



Shard of Glass

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Part 1

That day, my mother picked me up from school, wearing the yellow sundress and shawl I remembered from our trip with Father the year before. She looked just like she did most days back then--a glamour queen, a movie star ("Just like Lena Horne," my friend Chloe had once said, "only darker--oh, sorry, Leah!"), but today her beauty somehow had a harder, more defiant edge to it. I could smell the expensive Dior perfume as soon as I opened the door, which surprised me, because my mom was usually fastidious about not getting perfume on her clothes. She was wearing her bug glasses--huge dark things with lenses that bulged out like fly eyes and reflected my face like a fun-house mirror. She had tied a yellow silk scarf around her hair and was taking deep pulls on a cigarette held between two immaculately manicured fingers. Only I knew about the nicotine stains she carefully covered with her special order "forest sable" cream each morning.

Tiffany, a stupid but vicious senator's daughter who I had the misfortune of sharing a classroom with, suddenly dashed from inside the school, her face flushed.

"Hello, Mrs. Wilson," she called. Before my mother could respond, she giggled and ran back to three of her friends waiting beyond the door. I could hear them laughing, but I was glad I couldn't understand their words. They were all fascinated with my mother--the black housekeeper who dressed like Katharine Hepburn and drove a Cadillac, whose daughter's "light toffee" skin indicated that she might just like her coffee with a lot of cream.

Sometimes I hated those girls.

"Get in the car, Leah," my mother said. Her already husky voice was pitched low, as though she'd been crying. That made me nervous. Why was she here?

"Ma, Chloe was going to show me her dad's new camera. Can't I go home on the bus?"

My mom pulled on the cigarette until it burned the filter, and then ground it into the car ashtray--already filled with forty or so butts. She always emptied out the ashtray each evening.

"Get in the car, Leah." My mom's voice was even huskier as she lit another cigarette and tossed the match out of the window.

I sat down and shut the door.

We rode in silence for a while. Despite her shaking hands and the rapidly dwindling box of cigarettes, she drove meticulously, even coming to a full stop at the stop signs. She *never* stopped at stop signs.

"Ma . . . is something wrong?" I asked hesitantly.

Her fingers tightened on the wheel until her knuckles looked even paler than my skin. "We're going on a trip, Leah," she said finally, jamming on the brakes at a stop sign.

Was that why she had chosen to wear that outfit today? "A trip? Where is it this year? Are we meeting Dad soon?" My heart sped up at just the thought of seeing him again.

"Charles," my mother corrected, deliberately. "You know you can't call him 'Dad,' Leah, I've told you a hundred times. And no, we're not going with . . . Charles, this time." Her voice caught on his name and for a second I thought she was going to cry.

A cop behind us leaned angrily on his horn. My mom's head jerked around so quickly I could hear the bones in her neck popping. We had been sitting in front of the stop sign for over a minute. My mom cursed and the car lurched forward. A minute later, after the cop had turned away, she seemed to relax a little.

"Did something happen to Da--Charles? And can I still go to school tomorrow? I have a geography report and, well, . . ."

I trailed off. My mom didn't even look like she'd heard me. After checking over her shoulder again even though the cop had long since disappeared, she pulled onto the highway.

"They can't know we're gone yet," she muttered to herself. "I'm just being paranoid. They won't be looking for us for hours. . . ." She shook her head and took off her sunglasses. The face she turned to me scared me more than anything--her mascara had run and her eyes were glazed and puffy. I knew my mom cried, of course I did, but she had always tried to hide it from me before. Now . . . what could have happened to make her cry so openly?

"Is he . . . dead?" I asked, suddenly terrified.

Her mouth twisted in a bitter half-smile. "No. No, Charles is most certainly alive. Leah . . ." She sighed, and handed me a thick leather-bound book.

"Don Quixote," I read out loud, pronouncing the second word only after careful deliberation. "What is it?"

"It's a present. One of your father's books. There's something inside. . . . Why don't you look, Leah, before I

lose all my nerve?"

My stomach clenched, but I flipped through the pages. Somewhere in the center, I realized, part of the book had been hollowed out. Within a bed of cut-off words and ragged paper edges nestled the strangest piece of glass I had ever seen. Its beveled surface was pitch black--but unlike any other glass I had known, it didn't reflect light at all. In fact, it seemed to suck it in, so the page right beside the glass was so dark I could hardly read the print. The shard was shaped like an isosceles triangle with a chipped top--so lopsided it could only have been broken off from a larger piece. But someone had melted copper along the edges so they wouldn't cut. I looked at my mom, but she was staring doggedly at the road and wouldn't meet my gaze.

I picked up the glass and held it in front of my right eye.

"Ma!" I screamed, "Look out! You're going to hit her!"

The car swerved violently and my head knocked against the side window. Momentary pain lanced through my skull, exacerbated by screeching tires and a chorus of car horns. We pulled out of it seconds later. I looked frantically out the back window to see if she had managed to avoid hitting the woman sitting in the middle of the highway.

There was no one there.

I turned back to Mom. Her hands were trembling so badly she had dropped her cigarette, but she didn't seem angry with me. "Don't believe what you see through the glass," she said softly. "That's what he always said to me. I should have told you, but I never saw anything. . . . I didn't realize that you would."

