

FANTASY

Butterfly

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Rain.

When she got up and drew the curtains, the sky was a flat dark grey. A chilly, moist wind blew into the room through the open window, sprinkling tiny raindrops over her chin and neck. Under the gloomy sky, the falling rainwater appeared to be the same dark grey.

She yawned and glanced at the clock.

6:40 a.m.

Wash, makeup, breakfast, she finished her morning routine and left home at 7:20.

Outside the apartment, she reached out a hand and watched the rain fall on her open palm.

The rainwater was cold and colorless.

The wind blew stronger and howled through buildings.

She preferred going to work in this kind of weather. On bright sunny days, she always found it a waste to spend the rest of her day sitting indoors and watching others walk outside in the sunshine.

She reached the bank at 7:45 and seated herself into her chair behind the counter before 8:00, the time the bank opened.

A glass door, her only exit, was far from where she sat. She couldn't see the rain, if it was still heavy or if it had stopped; all she could see was a narrow piece of grey sky outside the glass door.

She put on a smile when the first customer came in.



She roamed along the familiar street; a sweet fragrance of flowers wafted in the warm air.

It was a balmy day. The sky was blue with feathery, white clouds.

She smoothed her hair waving in the breeze, her steps light and joyful.

After the street corner, she reached her old childhood home. It was the same as she remembered, the light-yellow walls, red stairs, and green wreath on the door.

The pear tree stood a few steps outside the door, its leaves rustling like whispers. It was the tree she watched sprout, flower and fruit every year; it was her silent company and friend.

She picked a leaf and brought it to her nose; it was the scent of home, long-lost home.

The door opened; in a silvery laugh, the younger her came out with two other girls. Together, they went to the community garden and started playing among the plants.

She smiled watching their petite figures bathed in the golden sunshine.

In the wind floated a piano melody; warm and clean, it flowed like a smooth silk and blended into this peaceful moment.

A block away, someone in black was playing piano on the roof of an apartment. Its flowy cloak swung and streamed with wind; a flock of pure black butterflies flew around it and danced to the rhythm.

She couldn't see its face, yet just by looking at its figure, she was attracted.

Sunshine, breeze, and the soft melody, she wished time could stop at this moment.



The rain lasted for three days.

In the morning, she got to work at the usual time and met with one of the managers who seemed to be waiting for her.

“This is not personal,” the manager said.

She collected her stuff and left the bank.

She didn't feel sad; during the four years she worked there, she had seen a few coworkers get laid off, and today was her turn.

She went home and started searching for jobs online. She checked the websites of some other banks; none of them were hiring.

She leaned back in the chair and looked out of the window.

Overcast.

Why wasn't the sky as blue as the one in her dream? She thought back to when she was younger, happier, in her hometown and didn't have many burdens on her shoulders.

She shifted her gaze to the laptop screen.

It was all gone. The old house was sold and renovated; the pear tree was cut down to make way for the new road; her childhood friends had become wives and mothers, or moved to other cities like her.

Maybe losing the job was a chance for her to start something new.

She went to the website of a well-known art school in her city. As a kid, she liked drawing and dreamt of being an artist, but as she grew up, she was taught to be practical and realistic.

The majors, visual arts, illustration, animation, all looked much more interesting than being a bank teller.

She checked the tuition, then the balance in her bank account. She laughed mockingly, closed the school page and resumed job searching.



A quiet room with large windows and white marble statues.

She stood in the middle of it; in front of her was an easel with a finished sketch.

On it was the mysterious figure in black with its butterflies; it sat by the piano with its back facing her.

Under her gaze, it moved and started playing the piano: a clear and mellow melody, like a crystal creek running across spring grassland.

When she stepped back in surprise, the white marble statues in the room dissolved into numerous drifting white petals.

Black butterflies flew out of the sketch and interwove with the petals, forming a swirl of black and white that encased her.

The music from the piano continued.

The scene began to change. She found herself becoming an artist drawing in a studio, a backpacker hiking in deep mountains, a singer performing under colourful spotlights, a photographer recording the world with her camera.

Life was full of possibilities; she could be anyone she wanted to be.

She opened her arms and spun around, danced with the flying butterflies and petals.

Sweet, she could taste the fruity sweetness of the music, in the air and in her soul.



The inbox was empty; no one replied to her resume.

Frustrated, she left the chair and lay on the bed.

She didn't really have to work hard like this. She stared at the ceiling and thought, she could just live on unemployment benefits

and enjoy life for a while. Like in her dream, life had unlimited possibilities and she didn't always have to be a bank teller.

She tossed and turned on the bed.

If life was really that beautiful, she didn't know; she only knew surreal dreams brought her more peace and happiness than reality did.

That black figure, she had seen it twice in a row; with its black butterflies and the music it played, it was too perfect to belong to this earthly world.

She looked at her dim bedroom and the grey sky behind the curtains. On the roads outside, the honks of passing cars never ended.

If she fell asleep now, she thought, would she meet that figure for the third time?

She closed her eyes and pulled the blanket over her head.

A salty and refreshing wind.

A pure velvety piano melody, together with light flutters of wings, slid into her ears, captured all of her attention and soul.

Her heart raced with growing excitement.

She opened her eyes.

She was on a rocky beach with scattered logs. Above the distant horizon, the setting sun tinted the waving sea pale pink.

Black butterflies flying around her landed on her hands and shoulders, their wings reflecting a dark gleam with each flap they made.

