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# Hello, Please Help Me

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# Hello, Please Help Me

"It's me. You up?"

"Good god, Gretta. What time is it?"

"Late. Early."

"You having another one?"

"She won't leave me alone, Grandma. I'm scared."

"She's not real, honey."

"My skin burns. I don't feel right."

"Just breathe. Say it isn't real."

"Okay."

"Out loud."

"She isn't real. But she wants me to do something. If I knew what it was, maybe I could do it and she'd go away."

"If she isn't real, there's nothing for you to do. It's that front globe, you heard the doctor."

Gretta inhales three seconds, exhales four. Inhales three—*exhale two, three, four.* Her grandmother doesn't protest the silence, doesn't try to break it.

Soon the images of the woman recede as inevitably as they came. The nausea grows.

Gretta says, "It's not the frontal lobe; it's the temporal lobe."

"You see? If you can tell me I'm wrong, you're all right."

It's clear her grandma has been researching seizures; Gretta's neurologist said nothing of the lobes of the brain, not when Grandma came with her, anyway. She wants to tell her she loves her for looking into it and ask her if she finally used her Internet connection or if she went to a library.

"It's going away."

"It always does. Have you been taking your pill?"

"I don't know. I don't feel right. I think I'm going to throw up."

"Are you sitting down? I think you should sit down."

"She's always there, Grandma. I saw it. Even when I'm not in it. Even after. Even before."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Dreams, maybe. She had a towel this time. Or a sheet. And brown hair—longish light brown hair. Can you remember that for me? And don't tell my mom. Don't tell her anything. Tell her I'm fine."

"Come home, Gretchen. Don't give your imaginary friend any more mind. Don't try to make sense of something that's not real. You ought to be in bed asleep by now anyway. Don't you have a room? You need some money, Button?" She waits at length for an answer; Gretta has nothing to offer. "And where do you think chasing Lance is going to get you? A seagull will eat anything you give him but you won't be able to catch him once you've thrown him a chocolate cake. And think about your health. A little mal today can be a damned big mal tomorrow."

"I don't think it works that way. Look, I feel real sick. I got to lay down. Maybe I need to sleep a bit. Call the kids, please. Check on them. Tell them I miss them. I really, really miss them."

She feels as though she will cry—out loud. Or laugh uncontrollably, which would be not only embarrassing but criminal, to some minds.

Her head hurts. Her shoulders ache.

"Jackie should have picked Tulip up from school by now, and Braden—can you check on them? Tell them I love them and I'll be home soon?"

"They know."

"Just in case, I mean."

"Of course I will."

"I'm sorry, Grandma. I love you."

"You take your pill, and call me next time—"