"This is Dad's?" I asked.

"It's yours now, Leah, but . . . promise me you'll never show it to anyone else. It's our secret, okay?"

I stared at my mother. The worn copper on the outside of the shard was biting into my sweat-slicked palm. I didn't know what else to do but agree.

"I promise. Ma . . . are we going on the trip now?"

She nodded.

"When are we coming back?" I was almost too afraid to ask the question.

"I don't know. Not for a very long time."

Very carefully, I put the shard back inside the book and shut the cover.

"Where are we going?"

"I bought tickets to Rome this morning," she said, "but that was just to lead them off. Is there anywhere in the world you want to go, Leah?"

I thought about the geography presentation I would never have the chance to give. We were each supposed to do it on a different country. I didn't really know much about mine--I had only picked it because it was cute and small.

"Luxembourg," I said.

My mom just nodded. She never asked me where it was. To this day, I still don't know if she had ever heard of it, but she nodded just the same.

At the airport, she went into the bathroom alone. When she came out, she was no longer an anomaly, a black movie queen in a white woman's clothes. The woman who left that bathroom was not my mother--she was one of the invisible thousands, a black woman in gray, serviceable housekeeping clothes and a scuffed but sturdy pair of white tennis shoes. She had pulled her nappy hair back in a bun, washed her makeup off of her face. Now, her bloodshot eyes just looked like part of the uniform.

"Your dress . . ." I said, struggling to keep myself from panicking, breaking down. I had always known my mother used to be a housekeeper, but I had never understood what it meant until now. "Charles . . . gave it to you, didn't he? Where . . . ?"

My mom's eyes were hard, but I knew she wanted to cry too. "I threw it out," she said.

And when I followed behind her, carrying along the bit of luggage she had dared to bring, I was no longer the daughter of a woman who looked like a dark Lena Horne, I was just a nappy-headed brat of uncertain paternity, whose possessions had suddenly been reduced to three sets of clothing, a book, and a shard of glass.

I was twelve years old.

We were careless in Luxembourg--too obviously secretive or suspiciously casual. We hadn't yet learned that fundamental lesson of disappearing: it's not enough to just vanish, even to a place thousands of miles away; to truly disappear, you must blend in.

My mother cried each night and I knew she kept a picture of my father in her bag, but the face she turned to me every morning was as hard as my piece of glass. She never asked me if I wanted our fugitive existence, but the idea of letting them catch us didn't occur to me until much later. She never really told me what had happened that day she wore the yellow dress, but I knew my father and his family were chasing us because of something she had done. Somehow, it didn't matter. I loved my father, but he had been like a smiling shadow my whole life--not a real person, just a grainy four-color facsimile. A man who sent me fancy clothes and jewelry on my birthday under fake names, visited me and my mother at strange times of night and then vanished for months on end. No, I loved my father, but my mother owned my soul. How could it have been otherwise?

Three weeks after we arrived in Luxembourg, my mother and I huddled together for warmth in a reeking alley behind an expensive French restaurant. The window on the side of the building was a bit too high for either of us, but I could see through a gap in the curtains when she hoisted me up. Inside, a man who looked sort of like my father, only with less hair and a bigger belly, was slowly sipping a glass of fifty-franc wine as he watched the front door with lidded eyes.

"Is he still there?" she whispered.

"On his third glass of wine," I said, softly as I could. "The waiter keeps coming back, but he won't order any food. I think he's waiting for someone."

"Us, probably. Just like that damned family to spend a small fortune feeding us before they throw us in jail."

"Who is he?" I asked.

I could practically hear my mother's frown. "Your uncle," she said, finally. "Henry. He's part of the family business."

"What's the family business?"

"Money. Politics. Mostly money." She sounded bitter, but I didn't quite understand why. Despite the confusion of the last few weeks, the glow of adventure somehow still hadn't worn off for me. I guess that I couldn't imagine my father actually hurting us. The danger was something only my mother understood--she knew what she had taken, and how much they would risk to take it back.

She had spied him around the corner when we were walking back from the market. We had cowered behind the gigantic loaves in a baker's window as he walked past and into a restaurant. Luckily, Mom had insisted we take our bags with us wherever we went--if they had traced us all the way to Luxembourg City, then surely they would have found our tiny second-floor apartment by now. They would expect us to flee the city, and were probably watching every possible method of transportation for just that eventuality. So, we hid in the safest place we could think of--behind the restaurant where my uncle waited for us, sipping his expensive wine.

"Leah," my mom whispered, "my shoulders are getting tired. I'm going to put you down, okay?"

The door in the front of the restaurant opened. "No, wait!" I said. Two men who didn't look anything like my father brushed straight past the maitre d' and sat down in front of my uncle. The two newcomers spoke quietly for a few moments, but whatever they said made my uncle livid. He slammed his glass on the table, and some wine sloshed over the rim. He stood up, tossed a few francs on the red-stained table cloth, and stalked out of the restaurant.

"Dammit!" he cursed as he stepped out onto the sidewalk. "I always told Charles that pet bitch of his would get him in trouble. You're sure there was no sign of them? Or the glass? Did you check the rooms?"

They had stopped in front of the alleyway, the three of them making long shadows in the flickering streetlights. My mother and I pressed ourselves against the wall.

