



Future Justice

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Remember

Thomas Khoo

For better, for worse, in sickness and health, until death do us part. How could I ever have known that a wedding vow is as beautiful and fragile as a gossamer thread of spider web drifting in the breeze? I never suspected that death would not be the final farewell ...

There's a certain satisfaction when the lights dim. It means you no longer have to engage in idle banter and empty pleasantries; that what you have come to watch is finally starting and that for the next few hours you can sit still and silent. I have a seat right at the very back in the shadows. The stage is a tiny square of bright yellow light, the piano a black smudge in its centre, the pianist looking supremely confident in his striking black and white costume, slashes of blinding brightness and endless shadow from where I sit. There is silence; everyone is waiting.



The packet of pills lies in the bin. Glinting in the harsh fluorescent light from above the kitchen sink, each tiny capsule is firmly ensconced within its plastic pod, twelve miniscule lies that sit among the vegetable peels and the chicken bones. She said she had taken one every night for the last few weeks. Who will pay the price?

When I walk in the front door and remove my hat and my jacket as I have done so many times before, I know that today will not be normal. It's the sort of realisation that makes you

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stop, makes you close your eyes and wish more than anything else that today could be yesterday again. She is sitting in the corner of the dining room, quivering. I know that face, the hair that hangs in tumbling brown lianas down rosy cheeks; the curve of that ear, the bow of those lips, the taste of that breath. But it's the eyes. It's the eyes that are alien as she looks at me; her gaze is one of unrestrained terror, a tidal wave of fear which swamps her tiny island of sanity.

'Who are you? Get out of my house,' she whispers, her voice so painfully familiar and yet as hoarse as a stranger's. I know that her pills are lying at the bottom of the kitchen bin. She knows it too.

'Sarah ...' I murmur. I am tired, so tired of this, of the long periods of forgetfulness, the blank stares, the tears and the agony of slowly yet steadily losing one's memory like wine from a shattered chalice, blood from a gaping wound. With the tiny two syllables of my wife's name hanging with as much substance as a memory in the air between us, she claws back, fights as she always has and breaks into tears. Her sobs are silent. Rocking herself back and forth, she doesn't look at me; she's given up remembering who I am. Now she only struggles to remember herself and there's nothing I can do about it. I am so weak, so helpless, a newborn lamb which struggles and fails to stand on feet which are no longer planted on solid earth.



There was a time before the Alzheimer's. I'm sure there was. It's just a matter of remembering, but memory is in short supply at the moment. Sarah had brought a portable CD player to let me hear her latest concert performances. I can still hear the opening sequence of Brahms' Cello Sonata transcending the years to echo around my skull, ethereal and haunting yet strangely tantalising.

'We should have brought a camera,' Sarah's voice was a murmur in my ear and I luxuriated in the way her lips formed

each syllable before realising what she had said. I remember leaning in until my breath was warm on her cheek.

‘How do you photograph love?’ I whispered in her ear and she turned to me, those eyes so wide that I fell into them and pleasantly drowned in their depths.

‘But it’s easy! You use these lenses,’ she ran the tip of one warm finger across my eyelids.

‘And if I ever forget ... you’ll remember for both of us,’ and that is the point where the wind gusted and we were clothed in the golden syrup of sunlight and the dancing blossoms as they crowned us like confetti.



I wonder if it’s possible to lose your heart, whether an organ so important can just be there one day and absent the next. In the space of a changing thought, has my chest been surgically sliced down the middle, my ribs splayed back and my vital organs torn viciously away before being sewn back together again to leave unblemished skin and a scar which runs deeper than flesh and bone? Does blood still run in my veins or am I animated merely by the memory of life when it didn’t revolve around a woman whose mind is a locked vault sheltering a starless universe of nothing. I watch her in the corner, crying bitter tears.

‘Goodbye Sarah,’ I whisper before turning around, calling the carer’s service and then striding from a house so full of memories and a woman who has none.



When she starts playing, I gasp, even though I have heard her play so many times before. Each note flutters out to us, borne on the pinions of a swan. Brahms’ Cello Sonata weaves its way around me and I wonder if deep down in her ravaged mind, she still remembers that day, the cherry blossoms and the lullaby of the sea. Behind those strange eyes, can she still vaguely recall my face, my voice, my touch? As her bow

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caresses the strings, her face is a riot of emotions, at once passionate and yet filled with a poignancy that's new to her playing. By the time it's over, I am surrounded by tears, but only mine are of grief. An infinitesimally small pause, and time stops. Then the crowd disintegrates into applause and leaps to their feet, but I stay seated, watching her expression modulate back to an utterly blank and unseeing mask. As she is led away, I will her to look around, to see me watching from the back row. But she does not.



Sarah, my beautiful Sarah, you mean everything to me. I will watch you from the shadows as you live your lonely life. I will tuck your face in my pocket and listen for your voice on the wind. I will love you forever more. My love, my darling, for both of us, I will remember.



Thomas Khoo wrote this in 2009 when he was in Year 11 at St Peter's College in South Australia.