

The Ticket

It was time for a change.

Frankly, it had been for quite a while, but today – today would be different. And as a streak of warm sunlight dances its way through a tear in the old bedsheet thrown up against the window, Mia feels in her bones that change is finally here.

She often hears the soft, lilting cadence of her mother's voice first. Every day begins the same, but mornings are always her favourite; mornings are Mother's sad, pretty songs and Father's smiling eyes as he pours himself a bowl of cereal.

She sits down at her usual place, and holds her breath for a brief, trembling moment as she lets her surroundings wash over her in a wave of nostalgia for what is to come. The kitchen had always felt so bright, so full of this family and the life they had made for themselves here. Mia almost feels mournful to know that it would all change.

Then, something bright catches in the light and draws her eyes: the sparkling diamond ring that sits comfortably on her mother's finger. There is the low hum of mild conversation filling the room, but Mia cannot hear it; she is fixated on the ring.

Long, graceful extensions of a soft and small palm. Her mother's hands are just as the rest of her is, gentle and feminine. It is easy to forget something as sure and unwavering as her mother's beauty, but with the ring shining so boldly on her finger, Mia wonders how it had ever escaped her. She tells herself she will never forget it again.

With a kiss to her parents' cheeks, she heads out toward the town.

There is a purposeful bounce to her step, because she knows exactly where she is going. And for the first time in a long time, her chest is full of something with wings. Something that is both light and heavy, brightly burning and threatening to consume her whole.

She welcomes the foreign presence with open arms; she has never tasted anything sweeter.

Things will be different.

She asks for one ticket, please, and presents the precious bill in her hand with a flourish.

Her eyes are bright, and that great thing inside is beating its feathers with such force of will that she feels out of breath with delirious anticipation. It is this moment that their family will look back upon for years to come. This is where their new life begins.

But the store clerk looks down at her from behind the counter and shakes his head, the lines of his face softening in grown-up sympathy that strikes Mia like a whip across the face.

He doesn't understand. He must not get it.

Something like fear comes alive in the pit of her stomach and begins its treacherous crawl up her body but she doesn't pay it any mind. There is still that other beast, the one that is resilient and fierce and unquenchable.

It is still alive, and the man has made a mistake, definitely.

He explains to her that she is but a child, not old enough to purchase a ticket for the lottery. She needs to come back with somebody else, or come back in five years. He lets out a soft sigh as the girl before him bites back tears, and says he will be waiting.

Desperation claws at her throat like a vise, and she wants to tell him that five years is not an option. That she feels in her bones that today is the day.

Today is the day that her sweet, kind, wonderful mother with the non-native tongue walks into a mall and is attended to by the sales associates because she can afford to make a purchase.

Today is the day that her father with his warm, coffee eyes no longer bows his head down to an angry supervisor who reminds him that he is not indispensable.

For her mother who sings in the morning to forget how she goes unappreciated in this new country, for her father whose sharp mind and unmatched wit is wasted on physical labour which bends his back and sours his bones – five years is not an option.

How is it even possible to make him see all of this?

So she doesn't try.

When she arrives back home, Mia finds her mother in the kitchen, stirring a pot of stew with a ladle. There is no ring on her finger.

There never was.