"I turned the rooms upside down," one of the other men said. "Had to pay the landlady for two nights just so she wouldn't call the cops. I mean, somebody'd obviously been there, but they didn't leave anything behind. Not even a toothbrush."

"Did you show the landlady their pictures?" my uncle asked.

The second man nodded. "She wasn't sure about the woman, but she said it looked like the same girl."

My hands slid to my jacket pocket. The coat my mom had bought for me in Luxembourg was made for someone much bigger, and its pockets were deep enough for even the fat book to fit inside comfortably. I don't know why I took it out--I hadn't dared look through the glass since that near-disaster on the highway. But curiosity gripped me. Why did my uncle care so much about this glass? What would it show me if I used it to look at him?

"They can't have left yet," my uncle was saying as I pulled out the glass, hands shaking with every heartbeat. "I have to get back to Richmond for a fund-raiser, but I want you to stay here."

I held it up to my eye. My mom's face was drawn with panic, but she didn't tell me to stop. "Comb the whole damn country if you have to, but find them. And the glass."

Something seemed to shudder in the lamplight. A tall, thin white man wearing a bowler hat and a pea coat held the limp form of a little girl in his arms. My uncle was leaning against the side of a blue car, sweat running from his forehead into his eyes. He had hair, I realized after a moment, and his stomach didn't hang

over the edge of his belt. This younger version of my uncle swayed unsteadily, but his face was a mask of contempt. The two men were yelling at each other, but I could only hear oddly warped snatches of sounds, as though they were at the other end of a long, twisted corridor. Suddenly, my uncle lurched from the car and shoved the other man backwards. He stumbled and dropped the girl. When she fell limply to the ground, I realized that she wasn't breathing. Rage flared in the other man's eyes and he leapt onto my uncle, wrestling him to the ground. Even drunk, my uncle was much stronger. He wrapped his hands around the other man's throat, his face contorted with fury.

I had the curious sensation of leaning closer, even though the glass was flush against my eye.

". . . money . . ." I heard the other man say, and then some more words that were too distant and garbled to make out. ". . . papers, you killed my daughter! Why . . . money . . . I swear . . ."

My uncle slammed the man's head viciously on the ground once, and stood up. "I'll give you . . ." He walked around the car while the man rolled on his side and retched in the grass on the edge of the road. The man gently wiped some of the vomit off the girl's arm, which was beginning to stiffen.

I glanced back at my uncle and bit back a gasp; he was holding a gun. The other man barely had time to bleat before the bullet caught him in the neck. Blood pulsed in a macabre spray as he convulsed. My uncle tossed the gun in the car and drove away. When I tried to turn and follow him, the scene dissolved into a thousand smaller images, so loud and clamoring that it hurt just to look at them. I put down the glass.

My uncle was looking into the alley. For a terrified second, I thought that he had found us, but he seemed to be staring out blindly, lost in thought.

"Um . . . Senator Richards? Are you okay?"

My uncle shuddered and began walking away. The two other men hurried to keep up with him.

My mother looked at me. "Where . . . do you want to go, Leah?"

I thought for a minute.

"Japan," I said, finally.

After of four months of grueling, terrifying overland travel, which nearly exhausted our modest supply of money, we took a ferry to Osaka. On the way, my mother dared to purchase a small Japanese learner's dictionary, although she bought ones for German, Dutch, and Korean as well, just in case my father's family caught our trail. Once, on a crowded local train in northern China, I thoughtlessly opened my father's book. I was about to pull out the glass when my mom slapped my hand away. The look she gave me made me want to melt into the seat. It was hard to always remember who we were and what we were hiding from.

My mother and I had mastered some rudimentary Japanese phrases by the time we arrived, although we soon discovered that most of the locals were too busy staring at us to bother wading through our mangled Japanese. Mostly, we got by with hand signals. Once, I remember, young girls walking to the trains after school crowded around my mother, shyly asking if they could touch her hair. Even in that large city, we were anomalies, walking circus exhibits who couldn't even speak properly. My mother felt profoundly uncomfortable there, I think. We left after just a few weeks, traveling by ferry and local train to one of the most remote areas in Japan: the Kerama islands, just to the west of Okinawa's main island. The war had ravaged this place, you could see it in the faces of the women in hitched kimonos who hacked at the sugar cane or in the occasional mortar that washed up on the rocky beaches. My mom found a job as a housekeeper in the only hotel on the islands--not a hotel, really, just a modest two-floor inn with Japanese-style furnishings

and a window where the locals liked to pick up their lunches. Almost despite ourselves, we began to settle into a routine, reassemble our lives from the pieces my mom had scattered that day she picked me up from school. The line between my mom's eyebrows never entirely disappeared, but as the weeks passed and she began to hope that we were finally safe, I saw her begin to smile again. Once in a while, I would catch her staring out at one of the magnificent island sunsets, her nappy hair ruffling in the wind, and I would be reminded once again of how beautiful she was. Even here, in this island in the middle of nowhere, she stood like a woman who wouldn't quite forget that she had once been a glamour queen.

