

# “Justice”

By: Wan-Chi

When my mother had consumed too many bottles, she would sit on the worn grey and blue armchair and gaze out the window, a forlorn expression etched upon her face. She never sits on that armchair unless she was intoxicated. When I come home from school and see her sitting there, I would know immediately what the rest of the day will entail. It involved me spending an afternoon caged in my room so as to not to disturb her “birdwatching”, me tackling my homework alone, and me attempting to make dinner. And then listening to her stories. Stories of fantasies and thrillers, and tales beyond my nine-year-old mind’s imagination. Listening to her during those times was like watching an episode my favourite show, albeit in a foreign tongue: confusing, but nonetheless exhilarating. It made the whole day nearly worthwhile.

Once, on the anniversary of my parents’ wedding, one that made our glass recycling bin fill up, my mother told me a tale of a wizard as immemorial as time itself, who would enchant anyone who caused too many unhappy memories and drive them insane.

“How does he do it?” I whispered, a half-cooked spaghetti strand on a fork suspended in motion.

“He takes away their memories, slowly but surely, until an empty mind is all they have left. Scientists always mix it up with what they call demented or something-or-other, but that, in fact, is the work of the wizard.”

“Why so slowly? Wouldn’t it be better to just... make it quick, like pulling a thread from a sweater?”

“Because, my dear,” my mother replied, “What would be the benefit in that? To have one’s crimes and wrongdoings erased in a mere shadow of a second? This way is much more effective. To feel one’s own sense falling apart, to witness the slow erosion of one’s mind and memories, is a punishment by far worse than any sudden delirium. You have no idea how humans are so dependent upon memories.” She sounded less like my mother in that moment than a deranged madwoman.

“That’s... harsh,” I said, disconcerted.

She gave a careless shrug. “They deserve it. Anyone who causes so much unhappiness deserves it. The wizard is only serving justice, and he cannot be swayed by wasted words of pleas.”

The room suddenly felt fifty degrees colder, like a chill of preternatural wind has swept into the room. Her words weighed heavily on my mind, like stones sinking into a pool of fear.

“But don’t worry,” my mother said hastily, noticing my expression. “The wizard won’t enchant you. You’re a good child.” She smiled at me, but that did not make me feel better.

I did not realise I had released my hold on the spaghetti bowl. It dropped to the floor, staining the shabby carpet with a tangled mess of half-cooked pasta and sauce, mirroring the mess of emotions inside me.

I was not worried for me, you see. I was worried for my mother.