

Nighttime Dreaming

by Jowell Tan

Sometimes late at night, when I can't sleep, I make myself a cup of coffee. I trudge down the stairs to the kitchen in my drawstring pants and no shirt, and brew a mug of black, two sugars. I sit down in the dining room, coaster for the mug down on the table, and sip slowly, blowing to cool it down in between.

That's when she shows up.

She fades into my view like a film dissolve, seated across me, hands clasped together on the table. She wear the same thing each time - a simple white dress with a band bracelet to match on her right arm. She stay silent, looking at me while I sip on my coffee, trying my best not to speak first. Sometimes when she arrives, she speaks first. Other times she just waits for me to begin. I rack my brain trying to think of something to say other than the obvious, but tonight it seems she doesn't want the small talk, so I go straight to the point.

"What? What do you want me to say?," I ask, placing my mug down on the table.

"I want you to say that you'll follow me where I go, like you used to say," She replies, 'When we were still together.'" She stares me down like an errant child, akin to how kids look at their parents when they don't get what they want.

"I can't do that," I say.

"Why not? Do you mean to say you were lying to me all this time?" She asks, more pointedly this time.

I fiddle with the coffee mug, resisting the urge to look her in the eye.

I fear that if I do, one of these days I really would follow her.

"No, I... I just need more time to, to -"

"Bullshit," She snaps. "You're just afraid. Like a fraidy cat," She jeers, the anger in her seeping out at her sides, her hands unclasping to point accusingly at me. "You've fallen out of love with me, is that it? That you'll leave me for another girl, who has bigger boobs and fucks you better than I do."

"No, it's just.. I'm not done here yet."

"Tell yourself whatever you want, dear," Her voice dripping with venom. She stands up and moves over to me, stopping behind me and bending down to whisper in my ear: "Just remember, no one has loved, nor will ever know you better than I do. You will die here, alone in this house, and your body will stink up the entire neighbourhood and the cops will find your body decomposed, a home for the rats and cockroaches."

I can no longer bear to hear her continue. I jerk around, elbow swinging to try to hit her. But she's gone, moved back to the seat across me, calm smug look on her face.

"You know it's true, darling - But you can still make it right. Join me, on the other side. Death's not so bad."

I pick up my coffee mug and fling it at her. "QUIET!!", I yell. As the mug flies through the air, I see her disappear, dissolving out of sight. The mug goes through her faint visage and makes contact with the wall behind, shattering into a thousand pieces of porcelain onto the floor, a coffee stain making its mark on the wall and floor.

I rub the bridge of my nose. "God dammit." I leave the mess on the floor, deciding to clean it up tomorrow morning. Moving slowly back

up the stairs to the bedroom, I hold on to the handrail for support. I pass framed and mounted photographs of us in happier times. There's one from when we bungee jumped off a cliff. Another from when we were in Tokyo, us smooching in the middle of a bustling intersection. Yet another of us at a friend's party, dressed up with drinks in hand, smiling for the camera.

I reach the bedroom. Closing the door behind me, I crawl back into bed, covers up to my neck. On the side table is our wedding photo. I pick it up and hug it close to my chest. I close my eyes and try to fall asleep again.

My friends tell me I should see a psychiatrist. My mother, a staunch believer in the supernatural, is always trying to convince to let in somebody that'll "clean up" the house. However, I heed none of their advice. As much as it pains me and causes me no end of grief to see her and hear her speak. I would rather have her still around me than to have her be gone completely from my life and never see or hear from her ever again. That would be too much to bear. And so I carry on, still not sleeping and seeing her across my table and throwing coffee mugs to the wall, hoping that one day she'll show up with something nice and positive to say, and I can live with her death but somehow still carry on with her around me. And maybe one day when I cross over, she'll be there waiting for me with open arms and a smile on her face.