The main school was on our island, but my mother thought it was too dangerous for the other kids to get to know me, even here. So I stayed behind, often helping Sato-san, the owner's wife, batter and fry the fish and vegetables for lunch. In the mornings, I would wake up early and go with her husband (also Sato-san, which sometimes got confusing) to the docks, where we would wade in the water up to our thighs with buckets to catch the crabs as they ran in from the tide. On our way back we bought the first catch from the fishermen and then hauled it all back to the inn on a rickety wheelbarrow. My mom didn't speak more than she had to, but I had been starved for conversation for months and my Japanese soon became fluent.

The Satos had two boys, one six and the other about my age. On weekends, their father would take us out on his small rowboat and we would sit for hours, catching fish. The boys had been afraid of me at first, but after a few weeks it seemed that they had forgotten I was a foreigner, let alone an American. Koichi and I would run around the island together, with Yuki tagging along behind when we let him. We found all of the island's secrets--the grottos with the best crabs, the beach with the deepest water, the cliff where you could sometimes see the humps of huge whales arcing above the waves at sunset and dawn. And then, one day, Koichi and I found the island's greatest secret of all.

It was sunset. Koichi and I scrambled in bare feet over the top of an unfamiliar cliff on the western side of the island.

"Sun," I said in English, pointing to the rapidly sinking red ball.

Koichi grimaced. "Do we have to do this?" he asked.

"I told Sato-san I would teach you English. What's she going to say if you don't know any new words?"

So I taught him a few more: *stone, cliff, beach, crab, adventure*. He repeated them good-naturedly, and I tried to correct some of his pronunciation as we walked along the rock.

"We have crab adventure on stone beach," he said slowly.

I clapped my hands and laughed. "That's good!" I said. "Say that to your mom and she might let us share one of the *manju* she got from your aunt."

"Never. She saves all of those for Yuki, the spoiled brat." He paused before a small outcropping and put his arm on my left side, so I couldn't get past.

"You know," I said, "we should really get back before the sun goes all the way down. I have to do your math homework, remember?" Koichi hated homework and my mom wanted me to get an education, so I had ended up practically being his tutor.

Koichi nodded, but he didn't move. His broad face had a curious look to it, as though he were staring at me through a tank of water. I shifted uncomfortably.

He kissed me. Out of sheer surprise, I staggered backwards. Instead of hitting the rock, however, I fell through

a hole. Koichi tumbled down on top of me.

We untangled ourselves and looked around. The cave was fairly large, considering its small, hidden opening. For a few moments the descending sun shone directly into the crevice, illuminating the back wall of the cave.

Koichi and I saw them at the same time.

The cave was littered with human bones.

It looked as though these people--whoever they were--had not been disturbed since they died. In one corner I saw a heap of pathetically tiny bones nestled near the ribcage of someone I could only assume had been its mother. My breath began sticking in my throat.

"Where are we?" I asked.

Koichi looked at me. That strange fish-aquarium look had left his eyes. Now, inexplicably, I only saw anger.

"These are *your* bones!" he shouted.

Before I could even ask him what he meant, he picked up a jawbone and tossed it at my head. I caught the grisly token and watched him rush out of the cave. I should have followed him--I knew how dangerous it was to be stuck on the rocks after the sun had gone down--but I was angry and confused. I brooded for nearly an hour, until the sun had disappeared and the moon had come up to replace it. I could smell the encroaching storm clouds, but still I didn't move. Who were these dead people that surrounded me?

And then, when I heard the first distant rumble of thunder, I finally remembered how I could find out.

I pulled the glass from the book and held it to my eyes.

For a long moment, nothing happened. Then, with an almost physical lurch, I was in a different world.

A tall man stood in the mouth of the cave, carrying a paper lantern in one hand and a knife in the other. Three others huddled inside: a woman clutching a baby to her chest, and a little boy just about Yuki's age.

The man looked out of the crevice, as though he was searching for something, and then turned back, shaking his head. "They'll be here by dawn, they said. We can't . . . we can't let ourselves be taken." Their voices still sounded distant, but not so garbled as when I had looked through the glass before.

"Did you see them?" the woman asked. She looked dazed with terror. "Are you sure they're coming? They could miss us, couldn't they? We could just hide up here until they're gone, no one will find us--"

"Quiet!" the man said, his voice hard as a slap. The baby began to cry and the little boy held onto his mother's skirts, quietly snuffling.

The man walked closer to the woman. "We have no choice, Eriko. What do you think the Americans will do to us when they get here? It's better for us to end it now, with dignity."

Slowly, she nodded. He bent down to kiss her, and as he did so I saw him move the knife just above her heart. She leaned forward.

So did I.

It felt as though I were moving through a mountain of sand, but desperation and terror pushed me through. "No," I shouted, in both Japanese and English. "Don't do this!"

And somehow, the woman heard me.

As the blood blossomed around the hilt of the blade and ran down the front of her kimono, she turned her head and met my eyes.

"What are you doing here?" she asked. Her voice was sad, but so calm it was incongruent with the blood and her screaming children. "You don't belong here. Why wake this up?" She slid off the end of the blade and collapsed on the floor. The high-pitched screams of her children seemed to have receded--I could only hear the woman. Her husband sliced the neck of the boy first, and then the infant.

"Why not let it fade?" she said as she cradled her dying infant on the floor. "Why won't you let it fade?"

