

Fate and Fortune:

A Collection of Stories

by Deniz Besim

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Table of Contents

Twenty-first Anniversary

Mother Snowman (a Christmas story)

A Love Despaired

The Paper

Caroline's Witness

The Curse of the Stone Statue

The Government Boycott

A Day in the Life of Malcolm

Lord Medley

Twenty-first Anniversary

Anne stirs quietly in bed. It's morning. Anne senses the day break through the curtains. She begins to wake. She reaches for her robe on the chair and wears it. The TV is on in the background. Anne yawns.

As she sits up to fluff the pillow she sees something. It's a tray left on her bedside table. Breakfast? Oh, he shouldn't have.

A single red rose sits beside marmalade, toast and tea. Two sugars and milk, just how she likes it. Anne picks up the rose and breathes in its fragrance.

Mark enters the room. "Are you awake, love? I didn't want to disturb you." Anne beams. He's being such a gentleman today. But hold on. That's weird. He's not usually like this. "Come over, sexy," Anne says, giving him a pout. Suddenly she notices the neatly wrapped parcel in his hand. Is that a present? Anne shifts on the bed uncomfortably. Mark gives her a kiss.

"Happy anniversary, sweetheart," he says. She takes the gift from his fingers. Oh, damn. That's what it is. Their anniversary. She'd

completely forgotten. Anne tries to buy time.

"Er...it's...it's...it's.." She fiddles with the wrapping. She can't quite get the tape off.

Mark's eyes follow her fingers. "Here, let me do it," he says finally. "No, I've got this!" she says. Eventually the wrapping's off and it's a.. Gucci bag. She traces the material over with her fingers. Oh boy, she doesn't deserve this.

"So?" Mark asks. "So?" she replies. Mark's eyes shift from the bag to Anne's face.

"What about mine?" he says. "Yours?" she asks. Suddenly a wave of inspiration hits her. She gets up and walks across the room to the foot of the bed. She takes her robe off and throws it on the bed.

"Hey do you remember this?" she teases. She slowly unzips her silk nightdress and lets it fall onto the floor. Thankfully, she's wearing her favourite satin underwear. The purple one that Mark likes.

Victoria's Secret. Now it all seems like part of the plan. "And.." she says. There's a mischievous look in her eyes. She takes off the bra and throws it over at him. He catches it and gives her a wicked smile.

"And.." She slowly slips off the remains of her lingerie. Mark hoots.

Anne seductively sways from right to left.

"You know you're spoiling me right now?" he says.

Suddenly there's an interruption at the door. Little Richard walks in. Anne grabs her robe. "You know you have to knock before you walk in darling?" she says. Little Richard rubs his eyes.

"Mum?" he says. "Did you get that Gucci bag I bought you for your twenty-first anniversary?" Anne gives Mark a frosty look. "And the breakfast in bed I made you?" Mark sits across the room looking sheepish. "You rascal!" Anne screams grabbing for her nightdress.

"Sorry, darling! I forgot all about it."

Mother Snowman (a Christmas story)

Amy runs into her bedroom and slams the door shut. A loud bang echoes through the corridors of the house. She hears the sound of steps thumping upstairs. Amy panics. She breathes fast and looks around. Quickly working out what to do next. She heaves a chest of drawers from the side of the room and shoves it in front of the door. Surely he can't come in now. A dizzying sensation overwhelms her as she desperately pushes a few more objects in front of the door. A pot of flowers, two side cupboards and finally ends it with a wooden desk. Amy squeezes her eyes shut hoping that that's enough. The sound of Gareth heaving his body full force over the door startles her too soon. He heaves again. Thump! Thump!

"You know you can't hide in there forever!" he shouts. "I'm gonna get you good." He tries again, heaving his body a couple of times more, inching the room's objects forward. Amy pushes back with all her might and holds her breath. A few attempts more and Gareth has enough. There's a silence. Amy hears the sound of wooden footsteps

retreating. Then the sound of silence. Relieved, she lets out a breath.

