



Memento Mori

© Kennedy Hemme

Note: *This excerpt is from the novel-in-progress, Memento Mori. It is about a girl named Leda Summers who was adopted after being given up by her mother who, she was told, was a drug addict. As Leda gets older, things get odder. Were those ghosts she just saw? And why did her mother send her a distressing phone call after not talking to her for four years? And who was Case Ford? As Leda tries to unravel these mysteries and learns the truth, she discovers something frightening about herself.*

Chapter 3

I opened the door, hearing the familiar melodic ding from the door. The smell of old and new books filled my nose, bringing back familiar memories of Lisa reading my favorite short stories to me instead of buying the books and taking them home. I passed the cashier, who squinted at my blue curled hair, as if trying to decide if he liked it or not. His nose flared slightly and that's when I realized it was Case.

“What made you decide to get that hair color?” I heard him say, his voice deep but oddly smooth. I stared back at him, well, his hair. It was straight and long, but all over the place. It was horribly cute.

“I-I don't know,” I said quietly, turning away to walk up the steps to the second floor. I heard him laugh and I felt myself blush. When I got to the second floor, I sat on the worn, blue loveseat, the only place to sit on this level. This was where Lisa read to me while I

smelled all the curious smells in the shop: Dust, leather and warm paper, like paper fresh from a printer.

I stared at the long rows of books in front of me, trying to figure out why I came here in the first place. I saw an old man just glaring at books. He wore a dark green sweater and brown pants. His hair was all still there, but was brittle looking and gray. He just stared at the books, not touching them. I let out a breath and he looked at me. Confusion then surprise filled his face, and I turned back to see if there was someone behind me before returning his confused gaze.

“Can you—,” he began, and then disappeared. *Disappeared?*

I screamed, scared and confused. I looked around to see if anyone else saw this, and heard footsteps running up the stairs. I saw Case and pointed to where the old man was.

“There-there was a-a man,” I said, gasping and staring at Case. He faced at where I pointed and squinted.

“Oh.”

“Oh? He was there, and then he was gone,” I rushed through my words. Case looked at me incredulously, “no, he didn’t *walk* away, he just faded!”

I stood up, shaking.

“Calm down, Leda,” he said, putting his hands on my shoulders. I could feel his cool breath on me, ragged from running up here. My fear was quickly replaced by nervousness, I pulled away from him.

“S-sorry,” I said, and turned away.

“It was the old shopkeeper,” he said matter-of-factly.

“The old shopkeeper?” I asked curiously.

Case looked at me for a second, then shook his head, and headed for the door towards the stairs. “You’re crazy,” he muttered, then left.

I stood there, lost. I looked back at the bookcases expecting to see the old man, but there was nothing there but a few books on the ground. My stomach did slow flips as I scanned the room. I could still smell Case’s cologne on my shoulders and the image of the shopkeeper. By old shopkeeper did he mean retired . . .? Or . . . dead?

I shook my head, of course not, I'm just crazy. If he was dead, then that would've been a ghost. I shook my head again, if he was retired then why did he just fade away on the spot? I felt a headache coming on, forming at my temples. I rubbed them and walked down the stairs and past Case, refusing to look at him.

I walked down the sunny sidewalk, trying to enjoy the spring weather. I watched all the shops as I walked past. I wanted to think about anything but what just happened, but my curiosity and confusion wouldn't let me forget. If that was a ghost, did that mean the little girl from last week was too? Or was it really just stress? I passed the coffee shop, glancing at the red overhang over the windows and caught coffee wafting from the opened door. How did Case know who I was talking about?

I stared at my purple Vans as I walked and counted the cracks in the sidewalk.

"Leda—,"

I counted the twentieth crack just before I felt something collide into my head. I shook it off and looked up. "Oh, I'm sorry!"

"Wow," he said, grinning. I smiled back as I recognized Seth. "What were you doing?"

"Just walking . . . counting the cracks in the sidewalks, I should've been looking I know," I laughed.

"Yeah," he replied, rubbing his chest where my head must've hit him. "I just came from GameStop." He held up a Call of Duty game. I noticed he was wearing two colorful bracelets on his wrist under his gray striped hoodie.

"What's that?" I asked and motioned to his wrist. "Looks like something I'd wear."

"Oh," he pulled up his sleeve, "they're just—,"

"I like them," I said even though they made him seem a little *happy*. He grinned, obviously pleased by my approval. He pulled his sleeves back down and motioned for me to follow him.

"Where?"

"It feels good outside so let's go to the park," he said, tugging on my fingers. I thought briefly about Molly but quickly forgot about her as a warm breeze passed over my arms. I nodded at Seth even though I was already following him across the street.

I heard dogs barking and children screaming as we looked for a good place to sit. Seth chose a bench by a pond full of little ducks. We sat down and that's when my bliss ended.

"So what were you doing here? You usually just stay home," he said as he closed his eyes and put his arms on the back of the metal bench. His fingers brushed my shoulder and I scooted over nonchalantly.

"I went to the bookstore," I said slowly, remembering what had happened just half an hour ago. I pictured the little girl and the old man, just now realizing how pale they were. I shivered.

"Fun," he said sarcastically. "What happened there? 'Cause you seemed down when you were walking. No pun intended," he added, smiling.

I considered telling Seth what happened then felt foolish for not telling him in the first place, I mean he is my best friend, why don't I automatically confide in him? If anything, he won't think I'm crazy because he already knows I am.

I took a nervous breath and let it out; Seth opened his eyes, intrigued. "Well, this is going to sound crazy. Like, *really* crazy. Do you think you can handle it?"

"Try me," he said, closing his eyes again.

"O-okay," I said, blushing at my sudden stutter. "I went to the bookstore and I was sitting on that couch on the second floor? Yeah, and I saw this old man," I paused and shivered again.

"Leda, there are old people *everywhere*," he said without opening his eyes.

"Ha ha," I said, feeling slightly less nervous. "Anyways, I saw him and he looked at me like he was surprised to see me and asked 'can you' before he . . . *disappeared.*"

Seth opened his eyes and faced me. "Disappeared? You mean walked away from you?"

"No!" I said, lightly pushing him. "He . . . faded or something."

"So, you saw a ghost?"

"Well, maybe. I don't know, Case knew who I was talking about and probably saw him, too."

“Case? He was there with you?” Seth asked stiffly, turning his gaze to a duck shaking water off of its feathers.

“I mean, he works there, and I think I might’ve screamed loud enough for him to hear. . .”

“Oh,” he breathed, shrugging. “Yeah, you probably just scared the old guy and he walked off or something.”

I opened my mouth to tell him about Case calling him the ‘old shopkeeper’ but decided it was pointless trying to argue. “I guess,” I said, joining his eyes at the pond. I squinted through the sunlight coming in lines from the tree above us and saw a little boy bending over the pond. His short brown hair looked matted, like he hadn’t showered in days. He didn’t look back up at me, just kept running his fingers through the water as if trying to coax the ducklings over.

“What a cutie,” I said, smiling.

“Who?” Seth glanced at me. “Talking about me?”

“No,” I said, laughing, “that little boy.” I nodded toward the pond.

Seth frowned at me. “What little boy?”

I looked back at the pond; the boy was still playing in the water. I felt another chill pass through me.

“Oh, I was just remembering a little boy from a while ago. . . He was adorable. Anyways, I have to get back home, you know, lunch.”

Seth stood up when I did and hugged me. “Yeah, sure. See you tomorrow at school?”

“Yep,” I said, heading back towards the street where my car was parked, feeling less than sane.