

## Memory - story about memories

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### Memory

By Kalin Ringkvist

The sun glared menacingly in the screened view port. Antony watched himself throw the lever that disconnected the lower section of the rocket. His speed jumped immediately, and the great yellow ball began to grow larger. He felt the pain in his stomach and the nervousness grew. His hands shook and the sweat beaded on his forehead. The fear began to bubble up, just as he remembered, as he considered the possibility of his failure.

But it wasn't real. He felt these things as though they were an echo through time. He thought it would bring him back. Instead, he watched himself long ago, as if it were a movie. A very vivid movie, but still, just a movie.

He played the switches and dials within the craft, though Antony himself could hardly recall their uses. Each time he touched one, the feeling in the tip of his fingers would take a second to reach his mind. His visual and mental impulses weren't in sync.

*Oh, God. Here it comes,* he felt his thoughts echoing from more than seventy years ago. The star now filled more than half the front view port, and Antony had to squint painfully, despite the screening.

Glancing down at the secondary computer screen, he found his mark and set the computer to hone in on the point. The craft turned quickly, the yellow and orange covering the screen entirely.

*Thirty-eight people have attempted this maneuver. Twenty-three have made it back.* Antony heard his own mind, but he wasn't truly thinking these thoughts. It seemed almost as if a stranger was explaining the situation to him.

A comforting black spot opened, and he felt a quick sense of relief. He punched the accelerator and the spot, surrounded now by vividly defined flames, grew in size.

Can't stay more than thirty seconds at this close range. I wonder if I'm pushing it.

The upper half of the view port changed from painfully bright orange to black. Antony pulled back on the navigation controls and the remaining brightness disappeared into the bottom of the screen. Waiting several moments, he released the accelerator and set the secondary screen to provide a rear view. Looking back he squinted at the solar flare he'd successfully passed under.

He heard himself scream in triumph, and a moment later even felt the vibration in his throat. Thrusting his hands above him, he threw his head back--

And the sensations ended.

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Antony forced his eyes open and glanced around the area where he lay. He took a deep breath and for a moment was surprised that he felt the air rushing to his lungs immediately rather than on a delay. He sat up, picking electrodes from his forehead, and commented to the attendant, "Barely two minutes."

"One minute, fourteen seconds," corrected the woman who had set up this adventure. "Full mind recording takes an amazing amount of storage space. We edit them down to the most important parts."

"So you're telling me all the rest is lost?" asked Antony. "The anxiety I felt before takeoff, the pressure of exiting earth's atmosphere, the return, the landing. All gone? I had almost four hours recorded. I wanted to feel it all. I wanted to really get into it. What you showed me was like a flash of a memory. It wasn't even very vivid."

"It's not efficient to make the sequences any longer. It takes a great deal of storage space, plus it's not healthy for the human brain to be subjected to a fantasy sequence for longer than a few minutes. If you continue using this machine the experiences will become more and more real as your mind tunes itself to the impulses."

Antony nodded. "Well, thank you for the experience. I'm sure you did the best you could. I believe I have two more recordings, right? When can I see those?"

"I believe I can schedule you for sometime next week." She began typing at a computer screen. "You have two more recordings in your file," she said. "Your promotion to Admiral and your wedding. The promotion is only fifty-two seconds, but the wedding is almost four minutes. Which would you like to do?"

"The promotion."

"Okay, I have an opening Thursday, four-twenty PM?"

"Sure," said Antony.

She nodded. "Go home and get some rest. These things can be emotionally draining."

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Antony stared at his hands for a moment as he picked up his fork. "It made me feel younger though," he said to the two others sitting at his table. "I was thirty when I flew that rocket under the solar flare. It didn't feel like thirty when they replayed it for me, but maybe seventy, or even sixty. But they claimed I'd feel exactly like I did when it actually happened."

The two others at the table sat quietly, nodding. Antony glanced around the dining room, seeing all the other retirees eating their dinner. He had moved into the retirement community three months earlier, shortly after his wife died. It was different than any place he'd lived before. His meals were provided, his apartment cleaned. He had nothing to do except think about the past. After recently gaining his pension, he could afford a few extra luxuries like taking trips back, on the mind recorders.

After a long silence, Lena spoke: "Do you still think about Vienna? It's been less than half a year. You were together for sixty, right?" She paused. People didn't normally talk to Antony about his late wife, but she continued: "I've heard the flashback doesn't work as well if you have something else on your mind."

Antony waited a moment before answering. "I don't think about her anymore. That's not the problem. The mind recorder is a rip-off."

The silence returned, and Antony thought for a moment, realizing he'd misinterpreted her question. He did think about Vienna every day. He didn't miss her was what he'd meant. He missed something though, but didn't know what. Maybe that was the problem.

