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The Queen of Sheba

"Remember me to Marion". These were the last words I ever heard her utter. While they were projected from the voice box of another—my mother; her daughter—I, at the very least had been permitted to learn that she had died, and for that, I had been reminded that I *"should be thankful."* Mummy had been abnormally calm and cool as she rationally relayed the gift of Granny's parting words—to me. The morning sky had been pregnant with disquieting pause. As the strategically aimed poisonous darts which typically embroidered my mother's usual verbiage went undetected, I wondered: *is it safe to put my shield down?* My mother continued: "This should not be coming as any kind of surprise, surely? She was a hundred years old, after all. *One hundred* for goodness' sake!" Then, seemingly as an afterthought: "Besides, she wasn't really that nice of a person anyway, was she? I mean, she was *my* mother, and if anyone can say that, it's me." *No—not safe.* An awareness of my mother's growing recognition of the emotion embodied within my silence seemed to JOLT me into a more defiant yet strangely conscious mode of self-protection. *She is an unsafe harbor of my memories and I am silently resolving to make this my last "conversation" with her.* And that, had been that.

Well, it's been thirteen years since I learned you left this world, Granny. All this time I thought I had been holding back tears but perhaps they were choosing not to come all by themselves. Preferring to clog up my throat like salty jagged icicles. *Time.* Perhaps I had no hand in it? *There's been a shift.* The old polaroid in my head seems to stir...yielding a click, a flash and a whirr and suddenly I see little me, head jutting forward, sniffing the air like a delighted puppy en route to the finest patisserie in your picture book village. As the sweet aroma of Bakewell tarts and chocolate filled pastries wafts into the atmosphere my little hands are clasped tightly around your gnarled arthritic fingers. *Flash, flash, flash.* You could be gruff. You didn't like people who slouched or stole whether they were Guttersnipes, Ragamuffins or Tramps. *"Children should be seen and not heard"* were words you would love to say—and they were always accompanied by a pointed wink. In cahoots with your friend, the elocution mistress, you taught me impeccable manners. A diamond in the rough! *I can see you smiling with your eyes*—the delicately defined crows' feet decorating the corners. Eyes of azure blue—like those of the faery folk residing in the stories you told me many a time, twinkling in concert with the generous afternoon sun kissing his way through the muddling corn maze. Your mostly straight, long yellow-white hair is pulled back into a rather severe looking bun and what a tall, stately figure you are, striding amidst the rambling Yorkshire fields: a multigreen patchwork of endless wonderment, artistically compartmentalized by smooth, grey clean stone walls. *I can see you smiling with your eyes.* They said you were hard. Hard as *nails* to be quite precise. Yet you were the only one in our heavily dysfunctional family who offered more than a semblance of a sympathetic shoulder when it came to my protestations against eating the murdered animals my parents insisted on presenting to me during what was known as "supper time". And, my father, devastatingly immortal by virtue of insanity managed to fool everyone—except you. You, who modeled to me the virtue in wielding unapologetic passion regarding truths that most of the others were not

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willing to understand. They said you were psychotic. A *paranoid schizophrenic*, to be concise. But how were you the most caring and alert human I have ever encountered? What did it mean that your marvelous and sometimes scary predictions always came true? Like the time you dreamed of the tomb of Tutankhamun and then, the consequential catacomb was discovered, 24 hours later, on that chilly day on November 4th, 1922—when you were only twelve. *Psychic not psychotic*. Bath times at your house were invariably royal events, full of the pomp and circumstance of greatness. By the time we had loaded up your tiny porcelain tub with all my dollies and soaps and bubbles and things there was barely enough room for me. Yet I would somehow settle in like a semi-coiled seahorse of tawny persuasion. We would run the water as warm as I could stand and I would stay immersed for as long as was tolerable, seeing how long I could hold my breath under water, my wizened fingers eventually shriveling up like pink prunes. I adored the way the weight of the water would temporarily straighten my naturally curly hair to the point that I could fancy that I was a mermaid. Then it would begin:

“You know *what?*” you would ask.

“No. Who is he? *Ha-ha!*”

“I know who you look like!”

“Who’s that?”

“You look like the *Queen of Sheba!*”

Your triumphant exclamations always got me excited.

“But *who* is the Queen of Sheba?”

“*What?* You mean you *never* heard of the Queen of Sheba? She was the most beautiful African queen. She looked *just* like you.”

I would get gloriously giddy with delight.

“Everybody looked up to her.

She was so special, they curtsied to her.

And you know, *nobody* pushes royalty around, right?”

“You don’t put up with anybody’s nonsense. *We* don’t tolerate it.

Got it?”

“Got it, Granny!”

“In fact, you are the Queen of Sheba come back as reincarnation! I bow to you, your majesty!”

I would shriek with gusto until the next day when we would enjoy Sheba shenanigans all over again. But today it is morning and I am staring heavenwards, head pointed towards a lavender blue, cloud free sky. Calm, cleansed and refreshingly vibrant following a brief spell of hard rain. Looking more closely, I see the faint etchings of what appears to be a burgeoning rainbow sprawling across the scene. I find that I can’t help but wonder what was the color of your loneliness? And, somehow, I allow a trickle of a tear to run down my cheek and drop to the floor. I think— I thought, you should know; the Queen of Sheba remembers you.