

Iris

I took a deep breath and summoned energy I didn't possess. 'Knock Knock!' I called out with false cheer.

Iris sat in her usual spot. Slumped in her wheelchair, against faded, peeling wallpaper, staring listlessly at muted daytime television. A thin, yellow gingham blanket hung limply over her boney knees. Her food lay untouched on a tray in front of her. I gagged at the smell of stale, cold fish that lay in watery mashed potato. Hard, under-cooked green peas, like beady eyes, stared at me accusingly, reproachfully.

'How are you today?' I bent closer and touched my lips to her cheek. It was moist, oily, slathered in cheap moisturizing cream. She smelled slightly sour, in need of a good bath. Iris said nothing, just nodded towards the television, her eyes rheumy, distant.

I sat down heavily in the grey, plastic chair next to her and followed her gaze towards the screen. Two B-rated actors with coiffed hair and surgically enhanced faces were arguing. One was perched on the edge of a sofa, a gin and tonic in her hand. I swallowed, suddenly in need of a drink. I tried again.

'How do you feel?' I said, taking her thin, veined hand in mine and searching her grey, rumpled face. Iris dragged her eyes away from the television and stared dolefully at me. She snatched her hand away.

'I feel nothing', she said starkly, lucidly, before blinking slowly, lowering her shutters against me and withdrawing into the scene on the screen.