

*Breakfast*

(Excerpt)

In a split second Ernan is through the glass doors and across the lobby. The crisp-capped nurse behind the reception desk, staring at her phone, doesn't even ask him to sign in.

He slips down the hall to the morning room (a different nurse had kindly given Ernan a tour of the facilities when he'd visited two weeks earlier). From the threshold, he whispers, "Lou-Lou!"

Then, "Baby Doll!"

Then, after a few seconds, "Momma!"

Louise's head turns away from the baby-talking therapist and her whiteboard. Memory exercises, Ernan has read about them on the Tranquil Meadows website.

Her eyes kindle as they catch his, dimples forming in her cheeks. "Paulie."

'Momma' has done it. Paulie was a beautiful little boy. Louise talks about him a lot, sometimes as though he were still alive.