

The Fog had Cleared

Winifred

The outside of the window melted into a fog of blurred colours as the driver sped to the hospital. It was mostly dark, though faint beams of amber occasionally fell into the mix of hues from the street-lamps nearby. I clutched my hand closed; the nails slowly sunk into the flesh of my palm. It was said to be able to divert attention to agitation. Though the vertigo halted after I had recovered from passing out, the slick smell of leather seats that intertwined with the lingering smell of tobacco welcomed its return.

Stay awake. It's going to be okay.

My luggage was lumped beside me. It was another trip alone to the institution. The cleft on my barricade that had been cracked open by the gradually increasing unease, but my stubbornness forbade even the slightest drop of frailty to slip. The screen of my phone lit up the dim backseats of the taxi, a couple of texts were delivered from my adoring lover questioning my whereabouts. I pursed my lips.

To be tough, that was what Mother insisted, for one could trust no one but themselves.

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"It is for your own good."

The ear had still been ringing from the slap; shame had been loudly clear from the redness on its shell.

"The crueler I am to you, the less cruel you will find the world."

My seven-year-old self had been unable to fathom the meaning of the line, though now I understand there is a bottomless pit for ferocity but more room for compassion. My simple wish at the time had been to shrink back into the shelter of a blanket, to be enclosed by the scarce warmth in the dark hollow hole of fluffiness, a flimsy yet affable home I had constructed myself.

"Errors, even as trivial as buying an overpriced hotdog, are unacceptable. People are unkind, believe me. You will forever be your own sole support."

I had kept my eyes on the diagonally arranged blank tiles on the floor with thin grey gaps of crosses in between as she rambled on. I had fancied them as tightropes set on the top of buildings so colossal that mists of fogs floated right beneath the wires; I had been trudging gingerly on them for any steps miscalculated, would have sent me falling into the haunting mass of white.

“But it was only a hotdog—perhaps more expensive than you expected—but still it was only a hotdog.” I had glanced up at her through the eyelashes.

The pause had been pregnant with anger; her murk of constant irritation had veiled me from any glimpse of possible affection from a mother. A million words could have been birthed, such as condemnation on my monstrous selfishness or accusation on me being a creature so self-absorbed, as she had always emphasised. Instead, frustrated silence had screeched in the room.

“Don’t, just don’t. Just don’t ever call me your mother.”

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Having got off the taxi, the emergency ward was piled with people when I entered. I sighed in frustration; it would definitely be a tedious wait tonight. At a time late as such, the faces of the crowd, akin to mine, were all laced with fatigue and annoyance. Every now and then, cries from impatient toddlers or grunts from ill old men sounded from corners of the room.

I settled myself at the section for the feverish ones after having reported to the reception. The fluorescent light was too blinding that a headache blared in my skull, mounding on the nauseousness that had been churning in the stomach since the morning. Perhaps it was due to overworking during these few months, my body could no longer withstand the stress from the toll of two part-time jobs and excessive schoolwork that it was forced to shut down its operations; from the eyes, then the limbs and eventually the mind, I was left blacked out for some time.

I leaned on the screen used to separate the fever zone and the regular area, in fear of collapsing once again if I maintained upright for too long. Across the transparent barrier, a boy was fidgeting on his chair. His brows knitted together in an irritated frown, his mouth slightly agape as he counted his breaths the way his mother instructed beside him, his arm was wrapped in bandages stained by the maroons of dried blood.

Should be a laceration. I supposed. Laceration. It has been a long time.

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“What plans do you have for New Year’s Eve?”

“I don’t know,” I tilted my head up to the murky darkened sky. “2022 would not be much of a difference anyways.”

“But you know,” he had said as a white puff of cloud left his lips. “I have decided to get back with her.”

The line had had as though scraped then scorched the skin. The flesh had been so raw that even the graze of the cool autumn breeze had had as though left a searing burn. The soul had been cornered by the confusing sensation, the intertwining of the imagined heat and the actual frigidity; neither standing nor sitting could have ceased the torture.