"I'm sorry," I whispered. I couldn't feel my throat, but my voice was hoarse. Was I crying?

I had gone so far that time, it took a while to pull back out. Just before I lowered the glass, I had the strange impression that I glimpsed my father. He seemed sad and worn, but in some strange way, it made him look even more handsome. I realized that I had nearly forgotten his face.

After I put away the shard, I crawled out of the cave and tried to shelter myself from the pelting rain under a small overhang nearby. I fell asleep clutching the book to my chest, crying for the woman in the cave and wishing I could see my father again.

Part 2

Sato-san and the others found me the next morning, after the rains had stopped. I tried to climb down, but my legs wouldn't stop shaking and I felt light-headed. I rode home on Sato-san's back. My father used to carry me around like that, I remembered, but he had always smelled of red wine and expensive cologne. Sato-san smelled like saltwater and sweat and crabs, but it was still somehow reassuring.

"What . . . happened? She okay?" I heard my mother ask in her broken Japanese.

"I'm fine," I said in English.

They helped me to our small room on the second floor. My mom had rolled out my futon already and started undressing me like a baby. I would have objected to the treatment if I hadn't already been shivering uncontrollably. I couldn't tell if it was from residual fear or actual illness.

"Ma," I said that night as I shivered under extra covers. "What is that glass? What do I see when I look through it?"

My mom was silent for so long that I nearly fell asleep again.

"Memories," she said finally. "I asked Charles once, and that's what he said. 'There's nothing more powerful than a memory,' he said. But there you go, that's the Richardses for you. There's no such thing as beauty without power."

"You don't have any power and Dad thinks you're beautiful," I said.

My mom laughed. "But he had power *over* me. That was almost as good. Then I took all that away, and now I'm just a fly for him to crush. Flies aren't beautiful, Leah."

The next day Koichi apologized to me awkwardly over breakfast. I accepted it solemnly, and I never asked him what he had meant when he said they were my bones. I had looked at the memory and I knew--I just wished I didn't feel guilty every time I thought of it.

That weekend Sato-san took us with him to Naha, the major city in Okinawa. The inn needed certain supplies and Sato-san decided to take the two of us along as a treat. My mother begged me with her eyes not to go, but I ignored her and boarded the ferry with Koichi while Yuki stayed behind with his mother. At first talking to Koichi felt horribly awkward, but by the time the ferry landed we were friends again. We wandered around the arcaded shops while his father haggled over a crate of dried bonito and some Satsuma miso paste, which was the kind his wife liked the most. We passed a bank, where someone had left an American newspaper on a bench by the door. I picked it up and flipped through the headlines. There were stories of demonstrations and police violence, school segregation and a growing American concerns about Vietnam. I was a little shocked--it had been over a year since I had heard anything about my home country. Koichi wandered away from me while I scoured the rest of the paper. An item towards the bottom of the second-to-last page caught my attention:

Three weeks away from the election, popular Florida senatorial candidate Charles Richards (brother of staunch anti-integration Virginia senator Henry Richards) and his wife, Linda, have suffered the tragic death of their premature child, Mary. The infant died of respiratory failure last night following a series of unsuccessful surgeries. Richards says that he will be back on the campaign trail next week, but that he must "have some time to grieve for the loss of my child." Analysts wonder if his week-long leave of absence will give Dale Hearn, the Democratic contender, a chance to pick up more votes.

His wife, it said. My hands were shaking so badly I could hear the paper rattling. Why was I so surprised, anyway? He might have paid for our apartment and my school, but all the time he and my mom had been together, he had never offered to marry her. When I was younger, I had always wondered why. Now, I realized, I knew. His brother, the "staunch anti-integration Virginia senator," would hardly have approved, let alone the rest of his political family.

Should I tell my mother how enormously the man she loved had betrayed her?

And then, the strangest thought occurred to me: did she already know?

Could that possibly be why we left?

We stayed there for another year. Koichi never tried to kiss me again, even though there were some days when I wished he would, when I wished that we had never fallen into that stupid cave. One evening, I sat with my legs dangling over the harbor wall, thinking about how nice it would be just to live on this island forever. I liked it better than America--here I was foreign before I was black, and even before that I was part of the Satos' family. I pulled the shard from my pocket--it was too hot in the summer to lug around the book, even though my mom got angry when I left it at home.

There were many memories on this island, I had learned, some much older than others. Sometimes they noticed me, and sometimes they seemed oblivious--but I never told anyone what I learned from them. I felt like a voyeur whenever I looked through the glass; I was spying on the innermost thoughts of people long dead.

The shard's beveled surface drank in even today's bright noon sun, remaining opaque until I held it in front of my eyes. Down below me, on one of the algae-slicked rocks, I saw a woman, her belly swollen with

pregnancy, laughing as her little son struggled to catch the crabs that were scuttling away from him.

"Don't run so fast," she said. "You might slip and hurt yourself."

Surprise nearly made me put down the glass. I knew that voice. When I looked closer, I recognized her face, too, although terror had done much to hide her natural beauty. I began to push forward, struggling through the strange sand that separated us. It was easier this time than it had been in the cave, but I didn't stop to wonder why. I pushed until it seemed I was sitting next to her, even though I was still vaguely aware of my body perched on the wall.

She turned to me. "Hello," she said. "I've never had someone visit before."

