

Gratitude

By

Yaoze Liu

yliu188@syr.edu

1

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

1

MICHELLE (5), a little kindergarten girl, wears a pink skirt. She smiles widely.

She is jumping and vivacious taking a small cupcake and walking toward her neighbor.

Michelle knocks the door.

MICHELLE

Hey, Mr. Ken. Delivering cupcake!

MICHELLE'S NEIGHBOR (O.S.)

Just open the door by yourself!

A man is speaking in the room.

Michelle opens the door and gets into it.

CUT TO:

2

INT. KEN'S HOME - DAY

2

Dim and gloomy.

PAN SHOT ABOUT THE SURROUNDINGS.

There are lots of colorful bottles displace on every shelf.

MICHELLE'S NEIGHBOR (O.S.)

Sorry that I can't go out to play with you. I'm doing my experiment right now. Just put the cupcake on the table.

MICHELLE

Okay...

Michelle feels disappointed. She walks toward the table which in front of her and puts the cupcake on it. She also takes the empty cupcake plate on the table that she delivered yesterday. There is a bottle of COLORFUL LIQUID on the table. Michelle is really curious about it. She takes it and has a look really carefully to avoid any noise that she would make.

MICHELLE'S NEIGHBOR (O.S.)

By the way, don't touch the bottle on that table, small girl!

No reaction.

(CONTINUED)

Michelle starts looking at the COLORFUL LIQUID that she takes. She doesn't realize that her neighbor is walking out because he doesn't hear Michelle's response.

Michelle's neighbor stands on the other side of the bottle. Michelle gets scared when she sees that there is a face against her on the bottle.

MICHELLE

Hey! You scared me!

A man with a slovenly look, he's skinny, wears classic white chemical suits and glasses. He takes the bottle away from Michelle.

Ken (28), chemist. He has experienced lonely life for past 20 years since his parents died.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

That must be a tasty BEVERAGE! Can I have a try?

KEN

No! That is not for you small girl.

(beat)

This "BEVERAGE" is for people who does bad things to someone.

Ken puts the BEVERAGE on the table.

MICHELLE

So... I can take this to my father.

KEN

Wait... What? Your... father?

MICHELLE

Yeah, my father can drink this and he would become better, right?

(beat)

Oh, my mother and I want to invite you to have dinner with us tonight, she did a really big pizza for us! You will come, right?

Ken doesn't hear about what Michelle says to him. He is thinking something else.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Ken? Can you hear me?

KEN

Oh, yeah, yeah, sorry. I will be there tonight.

MICHELLE

That's great! See you at dinner!

Ken doesn't reply it and walks back to his laboratory.

CUT TO:

3 INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

3

Ken sluggishly walks to Michelle's home and think something. His eyes are dull. He is taking an empty cupcake plate. He puts his hand on the handle and tries to open it. When he finds he couldn't open the door, he regains consciousness.

KEN

What I am thinking about?

Ken says to himself and knocks the door.

MICHELLE (O.S.)

Coming!

Michelle opens the door.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Hello, Ken. Come in!

Ken enters the room and closes the door.

CUT TO:

4 INT. MICHELLE'S HOME - NIGHT

4

Warm and bright.

MICHELLE

I'm going to help my mom with that big pizza. You can just put the cupcake plate on the table.

KEN

Sure, go ahead.

Michelle turns around and walks toward the kitchen. Ken looks at Michelle, and he finds that there is a small bruise on her leg.

(CONTINUED)

KEN

Hey, Mi--

Michelle has already gotten into the kitchen.

Ken shrugs his shoulders and doesn't care too much about it. He walks toward the sofa and sits down. He sees that there are lots of beer bottles on the table and floor. The living room is really messy, but other spaces are really tidy.

RACHEL (O.S.)

Alright! That's great! Let's have dinner.

RACHEL (33), an optimistic woman and pastry cook for a restaurant, wears a classic housewife clothing. She is taking a really big pizza and walking out from the kitchen.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Hello, Ken. How are you today?

Rachel puts the pizza on the table.

KEN

Pretty good, thank you. How about you?

(beat)

Also, thank you for inviting me to have dinner with you and Michelle.

RACHEL

You are really welcome! If you really want to say thanks, you should say thanks to Michelle because she invited you.

KEN

Sure, I will.

RACHEL

You are no longer as introverted as you used to be.

(laugh)

If Michelle asks you for having dinner with us, it wouldn't be that easy, you know what I mean?

KEN

Yeah, of course, thank you so much for taking me out of my lonely life. I feel really thankful to you and Michelle. I would pay it back as much as I can in the future.

(CONTINUED)

RACHEL

No, you don't need to. We are really happy to see that you can get involved with us. Michelle also really likes you.

KEN

It's good to hear that, and I have a question...