As she tried to touch them, they flew back to the one playing the piano.

Like the last two times, it sat there with its back facing her, an aura of mystery filled its vicinity.

The music continued, enchanting with an otherworldly beauty.

She approached the black figure.

And don't call me Liz.
Liz is dead in the grave.

Like snowflakes, butterflies surrounded them when they were close enough.

“Who are you?” she asked.

The music stopped.

She twitched and woke up.

The music, butterflies, and black figure vanished without a trace.

She got up and supported herself by the table; the city noise from outside was killing her nerves.

The beach, she remembered, it was in her city; she went there once long ago.

She took a shivering breath; after a brief hesitation, she changed her clothes and left home.

On the rocky beach, in the cool wind, she wandered and searched.

It was near evening. People were taking their walks in small groups.

She thought she was out of her mind doing this when she spotted the familiar figure sitting by the piano.

The wind rose up; its flowy cloak spread like wings.

Under a rosy sky, among black butterflies, silhouetted against the shimmering, blue ocean, it was beyond the touch of any beings.

She trembled, her brain a total blank.

The music started: an ethereal melody, richer than any she heard before.

As she listened, her heart and soul rose and fell with the rhythm.

High above the clouds, deep in the sea, a warm ray of sunshine, a chilly blast of wind, sweet like a lover's kiss, bitter like a demon's curse, in the resonating melody, she no longer sensed the existence of herself and the world.

Immersed in the music, she closed her eyes.

In the gentle and peaceful melody, she felt as light as a feather.

She opened her eyes when the music faded.

She was flying across the boundless sea and towards the burning sunset on the horizon; wind whooshed past her ears when she flew at full speed.

She wasn't shocked or scared; she grinned and glided over the sea's surface, then lifted herself high into the sky until she came across a plane in the clouds.

She peered into the plane packed with passengers, watched the fiery sunset and shifting clouds, then dove lower in the sky.

She flew to the city. Under her, roads and buildings were like mini toys with moving dots of cars and people.

She'd never felt so carefree; flying freely in the sky, she was no longer one of the people crawling on the ground like a caterpillar.

She returned to the beach.

An ambulance had stopped by the road where she found the black figure. A large crowd gathered around someone lying on the ground.

She landed and ran to it. Seeing the figure lying there, she froze on the spot.

It was her, her body, eyes half-open, skin deathly pale.

She touched it; it was already cold and stiff.

People talked in low voices and glanced at her body; no one seemed to notice her.

Her head spinning in a daze, she reached out a hand towards the few people near her, only to see her hand go through their bodies without any resistance.

Stunned, she stood still until a black butterfly touched her shivering shoulder.

“Had fun flying?”

She swung around and saw the black figure standing behind her. It was tall and lean. Under the black hood, its face was covered by a white mask.

“What is all this?” She pointed to her dead body and then herself.

“Death.”

She felt a blunt blow hit her head.

“You...” She started shaking. “You killed me.”

“You wanted to see me and came looking for me.”

“I didn’t know it would...”

“So I let you know.”

“You can’t do this to me.” She raised her voice.

“You didn’t feel any pain.”

“I...I have a life.... I have a family, friends....”

“You will have a new life,” It approached her, “Your family, your friends, they will grieve for you and move on.”

It held her shoulders and guided her to turn and face the crowd.

“You see them, the living. They have jobs to do, families to take care of, bills to pay, responsibilities they can’t get rid of. They also have goals, dreams, obsessions, things they can’t let go of.”

It wiped the tears on her face, “Busy, aren’t they? Liz, don’t feel sad.... You were one of them, but now you are ahead of them.”

The butterflies brushed her cheeks with their wings as if to ease her sorrow.

“Who are you?” she said. “Show me your face.”

“Accept me, embrace me, then I am yours to explore.”

Its hands left her.

She watched it disappear into a wind.

In the following days, she stayed with her body. From when it was embalmed in the funeral home, to when it lay in the casket at her funeral, and until it was cremated to ashes.

No more tears. She touched her name carved into the gravestone and left the cemetery.

She flew over the whole city.

The busy streets were full of life and activity. Nothing ever changed; the world ran at its own pace.

She didn’t feel hungry, thirsty, or tired any more. During the day, she watched people’s lives; at night, she watched their dreams.

She used to think everyone was different, but after having watched so many people, she found everyone was the same. Though it didn’t sound pleasant, she had ceased feeling happy, sad, or any other strong emotions.

One night, she saw a young single mom crying alone on a bed, missing her hometown and parents thousands of kilometres away.

She waited until she fell asleep and went into her dream.

In the initial nothingness, she touched the space of void and stuck her fingers into it, read the girl's mind and memories and materialized them.

The surroundings rippled and brightened up; streets and houses began to show up. She landed on top of a building and added the girl's home and parents into the scene.

Silently, she watched the girl walk down the street, meet her parents, hug them and burst into tears.

Butterflies flew down the sky.

“What a beautiful dream.” The black figure landed beside her. “Liz, you are an artist, a creator.”

She shook her head. “After waking up, she is still the single mom who works fifty hours a week to provide for her kids.” She sighed lightly. “And don't call me Liz. Liz is dead in the grave.”

The black figure gave a short laugh under its mask. “I'm glad you said it.” It wrapped an arm around her shoulder; its cold fingers stroked her cheek.

A white mask covered her face.

“Don't let them see your face. Don't talk to them. The living, they are in deep sleep.”