

After the Silence

by *Celisnebula*

What happens when a witch can't remember who she is?
Written for omnicular's March challenge: The Post-War Challenge.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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It's the quiet of night that does her in; silence makes the night stretch out in unbearable strains of half remembered flashes of red and green – they chase around inside her head until she wants to scream. Often she does, making the nurses rush into the room with pounding feet and weary sighs. *Post-Traumatic Stress*, the nurses in sterling white whisper to one another as they push her against the mattress, pinning her to the bed with cruel, cold hands as they work the leather straps around her flailing limbs. Once she is bound, they stab at the translucent flesh of her arm as they try to inject the medication right into her veins. When that happens, she can't stop the images, horrible and frightening as they push into her waiting brain.

They call her Jane Doe to her face, in strange accents that sound odd to her ears. She wants to scream at them to talk correctly – to use the Queen's English – anything, to stop the strange twang of words that come out in incomprehensible garbles. It grates on her nerves each time someone talks to her, for she knows they don't sound right, but she doesn't know what would sound right, if anything at all would.

She does not know how she came to be in this place; time has no meaning here as the days all blend in together. If she were stronger, she'd leave, but she's not, and each time she thinks she might be, the nightmares come, along with the nurses and their yellow pills, and she ends up tethered to the bed.

She is not in a private room, though she's never seen the occupant in the bed beside her, only heard the strange guttural wails that pierce the daylight. The sounds ring in her ears, making her head ache, but she'd rather have that than the silence. The flashes of green disappear when there is noise.

Sometimes she feels close to remembering – fractured images of a boy with red hair or eyes of dark emerald – but trying to remember makes her head pound and her skin crawl, so she shuffles those bits aside. Other times, she feels as if she should be *doing* something – anything – rather than languishing in this bed, unable to get up and out into the world. Only the idea of doing what never really forms, and she slinks into the hazy half-remembered dreams of red and green.

When she sleeps, she can't force those bits away. It has to be a dream, she tells herself, none of it can be real – the good or the bad. She tries to deny it, but there are some good things that flash in and out of her head. They aren't real; she knows they aren't real – the doctor with the plastic smile and dark glasses told her so the first time he coaxed a confession from her lips. She ended up strapped to the bed; force-fed huge yellow pills they pressed against the chapped flesh of her lips, forcing them down her throat and making her nauseous, instead of merely injecting her with woo-woo juice.

Now she doesn't tell him of the white horses with long, golden horns, or the huge giants with fuzzy hair and kind hugs. She doesn't tell him how she remembers the feel of magic skittering across her skin; he might claim it was a delusion and force her to forget – she doesn't want to forget, so she doesn't talk about it. It's easier that way. She keeps all those happy little visions, and he thinks she is doing what he says.

The longer she stays here, the more she learns that what she sees in her dreams can't be real. Life doesn't work in a pattern of magic and wonder. There is no wonder in the monotony of her life, just the harsh hands of her caretakers and the strange wails of the unseen screamer in the bed beside her.

The dark-haired boy with the green eyes, the giant of a man with fuzzy hair, and most especially the redheaded boy with freckles across his nose – they are not real. She knows this with a certainty seeped inside the marrow of her bones. Were they real, she'd not be here, in this bed, while the days whirl away in a blur of light and dark.

Were they real, they would never stand for her imprisonment – and she is in prison, the cuts on her wrists and ankles from the leather straps are proof of this harsh reality.

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A/N:

Many thanks to Deviant Author for her quick read through and advice on this drabble's contents.