Torturous, indeed it had been, but it should not when there had never been a label for our relationship; it had not been like he had ever attempted to veil his nostalgic love for her either.

I had freed the cigarette from my fingers and watched it descend onto the ground. It had bounced off the concrete, yet a flicker of red had still been lighted at the end of the stick. I had stubbed out whatever had been left in the remnants of the glint with my heels. I had rubbed and rubbed it against the floor; the ugly content of tobacco had soon poured out from the pure white coating.

“I see.”

I did not know where to stare at—him, the sky or the walls of the back alley. Wherever my eyes had laid, tears would have still seemed to slip out the moment I had been careless enough not to guard the movement of my features. The reflection of my figure on one of the gates leading to the back of restaurants had caught my attention. A low-cut black woollen sweater had paired with a yellow checkered mini-skirt, how naïve had I been to be driven by pride and vanity, to believe sexuality could have been a token to genuine affection.

“I have to go.” The quiver of my lips had given away my fragility.

“I thought we were going back to my room.”

“I have to go.”

I had turned away. The opening of the alley had not been far. A gust of smoke had rushed from the pipe of a rangehood, yet I could still make out from the grime the neon light signs of the stores on the busy street outside that showered the dark alley with a soft rainbow of lustre. Some impatient grunts had leaked into our quiet passage as the line of pedestrians tediously had snaked to the end of the road.

“Stay.” His fingers had enclosed my wrist.

I had looked down at our entwined skin. It had been feather like, his touch on me, so light that it had almost felt like nothing. How effortless it had almost been, as I had raised my other hand, slowly removing his from me.

How I had returned home, had ended up with a tiny sheet of blade again, I fail to recall. Yet, the image of the blood, so much blood, had been vivid enough to be burned into the memory.

From droplets to a stream of crimson, they had dripped from my forearm and pooled on the white tiles. They had gathered as a puddle, clutching onto the arms of one another; a unity of anguish that had glared at my pathetic desolation.

The bottles of beer on the floor had perspired; their beads of sweat had made a pond at the bottom of the glasses.

I had stumbled out of the chair and had wiped the all the liquids away. Swabs after swabs, I had blotted them away; but they had teemed and teemed like tears should have had I been not too accustomed to the intrusion of depression and hurt from unrequited love.

I had been drunk on the illusion of a relationship sweetened by loyalty and commitment when, instead, it had been toxicated by deception and manipulation. I had been drugged by lines, sugary lines like *please stay*, even when they had followed lethal sentences of *I have decided to get back with her*.

The paper sack had rustled as I had retrieved it from under the desk. Bandages and micropore tapes had spilled out as I had bumped my elbow on the wooden leg.

I had pressed a medical gauze against the gash. The innocent white pads had been tainted by reds of monstrosity; they had been rouged gradually from small dots of scarlet to soaked patches of maroon. It had been easy, effortless for blankness to be stained.

I had peeled a corner from the cotton square. Smog of grey matters had wobbled at the bottom of the opened flesh. Stitches again, I had known; I had been familiar with the process to the emergency room. It would then be another display of a flawed skin from a flawed heart and a distraught mind; it would be a tear forced close that sealed the wretched present into a suppressed past.

“Mom, I need to go back to the dormitory.” I had yelled across the shut door of the bedroom.

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Even the small walk to the consultation room burnt the candle of my vitality; the blaring migraine persisted to drill the back of my head. I immediately collapsed on the rigid plastic chair when offered one.

“You are not pregnant, are you?”

“I don’t suppose I am.”

“But your period is late?”

“That’s right.”

The doctor continued typing. It was not even a secluded cubicle. It was a small desk with a computer atop, a blue chair on the side that I was sitting. The arrangement repeated itself for times the room could fit as much of these as possible. A lady muttered an apology; she accidentally bumped into the back of my chair on her way out.

“Come back when you are done.” He handed me a cup to pee in.

I shuffled back to the lobby still crammed with an anxious crowd towards the toilet; the container dangled between the thumb and the index finger. I grazed the frail edge with my nails, as though scraping off the silvery mask on a scratch-off lottery card. The white exterior glared back at me as the scuffing intensified; the papery surface had begun to wrinkle.

