

# REMEMBER

*A fresh start.*

BY A. J. LEE

Dan looked up from Jen to see her father staring at her, at the tubes and wires, the bunched-up blankets, the lifeless eyes. His face was blotchy.

"This is stupid," he said, and Dan didn't know whether he was talking about Jen's death or her plan. "You'll rip her head off for what?" her father continued. Then: "Maybe they could have saved her."

The CryoSys techs tipped Jen's body into a plastic tub. Dan felt light, airy, as he watched CryoSys security hold Jen's father back. He heard the protests from outside as if through a river. He watched Jen's feet, the blister from the shoes she wore to his best friend's wedding still a white sac on her dark heel, disappear into the ice.

That was the last he saw of Jen. He would not watch them remove her head, he would not watch them inject her with the chemicals that would preserve her. From that instant on, he had her only in memories.

When Jen signed on with CryoSys she and Dan had promised they wouldn't forget. "Never forget me," she said, and he laughed and said she was unforgettable. They were 24, and Dan still believed she would make it.

She didn't. She was 28 when she gave up, 28 when they slid her body into that tank.

He doesn't remember how old he was when he started to forget.

"Never forget me." But how can you remember anything forever? It wasn't that Dan wanted to forget. It was that, back then, memories clear as a calm lake in December would steam into mist in August.

Nothing could stay frozen forever.

Dan sat at his kitchen counter and watched his wife, Lauren. Watched her roll out thick wrists, heard joints pop. The sunlight turned the lines around her mouth and eyes into dark creases.

Dan didn't often feel old, but sometimes he looked at Lauren and thought this is what he must look like: wrinkled, sagging, soft in places that should be hard.

He wished he could Remember how she looked when they met. He *remembered*, of course, but memories aren't Remembers.

He envied his kids. Hamilton had Remembers going back to when he was ten, and Briona could Remember her first birthday party. Now Briona was in her room, doing



whatever 13-year-olds do, and Hamilton was 27, living across the world, and bringing his new girlfriend home for Lauren's birthday.

Dan was sometimes glad that he didn't Remember 27. It was rare for Jen to float into his memories, but when she did, the thought of her was tangled up in decades-old longings and nostalgia. He could no longer picture her face, but he could feel the gulf that opened inside him when he watched her body slip away.

Briona came past the kitchen, stepping over the mop as it trundled by.

"I'm going to the museum with Hamilton and Jen," she said. "We'll be back before dinner." She was gone before Dan's stomach finished sinking.

"Who's Jen?"

"Hamilton's girlfriend," Lauren said. "Remember?"

It was a common name, he reminded himself. Sure, CryoSys was in the news after announcing their thaw tests, but he'd have heard if she was thawed. She would have called him.

He found her old Instagram. Some pictures had disappeared when the servers went down, but he swiped through what remained.

Had he really stood that tall? Had she really been that beautiful? He studied her face, looking for something that would allow him to definitively say: yes, this person is my Jen.

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Dan looked at Jen. He tried not to stare, but

really, how could he help it? She didn't look like the Jen in the pictures, like his Jen. Did she?

It didn't matter. Hamilton was speaking.

"I wanted you to meet Jen sooner, but CryoSys only just lifted her NDA," he said.

"And she only just got her new body," Briona cut in. "Right?"

"New body?" Lauren asked. She was trying to sound casual, Dan could tell.

"That's not —" Hamilton started.

Jen would have kicked him under the table. She used to do that all the time.

"This body was donated last year. She died in a boating accident. Most of my left side is prosthetic."

"Her old body was an android," Briona said. Hamilton winced.

"What happened to ... your first body?" Lauren asked. "Oh, I'm sorry —"

Jen shushed her, smiling. "CryoSys prepared me for that, don't worry. They chose those of us least likely to give a shit for their betas."

Everyone laughed but Dan. Had Jen caught his eye?

The subject was changed, but Dan didn't speak. He couldn't remember if he had told Hamilton about Jen. He couldn't remember if he had told Lauren.

After cake had been eaten and port poured, Dan worked up the nerve to ask: "Do you remember anything? From your old life?"

His family had been reminiscing about some old vacation, but Hamilton stopped to say: "She's not supposed to talk about it, Dad." His arm was draped over Jen's shoulders.

"It's okay," Jen said. Her glass was empty. "I don't remember as much as I was supposed to. Some things, though. Big things. A few little things. And I remember what I don't remember. I can see the holes."

The room was silent, waiting.

"I can't tell you what I do remember, though, if that's what you're asking. I can't tell you who I was."

Dan sat alone in the darkened living room. His wife and children and Jen had gone to bed. He had poured himself another glass.

He sat alone, with memories and Remembers, and waited for Jen to step out of his son's room. ■

A. J. Lee is a Canadian writer without a long and interesting list of careers, a website or a Twitter account.

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