MICHELLE (O.S.)

Mom! I need help!

RACHEL

I'm coming, sweetie! Help yourself. I will be right back.

KEN

Yeah, yeah, go ahead.

Rachel walks back to the kitchen and helps Michelle. Ken stands up and walks around. He finds on those shelves, there are always some hand-drawn grimaces on a male's face on their family photo frames.

However, Michelle and Rachel are normal in every photo. Ken stands there and thinks.

The light goes off abruptly, and Ken got shocked.

RACHEL AND MICHELLE (O.S.)

Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you...

Ken turns around and looks at Rachel and Michelle. They are taking a really big birthday cake and approaching to him.

RACHEL AND MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Happy birthday to Ken, happy birthday to you.

MICHELLE

Happy birthday, Ken! Make a wish!

Ken is stunned by that and doesn't do any responses to Michelle.

MICHELLE

Hey, Ken? Make a wish!

KEN

Oh, yeah, yeah.

(CONTINUED)

Ken puts his palms together and makes a wish. He blows out those candles on the cake.

Rachel turns the light on.

KEN (CONT'D)

Thank you, Michelle, thank you, Rachel. Thank you guys so much. I feel so...

Ken looks is going to cry.

RACHEL

Ken, don't cry. You should feel happy. It's your birthday!

KEN

I know, I know. But... I feel so thankful to you guys.

RACHEL

You don't need to, Ken. You also help me a lot of taking care of Michelle.

KEN

No, that's not enough. I will do everything if you guys ask me to.

MICHELLE

Hey, can we sit down and have dinner first? I feel so hungry.

RACHEL

Of course, we can sweetheart. Let's have dinner!

Michelle, Rachel, and Ken sit on the dining table and start having dinner.

Ken puts cakes on Michelle's face and Michelle also puts cakes on Ken's face. They are playing, and Rachel is looking at them. Peaceful and happy.

Suddenly, there is someone knocking the door really loud. Michelle got shocked. She fears about it. Her hands stop putting cake on Ken's face and shaky. Rachel also looks unnormal.

Rachel says to herself.

RACHEL
What? Why does he back to home?

UNKNOWN MAN (O.S.)
Open the door! stupid women!

RACHEL
Sorry.

Rachel leaves the table and walks to the door. When she reaches in front of the door, she is hesitant to open it. The man is pounding the door again. Rachel opens the door.

BEN (44) is standing outside and drinking beer. Middle age man, unemployed, bludger. He is completely drunk but angry.

BEN
What the fuck are you doing? I was standing there for--

Ben faints into Rachel's body, and Rachel tries to support him. Ken comes to help Rachel to move Ben into the bedroom.

CUT TO:

5 INT. RACHEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

5

Clean and tidy.

Rachel and Ken put Ben on the Bed.

RACHEL
I can take care of him by myself, thank you.

KEN
Are you--

Ken realizes Rachel is not happy.

KEN (CONT'D)
Okay, sure.

CUT TO:

6 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

6

Ken walks back to living room and sits on the dining table's chair with Michelle. No talking.

KEN
Michelle, why does he always get drunk like this?

(CONTINUED)

(beat)
I mean your father.

BEN (O.S.)
I can drink more! I'm not drunk!
Give me more beers!

There is a sound like slapping someone's face. Michelle looks she is going to cry.

MICHELLE
I don't know actually.
(then)
But I really hate him when he gets drunk.

KEN
Wh--

Rachel gets out from the bedroom and tries to not show her face. She walks to a shelf and takes a new BOTTLE OF BEER, then she opens the DRAWER which under the television, and finds something. Ken sees that Rachel takes a bottle of SLEEPING PILLS on her hand and walks back to the bedroom.

Ken stands up and runs to the door.

KEN
I forget taking something.
(then)
I will be right back.

No reaction from Michelle, her eyes are out of focus.

The door slams.

CUT TO:

7 INT. KEN'S HOME - NIGHT 7

Ken takes the BEVERAGE, pours it out into a SMALL CONTAINER, and walks out.

CUT TO:

8 INT. MICHELLE'S HOME - NIGHT 8

Ken opens the door carefully without any sound. Michelle still sitting on the chair and doesn't do anything. Ken finds Rachel is standing in the kitchen and washing dishes.

Ken walks toward Michelle.

(CONTINUED)

KEN
Hey, Michelle?

Ken slightly claps Michelle's shoulder.

MICHELLE
Oh, hey.

KEN
Your mom is washing dishes, she
might need your help.

MICHELLE
Oh, okay...

Michelle walks to the kitchen to help Rachel.

Ken walks toward the bedroom, opens a small gap of the door surreptitiously. Ben is sleeping on the bed and snoring.