She makes her way toward her bed and collapses on her soft duvet cover. She whimpers in exhaustion. He's right. She can't hide in here forever. He'd get her soon. Or get *her toys* is what he means.

She gazes around her room downhearted. She doesn't even mind that her board-game collections aren't complete. The Guess Who game lacks all the faces. The Ludo's missing counters. The Monopoly set's got no houses. Her Twister game has no mat. Her Connect 4 has no coins. Or that one of her pretty pink roller-skates is missing. He likes to harass her toys but if only that was it. What matters most is that her Fireman Sam's lost an arm. Barbie doll has had her hair pulled out. Millie the china doll has its face smashed. Elsa her princess doll has an eye missing. Heavy tears form in her eyes. She wipes them away with fury. And even more frustratingly, Tiddles has been coughed out of the tumble dryer. She stares deep into his sorrowful eyes. He looks so unhappy, she can't bare it.

"I'm sorry Tiddles," she says hugging her bear close. "I promised I'd protect you. I failed."

Now Gareth wants to get to what's left of her toys. To destroy them. To rip them into shreds so she won't recognise them anymore. A whimper escapes her lips. He wants to kill them.

There's nothing she can do about it. She can't stay inside her room for long and she would need supper soon. He knows that.

Carefully, Amy makes her way toward her toy box, she opens the chest and takes out her doctor's kit. She puts on the stethoscope and places it on Tiddle's heart.

"Don't worry, Tiddles, it's not that bad," she says. "Take a spoon of this medicine every day and you'll get better soon." She kisses his furry forehead. "I promise."

She makes her way round the other dolls and delicately nurses them.

"I'll get you a good arm soon, Sam," she says. She sighs. Just as long as she could keep Gareth away.

Amy looks out the window at the cold December day. A ladder stands beside her window sill. The window cleaners will be coming soon to wipe the snow off the window. She rubs her hands together. Light flakes of snow fall gently down and consume the ground. Amy has an idea. Why not escape down the ladder? Surely she can leave the

bedroom now and still keep the door jammed so that her dolls should stay safe. Yes.

Amy goes into her wardrobe and pulls out a thick coat, a scarf and some mittens. She dresses warmly. She opens the window and makes her way down the ladder cautiously. She holds on tight and descends slowly making careful of each step.

Out in the fresh, frosty air, a laugh escapes Amy's lips. She runs around the garden, picking up snow and throwing it over her. What a gorgeous time to build a snowman. The perfect time.

Amy begins by piling together mounds of snow. She wants the snowman to be taller than her. That won't be difficult since she has long arms.

Amy pulls out two brown buttons from her coat pocket to use for the snowman's eyes. She runs quietly into the kitchen and brings out a carrot to form its nose. She wants the snowman's lips red and uses a red apple peel to achieve this. Finally, she snatches a curly black wig from her father's collection. She wraps a warm cloak around it. One at the front and one at the back so the Snowman will be extra warm. She gives it arms, feet and adds gloves, shoes and a scarf. When she

finishes, Amy steps back a moment to admire her creation. Oh, what a surprise. This is the prettiest snowman she has ever seen. The way her cherry-red lips frame her face with those sultry chocolate-coloured eyes and felt-tip lashes that Amy adds as an afterthought. Her creation is a woman. Oh, what a most beautiful Snowwoman.

As Amy stares deep into the snowman's button-brown eyes she senses a connection with it she doesn't understand and it stirs her. Amy reaches up to plume its curly hair and as she reaches up to define the lashes, the snowman suddenly blinks. Is she seeing this right? Did the snowman just do that? The snowman blinks again and smiles. Amy trembles slightly in confusion.

"Hail," says the snowman. "I am your mother snowman." Amy gasps. "Don't be afraid, child," says the snowman. "You may call me Mother Snowman." Amy's heart leaps. She runs forwards and hugs her. "I'm here to make all your Christmas wishes come true."

"Oh, Mother Snowman," says Amy. "Can you do that?"

"Of course I can, sweetie," she says. "Now where would you like to start?"

