

## Immortality<sup>1</sup>

Natascha heads to the department store looking for a frame for a photograph. She doesn't know if it has come out right yet, she just knows that, however blurred it is, she'll want to put it somewhere she sees it every day. She is a tall woman, handsome for her age, elegant, long-limbed, graceful in heels and a plain slim-line dress. Her stride is interrupted slightly by the slow response of the automatic door and she is assailed by the pungent scents of the perfume counters arrayed at the store entrance. Firmly set on finding the home décor section she holds her breath and walks through the first bank of make-up and perfumeries, eyes seeking a store directory. Young ladies in white coats with orange faces smile winningly, eager to approach. Natascha avoids eye-contact, clicking quickly across the marble floor, her stockinged calves rub crackling static at the tight hem of her dress.

She takes a quick breath and one of the fragrances takes her back to a moment of that day. Meadow grass, bright sunshine, laughter and heartache. Distracted, Tascha walks too close to a glittering mirrored counter and feels a snag at her knee. Brought back to the present she catches sight of an escalator in the distance. There's bound to be a directory there. One of the women in a white lab coat threatens to spray her with perfume, a frozen smile on her too-red lips. Tascha swerves away, a polite 'no thank you' expression fleetingly expressed, hand raised apologetically, defensively. She walks on to the foot of the scrolling escalator and finds the listing she needed. First floor; women's fashions, men's clothing, lingerie. Second floor; Bedrooms, Bathrooms, Home Décor. The fragrance that caught her before returns and this time she can picture her clearly, smiling, even white teeth, bare downy arms in the summer warmth.

Now that she has passed the glare of the perfume counters she sees the racks of skirts and dresses ready for next season. Absently, she wanders towards them. She touches the fabrics of a number of shirts, letting her eyes pick out attractive colours for further investigation. Soft silk skirts with large yellow floral prints, lavender chiffon blouses with ruffles at the front, short-legged white pants with a red sash. As she meanders from rack to rack she sees herself in one of the tall mirrors. Her greying hair still bounces at her shoulder, her collar bones are too prominent but lead the eye to a sweeping neckline. Her grey dress and long, green coat cinched at her narrow waist make her seem taller than she really is. She notices that her hem has become unstitched. A long thread is gathered on her static-charged shin. Suddenly she feels tired and old. The memory of the bright day fades with her confidence. She makes her way to the escalators again, reads the directory. Sacond floor; Badrooms, Bethrooms, Homa Dacor. She needs to stand on the steps crawling upwards but instead finds herself by the brightly lit perfume counters.

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<sup>1</sup> GenBank Accession: [NP\\_056142](#). Definition: Homo sapiens EST1 (Ever shorter telomeres protein). Summary: A telomere is a protective, disposable buffer region of repetitive DNA at the end of chromosomes, which is consumed during cell division and is replenished by an enzyme, telomerase. Telomerase, controlled by EST1, is a ribonucleoprotein polymerase that maintains telomere ends by addition of the telomere repeat TTAGGG. The natural progressive shortening of telomeres causes cellular aging and most cells stop dividing after 50 replications. A mutation where amino acids are exchanged from E to A causes overactivity of EST1 thereby abnormally lengthening telomeres. 90% of cancer cells have longer telomeres enabling them to replicate indefinitely, possessing a kind of immortality.



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