CUT TO:

9 INT. RACHEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

9

Ken gets into the bedroom. There is a BOTTLE OF BEER on the table which next to Ben, also an opened bottle of SLEEPING PILLS.

Ken takes the bottle of SLEEPING PILLS and has a look. There is just one-third of SLEEPING PILLS left in the bottle.

Ken says to himself.

KEN
I'm right.

Ken takes out the SMALL CONTAINER and drips few drops into the BOTTLE OF BEER, then he walks out.

CUT TO:

10 INT. LIVING ROOM/KITCHEN - NIGHT

10

Rachel and Michelle are not talking with other. They look unhappy. Ken walks to the kitchen.

KEN
Do you guys need help?

RACHEL
No, we are almost done.

(CONTINUED)

KEN

Okay...

(beat)

I need to go back to do my experiment. Thank you guys so much for remembering my birthday. I feel so happy. I will pay it back one day.

RACHEL

You are really welcome, you don't have to. We are friends.

(then)

Oh, I forgot taking fruits out. Do you want some during your experiment?

KEN

No, I'm fine. Thank you.

Ken walks to the door.

KEN (CONT'D)

Have a good night Rachel.

RACHEL

Good night.

KEN

Have a good night Michelle.

No reaction.

Ken shrugs his shoulders and says to himself.

KEN

I won't let you guys feel sad anymore. I promise.

CUT TO:

11 INT. KEN'S HOME/HALLWAY - DAY (NEXT DAY)

11

Ken is lying on the chair. There are some noises from the hallway. He stands up and walks to the door.

Ken opens a small gap of the door and leans forward, sees some medical staffs are carrying a stretcher out from Rachel's home. Rachel and Michelle are standing there and no expressions on their faces.

Ken is hesitant to say hello to Rachel and Michelle. He feels not good when he sees they are not happy. Ken closes his door and back to his room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

11.

CUT TO:

12 INT. MICHELLE'S HOME - DAY 12

Rachel and Michelle are both sitting on the sofa.

Michelle is doing her homework.

Rachel is reading a form.

"DEATH REPORT. Name: Ben. Reason: excessive drinking..."

MICHELLE

What is that, mom?

RACHEL

Nothing.

(then)

Oh, I forgot to do cupcake today,
can you tell Ken after finishing
your homework?

MICHELLE

Sure.

CUT TO:

13 INT. MICHELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT (2 YEARS LATER) 13

Rachel and Michelle are not that outgoing like used to do
after Ben died.

Michelle is lying on the bed and having a bad fever. Rachel
is reading the thermometer.

RACHEL

It's almost 100...

(then)

Are you okay, my sweetheart?

Michelle nods and falls asleep. Rachel stands up and walks
to the living room.

CUT TO:

14 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 14

Rachel walks to a DRAWER which under the television. She is
finding febrifuge for Michelle.

Rachel says to herself.

(CONTINUED)

RACHEL
 Why do these medicines are all
 already expired?

Rachel is still finding febrifuge. She finds a bottle of
 SLEEPING PILLS and takes it out.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 This one is also already expired...
 (then)
 three years ago?

When Rachel is putting it back to the drawer, she realizes
 something, and she takes it to have a look again.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Wait... This is that SLEEPING
 PILLS...

Rachel walks back to Michelle's bedroom.

CUT TO:

15 INT. MICHELLE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

15

Rachel's eyes are out of focus, she's thinking something
 else.

Michelle is coughing. Rachel regains consciousness and walks
 to Michelle.

RACHEL
 Sorry, sweetheart. I'm going to buy
 some medicines for you. Wait me
 here, okay?

MICHELLE
 Okay, mom...
 (coughing)
 Maybe you can ask Mr. Ken to
 produce some liquid medicine for
 me.

RACHEL
 No, sweetheart. He is a chemist,
 not a doctor.

MICHELLE
 (coughing)
 But he had a BEVERAGE which just
 heals bad people. He even wouldn't
 let me have a taste at that day.
 (coughing)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MICHELLE (cont'd)
I think he could also produce
something that works for me, mom.

Rachel says to herself softly.

RACHEL
A BEVERAGE, just healing bad
people?

Michelle is coughing continuously. Rachel is standing up and thinking.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Okay, sweetheart. I'm going to buy
medicines for you. Just stay on the
bed, okay?

MICHELLE
(coughing)
Okay...

CUT TO:

16 INT. HALLWAY - DAY

16

Ken is taking an empty cupcake plate, walking toward Rachel and Michelle's home. He knocks the door.

No reaction from inside.

There are lots of cobweb at every corner of the door, dust covers the handle. He stands there, sighs and finally puts the empty cupcake plate in front of the door this time. He walks back to his home, sighs again, and he looks back to the cupcake plate.

Ken closes the door.

FADE OUT