Somehow I had expected more venom. "You don't recognize me?" I asked.

She looked at me more closely and then shook her head. "No, should I?"

Of course she didn't recognize me, I realized. This was a different memory.

"Do you know how you're going to die?" I asked.

She looked sad. "I'm dead, then? I thought I might be, but it's so happy here. . . ." She looked away. "My son," she said quietly, "is he . . . also. . ."

I put a phantom hand over hers and felt a jolt. "Not here," I said, "not for you."

She turned to smile at me, but as she did so her image wavered and I felt a sickening lurch. Suddenly, I was back in the sand again, but I had no orientation--where was that woman's memory? Where was the glass? I felt as though the sand was sucking me in one direction, and so I struggled the other way. Then, before me, I saw my uncle's thinning brown hair and wide-set brown eyes, indistinct and wavering like a television getting a bad signal. He smiled.

"What are you doing here, Leah?" he asked. His words sounded mangled and slurred, as though they had been repeated in a game of Telephone. "Have you mastered the glass already, then? Or are you just lost and unlucky?"

"Leave us alone!" I said in Japanese.

Then I realized my mistake.

Koichi pulled me off the ledge and I skinned my elbow on the road. I lay blinking uncomprehendingly at the sky for a few moments before I realized that I had escaped.

"Leah," Koichi said, kneeling beside me, "are you all right? What were you doing?"

"Talking to a memory," I said.

I didn't tell my mother. For months afterwards, I tried to convince myself that he wouldn't have recognized the Japanese, that there was no way I could have destroyed our perfect haven with a stupid slip of the tongue.

I should have known better.

They found us five months later, on a clear evening in what passed for autumn here. Koichi came running into

the kitchen where I was helping his mother make dinner.

"Foreigners," he said, gasping, "they came in on the ferry. Said they were looking for a little black girl and her mother."

I dropped the knife I was using to gut a fish.

"What did you tell them, Koichi?" his mother asked.

"I told them to look on the other side of the island," he said. "They might just go away, right?"

Sato-san and I exchanged a glance. We both knew what this meant. "We have to leave, Koichi," I said.

"Tonight we hide, and then when it's safe, we have to take the ferry."

My mother packed our meager belongings silently. She was ready for this, I realized as I watched her. I had relaxed and fooled myself into believing that we could live here forever, but wariness had never entirely left her. She had never forgotten we were fugitives. I said goodbye to the Sato-sans and Yuki, who cried even though we told him that we were only going on a short trip.

"Where are you going to hide?" Koichi asked, just before we left.

"The cave. The cave with my bones."

He looked down, embarrassed. "Before . . . I didn't mean that," he said softly.

"Yes, you did," I said.

Then I kissed him.

My mother and I huddled in the cave of bones that night, praying that my uncle's men would take the morning ferry back when they realized we weren't there. It was a chilly night, and my mother was so quiet that sometimes I thought the bones made for better company.

"When did he get married?" I asked, breaking hours of sleepless silence.

She didn't ask me who I meant. "Just after we left," she said. "Henry picked her. She's some kind of an heiress."

"Is that why we disappeared?" I asked.

"No." And then, more quietly, "Maybe that was part of it."

"Do you know whose bones these are?" I asked, minutes later.

My mother shook her head.

"That man," I said, pointing to the shapeless huddle of bones beside the entrance, "killed his whole family, and then himself. They were afraid of being captured alive by the Americans, and so they killed themselves."

"We won't get captured alive," my mother said.

Years passed, and countries turned into a blur: Korea, Thailand, Ceylon, Papua New Guinea, Ethiopia. Our

pursuers started getting more persistent, deadlier. I bought a gun on the Ceylon black market and kept it in my pocket next to the book. I was careful when I looked through the glass now, and eventually I realized that I could change the way I waded through the sand. I discovered that if I moved silently enough, I could spy on my uncle, and sometimes my father, as they looked through their own glass. Whatever they were using, it was far inferior to mine--most memories stayed hidden from them, and they could not find me very easily. We stayed a half step ahead of them--as soon as I learned that they had found us, we would move. We never stayed anywhere longer than six months, though, and for that I was grateful. I missed our island and Koichi so much sometimes--I didn't want to come to love any other place that much and then lose it in another afternoon. My mother grew old on those trips; gray hair began to pepper the brown, and worry lines seemed as though they had been etched into her face with a chisel.

And then, when we were walking through a crowded market in New Delhi, they shot my mother. It hit her in the shoulder, and she went down amid sudden pandemonium. It was a stupid place to shoot us--I hauled her up and dragged her out of the plaza, hiding within the milling crowd. I didn't dare take her to a hospital in the city--my uncle's men would surely be watching every one. So I bound her shoulder as best I could and we took the next train out of the country. We traveled all night and part of the next day until we crossed the border to Nepal. There, I felt safe enough to take her to a hospital. The bullet had apparently passed through cleanly, but the doctor gave us some penicillin to ward off infection. We found a small room in a back alley tenement in Katmandu. She slept there for practically three days straight while I went out to find work. I was eventually hired as a dishwasher in the kitchens of one of the western hotels. It paid barely enough for the rent, but my mother was too weak to get a job herself.

