
REBE HUNTMAN

Parched

Because at Glenwood Gardens there are no orange poppies flashing their fiery centers. No riotous tulips. Just a few violets wilting out front. Rows of boxwoods cut into squares. Such a hassle anyway, the outdoors! We must roll out the wheelchair, find the sunglasses. Everything worth seeing has been brought inside—seashells stamped on beach-inspired wallpaper. Framed florals pressed behind glass. No extravagant watercolors, only print replicas hidden behind Latin names.

Because we are, above all, practical. Carpeting, counters, cabinets—beige! A note of ivory or crème thrown in for spice. The daily rhythm of laundry and medications, blood pressure, nails, hair, bingo. Lunch at eleven thirty. Dinner at four. No time for long stories about how you were once a vice-president. An army captain. A teacher. Mother. Daughter.

Here self-expression takes the form of hall decor—wreaths made from grandchildren's Popsicle sticks. Welcome signs pasted over closed doors. Laminated reminders that *the way we spend our days is the way we spend our lives*.

So, *Live. Love. Laugh*. March is Madagascar Month in the dining hall. There are stuffed monkeys hanging from plastic leaves. Tonight is Balloon Volleyball or Music with Rick, the sounds of piped-in big band Muzak almost drowning out a hundred silent screams of *Get me out of here*.

Because something inside you remembers, without remembering, how you once climbed the Great Wall of China. How you giggled when the man who took you first placed his arm around your still-girlish waist. How you moaned when he parted your red lips.

Because no one here imagines you were ever that woman. Your door looks like all the others. Beige. Inoffensive. How you long to be offensive—free yourself from framed glass. Raise your rose-wet mouth from its paper canvas. Let the dust of you pollinate the wind.