The child with the hurt arm staggered past me as he proceeded to the nurse station. A tint of anxiety smeared across his initially agitated features, paling the pink skin of young chubbiness with the brush of perturbation. His mother followed closely behind him with a wretched face of parental weariness obvious from the pursed lips and deep bags beneath the concerned eyes.

“I am scared, momma. I am scared.”

So am I, kid. So am I.

**

It had come in chunks and clots of red I had never experienced.

“You might want to see a gynaecologist. As soon as possible,” the doctor had said.

I had sat on the chair, holed up in a ball, rocking back and forth, as though in a cradle. Random notifications had popped up from the screen of my phone that had rested stiffly on my bed. Not a text from him though, for he had already united with her; it would be futile to even inform him about the news.

It is almost the end of 2021. May you have had a fruitful year..

The random podcast I had chosen had hummed low in the background; the energetic tone of the host had bounced off the walls, reverberating against the quiet hollow room. The bottle of chardonnay had rested on the desk before me, a company that would soon feed the void in me with warm but toxic comfort.

I had thought to take chances, how the period had been simply late because of stress, as it had often done. I had not been aware of my body being morphed into a murder machine, a ruthless engine, a bulldozer to terminate the thickened verdure and the growing pines of a fertile land in the early spring.

It had been silly of me to even attempt to feel its presence, but there had been a vague ambience of its phantom in me, around me, that I could sense. It had been an idyllic aura, like when a tranquil summer breeze caressed the cheeks with pecks of adoring kisses, or how the sparse smog of white clouds glided smoothly across the silent night sky bejewelled with thousands of millions of glittering stars.

I had closed my eyes with my palm rested against where it should have been, where the vacuum had now taken over by the tide of grief that had gradually filled it full with a vast tsunami of remorse. A silent prayer had chanted in me.

I know you are here, perhaps about to leave. It is definitely not the right time, I guess you have also figured; neither of us, me nor him, will make a decent parent. Can you please stay, though, for a little while? Allow me a chance to bid you goodbye.

If you have decided to go, you will return, right? In another form or maybe at another time, perhaps when a better father comes along?

But if you wish to be the child of another mother, promise me, be good.

Do promise me, be good. And be well.

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I glanced at the clock on the wall. It was almost dawn. Soft orange glows had wafted at the edges of the glass doors at the exit as I returned to the doctor's desk after the urine sample had been tested, slowly prodding the depressing darkness away with its calm radiance.

"We are going to admit you into the hospital," He looked up from the stack of medical records. "With you being pregnant but feverish, we would not want to take a risk. Do you have someone to contact with?"

"Yes, my boyfriend."

"The father, I suppose?"

I nodded. *Eventually one that is affirmative of us.*

His monotonous voice reverberated in my misty mind, yet it was not long before the murk began to be cleared by the symphony of surprised bliss sounded from the pit of my heart.

Nurses escorted me to the ward on the upper floors. I began to inform my whereabouts to my boyfriend with a message but looked up from the phone as we approached a wide window at the end of the hallway leading to the escalators. Trees of shamrock bundled into mountains of green as beams of sunlight coloured the top of their crowns with mild golden canary. The sky was dressed in cerulean with a velvety shawl of white clouds casually resting on its shoulders. I slowed my footsteps as I inhaled the clear placid scenery that had driven the tension of the dark night away.

I placed the palm of my hand atop the stomach as the warmth of affection sank into the shelter of the uterus, the dark hollow hole to a petite foetus; it was, perhaps, an attempt to construct where it first called our home affable.

The vibration of the phone signalled the arrival of a text that notified the promise of the imminent arrival of my lover.

Papa is coming along. He would make the right papa, I believe. Were he not able to make such commitment, darling, it would still be alright. Mama would still make it right. Don't you worry. You come eventually, that is all that matters; for what once was lost is found again, for your return fills my womb of grievous shade with heavenly light, for the purity of your heart pumped life into the battered corpse of mine, for you have cleared my fog of misery into the sky of elation.