

## Permanence

*Skyscraper Chair*, Paul Frankl

“No matter how hard you bang on that window, the glass isn’t going to break.”

The nurse has that gentle, methodical kindness in her tone yet I can tell she is already grieving the imminent loss of life beyond the wall. The glass is dense and makes a hollow ringing sound where my fists crash against it, echoing through cavernous halls. But now it is null and void. Despite the intensity of flames broiling in my gut, my fists fall to my side and I let my eyes blur, trying to focus their way through the thick pane dividing the operation chamber from the hall. When I try to peer through it, all I see are the smudgy residuals of old fingerprints. In this graveyard of reaching hands and scratching nails, I find no peace or quiet in the near-tangible silence, only an intense tugging sensation in my gut, inclining me to reach my own hand out and press it against the tinted window, sticky with etchings of visitors past.

Almost against my own will, I find my palm fitted against the flat pane of glass before me. I feel that touching it will send it shattering into candy-glass fragments, bridging the yawning chasm between where I stand in this harsh fluorescent glow and your grave slumber. I alone stand watch over my own reflection, a lone lamp on a dusky street with nothing but my own flickering shadow for company. I wait patiently for the effervescent glow of your morning light to break across the horizon and shower the alleys and crevices between brick walls with gilded golden glory.

“Sir, I’m afraid we’re going to have to ask you to leave.”

Jerking me from my revelry, I tear my eyes, but not my palm, from the glass to meet the bespectacled ones of the thinnest man I have ever seen. Thinner even than you were when you were admitted, his coat hangs from his limbs as though his bones are nothing but wire and everything about him drapes off a frame, forcing me to believe he is nothing but an outline of a

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man. Despite the fact that he is clearly the oddity in this perfectly sculpted sitcom hospital, he looks at me as though I am some specimen under a looking glass and his cat-eyed lenses serve as a microscope.

“Did you hear me, sir?” Again, with such an accusatory curiosity about him.

“Five more minutes?” I plead, suddenly a child in bed, lazy under the flannel covers his mother rips from his grasp.

He lets out a tight sigh, fraught with unspoken turmoil. I can tell it pains his frail frame just to do so by the way his coat shudders, but nods and turns to walk away.

As soon as the doctor turns the corner, I find myself leaning sideways to the glass, pressing my cheek against it and whispering along its length. “Don’t worry darling, I’m not leaving yet. Not until I see you.”

Although it has hardly been even one minute, I hear the sharp tapping of shoes against linoleum and a soft whistle; the nearly not a man has returned and is looking at me; a slight sadness in his stance. Suddenly, revulsion, cement-thick and churning with crushed stones of resentment; bitter to the molecular level, fills every crevice and canyon inside my heart until it is pulsing with an avalanche of hatred.

“I’m afraid it’s time for you to leave,” he calls out as he approaches. With his twiggish body, contrasting the bagginess of his uniform, he almost floats toward me, a specter haunting the gravekeeper, coming to drag him away; away from what he loves.

“Will she be okay, do you know?” I ask, not lifting my cheek from the glass. I watch my short puffs of breath condense on its surface, revealing the traces of more old fingerprints, decaying in my wake.

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“We’re not sure yet. Her operation is set for tomorrow morning and I would like to have faith but...” He doesn’t need to finish, I always knew you were fragile against the buffeting winds of fate and the twisting tides of time. I think I’m nodding, the side of my head rubbing against the barrier.

“Would it be so bad to simply...*let go*?”

The question startles me. Out of all the ways I had imagined facing the future, letting you pass me by was never one of them, and it certainly never would be.

“Yes. It would be dreadful and I never could.” I say, closing my eyes to avoid the intensity of his observance.

“I see.” The almost-man almost falters. “Sometimes, we lose things. Car keys, important paperwork-”

“The only reason we had for living?” I interject, fuming at having the impact of your life against mine compared to such trivial things.

“Important people,” he amends, “get lost in the shuffle and we must accept that there is nothing to be done. However, I am no fool, I can see where I overstepped and have decided it would be best if all three of us,” he gestures to the window...at you I presume, “go our separate ways.”

I find myself nodding, unsure of whether or not I agree with my own body, and detach myself from the glass. When I turn over my shoulder to glance at the pane one last time, it is no more transparent than it ever was but there is a faint tracing of a human where I pressed my body against it, as if willing myself to phase through it. And yet, what once seemed so prominent against the dark glass fades with just a few more steps, merging into the conglomerate of ancient yearning fingers and longing palms, burying itself in the graveyard along with you.

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Even in death, you have more permanence than me.