"It can't be that bad," Lena said. "It works just like they said it would. The only problem is that it's not as vivid as you expected. I'm willing to believe that's a problem with your mind and not the machine." She grinned widely. "Maybe it will get better."

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Standing at attention in the front of the crowd, Antony stared into the eyes of the ornately dressed hulking figure of his superior.

"Antony Milner," said the man, "for twenty-four years of faithful service to the United States military, you are hereby promoted to the rank of Admiral."

He shook hands with several officers and continued with the small ceremony. His gaze drifted toward the audience and met Vienna's. As he looked at her, his stomach knotted. Something was different. This wasn't the wife he remembered. This woman was much more lovely.

Trying to force his body to stare longer, he looked away, painfully aware of his lack of physical control. The ceremony went on. He shook a couple more hands, then left the stage.

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Antony sat up, blinking rapidly. Pausing, he reflected on what he'd just experienced. That promotion had been fifteen years into his marriage, and he hadn't remembered feeling like he had in the replay. He'd expected the promotion itself to be the focus of the memory, but instead it had been Vienna. Perhaps that was just his own mind in real time, affecting how he remembered things in the flashback.

"Everything go okay?" asked the attendant, a young bearded man.

"It worked better this time," Antony replied. "I'm not sure if everything was the same. I didn't remember it

quite like that."

"Forty-five years," the attendant commented. "You'll forget things. The computer won't."

"Is it possible to experience another person's recordings?" Antony asked.

"No. The brain patterns vary too much. People's minds cannot interpret each other."

Antony nodded slowly. "I have one more left. Are there any openings tomorrow?"

"Don't you think you should wait a few days before trying another one? These can be emotionally straining. It may not seem like it now, but it may cause problems. Especially in a person as--someone like yourself."

"Someone as old as me?" asked Antony. "Don't worry. I'll be perfectly fine. My brain functions perfectly. Can I sign up for tomorrow?"

The attendant replied, "Okay, if you insist. I have an opening."

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Lying awake, Antony found himself thinking back on the sixty years of his marriage. The first twenty were blurry--except for the moment of his promotion. The last twenty didn't seem to mean much. By the end he'd started to wonder what emotions had led him to marry Vienna in the first place. He had assumed that he had loved her at some point, but for some reason couldn't be sure. Today, he'd had a glimpse of what it felt like in the early years.

He never disliked Vienna. After all those years, he didn't have a problem with living with, talking to, or being around her. But he wasn't in love with her. He knew now that he truly had been at one point. Perhaps that's what he missed.

Eventually, Antony drifted into sleep.

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People all around spoke continuously. Antony paid no attention. Somebody tried to talk to him, leaning on his shoulder, but Antony brushed him off and stood up. Staring over the crowd he saw Vienna's coffin, enshrouded with wilted flowers. He watched for a moment, then started making his way toward it. Fighting the crowd to get to the center aisle, he stumbled out and began walking. People reached out hands, trying to console him, but he slapped them away.

Approaching the black box where she lay, he looked in and saw his wife. But she wasn't the same. She looked forty years old. Like she had when he married her.

He still felt nothing. She was just a person, almost a stranger.

A glass sheet covered her body. He put his hands on it and began tapping, wondering if he could restore her to life. Noticing a sign saying, DO NOT TAP, he stopped. Glancing over his shoulder, he noticed the crowds were gone.

Antony looked back and felt a pain developing in his stomach, but he felt distanced somehow, like the pain was an echo from sixty years ago.

But it continued to grow more vivid as he stared at Vienna. Realizing that he wanted her to awaken, he sank to his knees. He wanted more than anything for her to open her eyes.

He put his hands to his stomach.

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Sitting up in bed, Antony placed his hands on his stomach, feeling the pain slowly drift away. He glanced at the clock above the door. 0432 hours. Another six hours until his appointment. Strangely, he found himself looking forward to it.

He turned over and lay for a long while, but finally drifted back to sleep.

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Taking his place in the front of the room, Antony ran a quick hand over his tuxedo, making sure everything was in place. Not understanding why, his heart began to pound. He knew that the ceremony would go smoothly, and yet he could not control the nervousness.

He stood for more than a minute, waiting, as everyone took their places. Images flashed uncontrollably through his mind. He saw the house they had recently purchased. First, in its original, run down state, then, as a dream, how he imagined it would look in a year. Vienna stood next to him in jeans and a tee shirt, her arm resting around his waist.

Antony suddenly wanted, more than anything, for her to be with him. He wanted to feel her against him. The feeling didn't surprise him.