Sometimes I wonder why I didn't notice how tired she seemed, how just getting out of bed in the morning was becoming a daily struggle for her. Why did I just assume it was exhaustion, and not something more serious? But my mother was a woman in her forties who had spent the last five years in nearly constant terror. The grueling pace of our lives would exhaust anyone, I thought.

I began to wear a plain orange sari and cover my hair--my lips and nose were a little large, but my skin color was perfect, and in the right clothes I looked like a local. No one would associate my schoolgirl picture with the Nepalese kitchen worker I had become.

And then one day, a few months after we arrived, I saw my father. I was in the market, haggling over a fish for dinner (the one thing I could convince my mother to eat, these days), when I heard his voice.

"She should be about this tall," he said, "brown skin. Living with her mother. Their names are Leah and Carol."

The man he was talking to snorted. "You're just looking for a teenage girl living with her mother. Oh, well, there's only one of those in this city. But perhaps you can buy this vase--very cheap, only thirty American dollars and I'll see what I can do."

I snorted--the vase vendor was robbing my father blind. I looked at him surreptitiously from under my scarf. He was thinner than I remembered, which made his face look harder and more vulnerable at the same time. His hair had turned silver at the temples, but it was as thick as I remembered it. For a moment, I allowed myself to be happy to see him. Then I acknowledged what this meant: they had found us. I took my bag of fish and calmly paid the vendor, glancing around to see if there were other westerners in the market. It looked like he was alone. I walked the few feet to where my father was standing. He had pulled out his wallet and looked like he was actually shelling out the thirty dollars.

"If you want to find the woman, I can take you to her," I said in my best Nepali accent.

My father paused and turned to me. He gave me a searching look, but after a few moments I realized that he

didn't recognize me. It made me feel lonely.

"What about the girl?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I don't know about a girl, but I can take you to the woman."

"How much do you want?"

"Sixty American dollars. Thirty here, thirty after you meet her." I figured I could rob my own father just as well as a vase vendor.

My father nodded and handed me the money. I took him the wrong way down the street, to confuse the vendors who knew where I lived. I walked the most circuitous route I knew back home, to disguise the fact that we lived just a few blocks away. I could see him trying to memorize the street corners and I knew that he would never be able to find his way back. The lack of street signs in the back alleys of Katmandu would help me here.

I led him up the rickety staircase to our second-floor apartment.

"Wait here," I said, before I opened the door. My mom was sitting by the window, flipping the pages of a book with her left hand. She looked up when I came in, but I put my finger over my lips and she didn't say anything. She looked afraid and wary, but most of all, I thought, she looked tired. I bit my lip. What was I doing, bringing my father here? He was probably the last person she wanted to see. What had possessed me to put both of us in so much danger?

"He doesn't know me," I whispered. And then, much louder, my voice accented, "You can come in."

He stood in the threshold for a long time, staring at my mother. My back was to him, but I could see my mother's face. There was shock there, and anger, of course, but most of all I saw longing. Deep, bone-aching longing.

My father broke first. "What happened to your arm?" he asked. His voice was hoarse.

I shut the door behind him. We didn't need to draw attention to ourselves.

"One of Henry's people shot me. Or was it one of yours?" As tired as she was, with one arm in a sling and wearing a shapeless house dress, when she said that, my mom became beautiful again.

"Carol, I would never . . . I had no idea. . . ." He crossed the room in three long strides and embraced her.

My mother didn't exactly resist him, but she didn't return the gesture. She just lay there, stiff in his arms.

"Please come back with me," he said. "Come back with me and you won't have to live in this hellhole. I'll take care of you and Leah . . . where is Leah, though? Is she okay?"

My mother ignored his question. "You'll take me back . . . will you marry me, then? Or will I just go back to being your weekend whore?"

My father pulled back a little. He looked almost like he wanted to cry. "Do you know how much I've missed you, Carol? I'm married, you know that, but you've always been the only one I wanted."

"Then why wouldn't you marry me?" It was the first time I had heard my mother yell in a very long time.

"Why would you keep me hidden like I was some dirty secret?"

"They won't accept us, Carol. Maybe if we lived in a more . . . accepting world, but now--isn't it enough just to be together?"

Her mouth twisted bitterly. "So tell me, this new law. The Civil Rights Act. Tell me, Mr. Senator, how are you going to vote?"

He seemed confused. "Against it, of course. What does that have to do--"

She laughed. I wondered if I had ever heard a laugh sound so painful. "It has everything to do with everything, Charles. You never understood that, did you? You say the world won't accept us--what you mean is your brother won't accept us, your parents won't accept us. You have a chance to change all that, but you don't seem to care. *I'm* one of those niggers, your daughter is one of those niggers that you want to make sure drinks from a separate water fountain. If I lived with you again, it would be like spitting on myself, my parents, my daughter every day. I did that for twelve years, Charles. I'm not going to do it again. Now go. I'm tired."

For a moment I thought he was going to try to embrace her again, but instead he stood up and walked to the door.

"I loved you, Carol," he said.

"I still love you, Charles." She turned to the window. She wouldn't want him to see her tears.

I opened the door. "Come," I said. He followed me blindly outside, and didn't seem to notice how suspiciously husky my voice was.

I led us back to the market a different way, through back alleys bordered by foul-smelling sewage ditches and a few crowded thoroughfares.

