I guess you wouldn't. I don't know if I want to take David along. It's been kind of... it's hard to look at him lately. I just - well.

Cora: What?

Marie: You don't remember what happened.

Cora: Oh.

Marie: And he doesn't either, of course. It's just... it's only me. I'm the only one who knows... Doesn't matter. So maybe just us at dinner? Or you could bring that guy from work...

Cora: No! He's just a friend.
Marie: A cute friend. Who you kissed at the Christmas party.
Cora: There was mistletoe. It doesn't count.
Marie: Of course it doesn't.
Cora: Oh, shut up. Anyway, just us sounds good.

Cora continues cleaning; Marie flips to the crossword and grabs a pen.

Marie: I don't know how you could forget something like that.
Cora: You mean my leg? You know how it works.
Marie: I know, just... I broke my leg when I was seven years old.
Cora: And you remember it?
Marie: Yeah. My mom couldn't even call an ambulance or drive me to the hospital, cause every time she realized it was broken, she forgot. She would look at me with that stupid blank face, and then she'd realize, open her mouth to scream, and then bam. That look again, and again, and there I was, a little girl in pain, and my mother couldn't even do anything to help. And after her chip made her mind blank enough times, the signal called an ambulance, but it took half an hour, and even then - no comfort, no reassurance. They assumed I was blanking, didn't even give me anything to stop the pain while they pulled the halves of my leg back into place. They thought I'd forget. But I didn't.
Cora: Oh. Well...
Marie: Don't bother. What did I expect? The worst thing you can remember is probably breaking a nail.
Cora: No -
Marie: What is it, then? Did your little dog run away? Your brother steal your teddy bear?
Cora: It doesn't go away, not all the way. I get flashes. Little bits and pieces in my dreams, and even though I only see them when I sleep, I know they're real. I remember this rush of water over me, choking me, a pain in my leg... and someone in a hospital bed, someone I loved so much, but he's pale and empty and- *(a pause, and a blank look)* Sorry, what were we talking about?
Marie: Uh. Dinner. Tomorrow?
Cora: Right. So just us then?
Marie: Yeah... sounds fine.
Cora: So what's going on with you and David?
Marie: Nothing.
Cora: It's not nothing. You've barely been at your own house for the past few days, and sometimes you get this look in your eyes, like you're barely holding something in. And you said you can't look at him anymore.
Marie: Just leave it, Cora.
Cora: I'm not going to just leave it. There's something bothering you.
Marie: You wouldn't understand.
Cora: Try me.
Marie: You really wouldn't.
Cora: Why not?

Marie: Because you have never been so angry or so sad that it takes you over. If it does - poof, the little chip in your brain knocks out your memory. You don't know how it feels to hold onto a memory like that, to cling to it because you know if you don't it'll just be gone...

Cora: I know. And I wish I could, I really do. I mean, I read these books and I think, I will never experience heartache or grief or pain...

Marie: You don't want to. You're lucky. You are so lucky.

Cora: But I'm not. Because you - you get to feel things. You get to remember all the things in life, not just the good things. My life - it's just flat. One day to another, always the same thing.

Marie: Maybe that's better than the alternative. Just please. Please just drop it. I'm sick of this.

Cora: Do you really think I'll just let you keep wallowing?

Marie: I'm not wallowing.

Cora: Sulking.

Marie: Not.

Cora: Fine. Pouting.

Marie: I'm not pouting, okay?

Marie tries to go back to her crossword, but Cora sits down next to her and clasps a hand to her shoulder.

Cora: If you really want me to leave it alone, I will. But you need to stop doing this thing where you want to talk about it and then you want me to drop it. Either you do or you don't, okay? And you need to tell me which one. I can't read your mind.

Marie: I do want to talk about it. It's just. It's hard. Because you know what happened. I've tried to tell you every day this week, and you always forget it, but you know. That name you almost said earlier, the one that was on the tip of your tongue? It was someone.

Cora: What do you mean?

Marie: It's not just me and David. Or, it wasn't. Isn't.

Cora: What are you trying to say?

Marie: We had a child. A son. Nathan.

Cora: That's ridiculous.

Marie: He was born seven years ago, two years after we got married.

Cora: But you don't -

Marie: I know it sounds insane, but it's true. I had a child.

Cora: So where is he? Why haven't I seen him?

Marie: You have, but he's - he's dead, okay? It happened a week ago. It was so nice outside, finally getting warm again, and Nathan wanted to go swimming. And I said okay, and we went out there, and he splashed around while I was reading a book. And every few minutes I would look up, and there he'd be, laughing and playing and - and then I looked up again and he wasn't there. And I jumped in and I pulled him out, and I did everything, I swear, but he didn't start breathing again. Of course when David looked out the window and started blanking, but by the time the ambulance got there it was too late. They just took

him from me. They didn't say anything, didn't let me have one last goodbye, because they thought I would forget. They thought I would forget my own child. And I would have, if my chip had worked. Think about it! If your chip erases all your bad memories, it has to erase the deaths too. Do you remember your parents? Your grandparents? Haven't you ever wondered where they went, if you even had them? When we die - when *you* die, Cora, no one will remember you. Just as no one remembers Nathan. But I will. I will remember you when no one else does. I have to. Now please say you remember Nathan. Please say his memory doesn't die with me. Cora?

Cora: *(blank look)* Sorry. What were we talking about?

Marie: Nothing. Nothing at all.