"Oh, Mother Snowman," says Amy. "I've got a bunch of toys. But

they're not quite well. It breaks my heart to see them like that. Can you heal them?" says Amy.

"Is that your wish?" says Mother Snowman. "Yes, oh, please!" says Amy.

"Then it shall be done."

"First it's Sam," Amy says leading Mother Snowman up the ladder back into her room. "You see, he has no arm." Mother Snowman reaches out a cold puffy hand and touches Sam lightly. His broken toy arm is magically replaced with a new one. Sam beams proudly.

"Then there's Millie," says Amy leading her to the broken china doll. "She needs a new face."

"Oh, we can't have that," says Mother Snowman reaching out and healing Millie.

"Elsa's blind in one eye," says Amy. "Look at the state of Barbie Doll's hair." Then after a pause, "And Tiddles too, please." Mother Snowman heals them all. Amy's particularly joyous that Tiddles' fur is looking so new and fresh. Oh, would you look at her dolls. Now all looking so healthy and vibrant. Amy is about to thank Mother Snowman from the bottom of her heart when suddenly all her dolls

chime:

"Thanks for healing us, Mother Snowman!" Amy gasps.

"Oh, they are better than ever!" she says. "I always knew they can talk. I mean, I did used to talk to them *before* they were unwell. But ever since Gareth made them ill.. I suppose I forgot they knew how."

"Of course they can," says Mother Snowman.

"Well said, Mother Snowman," says Tiddles. "Do remember. It's that boy Gareth who hurt us, Mother Snowman. You must beware of him." Mother Snowman hugs him warmly with a considered expression on her bright, glowing face. After a moment:

"But what a selfless young lady you are," she says. "Putting your dolls before yourself. As a reward for this..." she waves a cold arm around the room. Suddenly all Amy's board-games are whole again. The Connect 4 has all its coins back. Her Twister has a mat again. Her roller-skates are a pair!

"Oh, thank you Mother Snowman!" says Amy.

"Now come with me," says Mother Snowman. "Our work is all but done yet."

She scoops Amy into her arms and whooshes her out of the window. Amy has never flown before or seen anything from this high up but the experience is so exhilarating. "Oh, Mother Snowman," she says. "This is extra-ordinary. But where are we going?" Mother Snowman laughs a silvery laugh that makes Amy tingle. "You'll see!" she says.

Hovering overhead, Amy spots a wooden-brown grotto. Spaces and spaces beside the grotto, Amy sees hundreds and thousands of little baby snowmen from overhead. They make up miles and miles of the empty snow space ahead. Amy gasps.

"Why, there are hundreds and thousands of them!" she says. "Who are they?"

"Each and every one of them are my children," says Mother Snowman. "They are my babies."

"But they are all so small," says Amy.

"They are very adorable, aren't they?" says Mother Snowman. She and Amy hover over the grotto and then she lands them both gently inside of it. "They're all here to make a wish for Christmas."

"And is that a wish-list that they each hold?" says Amy. "That it

is," Mother Snowman says, her bright eyes twinkling.

"Mother, we've been waiting for ages," fires one of her little snowmen, "Surely you cannot get through us all?"

Mother Snowman gives Amy a side-glance and winks:

"Oh, that I will," she says.

Mother Snowman gets through all her baby snowmen and as they each all make a different wish, Amy realises that she's never had more fun. True to her word each and every baby snowman has their wish come true. Amy knows that those babies will never forget her but even more so, Amy has had *her* wish come true and she knows Mother Snowman's given her more than she's asked for.

After the day is over and the last little snowman makes his wish and leaves the grotto, Mother Snowman and Amy make their way back home. This time rather than fly, they take a walk.

When they reach the house, Amy realises that the ladder is gone. Oh no, there's no way of going up to her room now. As Amy makes her way toward the house, the door suddenly breaks open and Gareth storms out. Amy looks behind her noticing that Mother Snowman has suddenly frozen still and stands in the centre of the garden remaining motionless.

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