I stopped in front of the vase seller, who was packing up his wares.

"Here," my father said, pulling a hundred-dollar bill out of his wallet. "Keep it."

I nodded, and tucked it in the top of my sari.

"Tell her . . . that they know she's here. They'll find her soon. She should leave."

"I will," I said, without the accent. His head snapped up. "I'm glad I got to see you again, Father."

And before he could say anything, I ducked back into an alley and ran.

When people die, their memories explode. No matter how peaceful the death, its aftermath is violence. Sometimes people's lives explode in a thousand tiny fragments, most of which will wither and fade with time. Once in a rare while, a person's memories hardly fragment at all, and those are the ones most people call spirits.

I saw a lot of death in the Ghanaian hospital where I took my mother after we left Nepal. Stomach cancer, the doctors told me. It was very advanced; she must have been living with it for long time. I thought of her exhaustion, her bad appetite, and wished that I hadn't been so stupid. It was only a matter of time, they said. When my mother broached the subject of me going back to the States, I realized that she knew she was going to die.

"What about the glass?" I asked.

"Give it back to them. I must have been crazy to take it . . . what kind of mother was I, dooming you to this kind of life. . . ." She sighed. "I didn't want them to have it. That glass makes them powerful, and I thought that if I stole it . . . well, it doesn't matter what I thought. You should just give it back, Leah."

But I didn't want to give it back. The more I thought about it, the angrier I got. I followed the news out of the States: the Civil Rights Act had passed the House and was about to go to the Senate. My uncle, Henry Richards, was one of the strongest voices of opposition, and his behind-the-scenes power was making things difficult.

My mom was getting weaker by the day. She never said it, but I knew that she wanted to see my father. Somehow, I had to end this for her.

One evening a week later, I was helping take down patients' names and information in the emergency room. A man walked in, carrying a young girl who was coughing feebly in his arms. I was overwhelmed with a sensation of déjà vu, even though I had never seen either of them before. Why did they seem so familiar?

A nurse wheeled an empty gurney past me. Its sheet was stained with splotches of fresh blood that suddenly seemed to be the color of expensive red wine, carelessly spilled on a tablecloth. For a moment I was twelve years old again, huddled in an alley behind a restaurant, clutching a shard of glass whose power I didn't understand.

Of course. How had the Richardses become so powerful? Because with the glass they could see memories. And what were memories, fundamentally, but secrets?

And I knew my uncle's darkest secret of all.

The scandal broke just before the Senate was scheduled to vote on the bill. My uncle recused himself and resigned a week later, when the bill passed. By then the spotlight was firmly focused on the suddenly rejuvenated investigation of the murder of Jim Yarrow, a shop owner near Dartmouth, where my uncle went to college. Apparently, my uncle had bought the upstairs apartment from him but then refused to pay for it, even when the man told him that he needed the money to take his daughter to the hospital. That argument that I had seen had taken place after the girl died. I wrote a letter to my father, knowing full well that he would not come alone, and not really caring.

I met him in the lobby of the hospital. The people behind him looked like bodyguards, but they didn't touch me. I wondered if they would save that until after my mother died.

"How is she?" he asked when he saw me.

I shrugged, as though just thinking about it didn't make me want to weep. "Any day now, they say."

"We should take her back to the States. I have a plane, I'm sure the doctors there could--"

"It's too late, Charles," I said. It made me feel stronger, somehow, to say his first name.

He looked so lost when he nodded that I felt sorry for him. He was weak and he was a bigot, but he had been raised on those twin pillars since he was a baby, and I knew it was too much for me to expect him to change, even for love of my mother.

"Have you come to take the glass?" she asked, when he came into the room.

My father shook his head, but one of the men behind him nodded. "We're ending it here. You'll give it back, one way or another."

My father stayed with her until the end. I touched the glass, sometimes, for comfort, but I never looked through it. I didn't want to know what memories were sharing our misery with us. My mom slipped into a coma during a thunderstorm just like the one from all those years ago in Japan, when I discovered the cave of bones.

Just before, she gripped my hand. She didn't say a thing, she only looked at me, with eyes so fierce in that gaunt face I almost thought they were glowing. I knew what she was asking me, what she couldn't bring herself to say.

"I won't give it back, Ma," I whispered. "I won't let them take me alive."

They were all in the room the morning she died. My father was crying silently beside the bed, but I was finished with my tears. I didn't look at her wasted, lifeless body--I thought of her eyes, dug my nails into my palm, and waited.

"You'll give us back the glass now," one of the men said. He stepped forward. His arms were motionless at his sides, but so tense with energy it was more frightening than a bared fist. I knew that he would not hesitate to hurt me.

"Please, just come back with us, Leah. This running . . . it killed Carol. Just come back."

I turned towards my father. "The Civil Rights Act . . . how did you vote?" I asked.

"I didn't," he said. "I didn't cast a ballot."

I smiled. "An invisible vote," I said, "for an invisible daughter."

I pulled the shard out of my pocket. The men glanced at each other warily, but my father only looked miserable.

My mother was standing by his side, wearing her yellow sundress and bug glasses.

"Leah," I heard her say, as though she saw me. "Get in the car."

I stepped through the glass.

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