

Trigger warnings: fires/burned building, mention of death and loss

“Mama?” “Yes, Dear?” “The good guys always win, right?” “Of course, with enough faith and determination no evil can hide forever.”

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Words spoken to him with the utmost care and kindness.

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Words he told himself were gospel.

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Words that ultimately betrayed the facade his mother performed for years.

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A sheep released a wolf into pasture, only to stand alone in a field of crimson grass. The wolf? A ghost, no trace left, only despair as a reminder of its presence. The sheep's gaze was tender, and her weak voice merely uttered, “I couldn't let him starve.”

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It's a softened metaphor Oz tells when questioned over the burned remittance of the past littering his desk : patient charts, nurse badges, birth certificates.. The ash stains and melted edges almost consumed their faces, distorting them into ghostly remnants of who they once were. Certificates of birth hardly legible twisted his stomach to gaze upon. Innocent souls taking their first breath only to inhale burning smoke. Their cries possibly never answered, to live such a short life full of fear. . .he cannot bear to finish his thought.

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Oz never knew these people, but their gruesome ends dig into him like fangs. An injustice kept as a filthy secret within his family for decades, poisoning their mortals with its venom. And the ‘wolf’ that committed such violence? It's far from gone, far from mere fantasy, and far from the hand of justice.

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It stares him down across the dining table.

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A man Oz knew so tenderly : a sharp smile, worn hands, jolly attitude. Once pleasant memories now soiled by the sins of his past. Zayn Nazari. The name feels almost like a curse, as if uttering it may have the man appear behind him like a specter.

Oh, how Oz wished he could throw the man into jail. Tragically, life is never so simple. The tender face his mother wore when the topic was brought up was nothing but a facade. She was the one who lured Zayn to the hospital in the first place though under different intentions. He was blinded by rage, thirsty for the blood of anyone who blocked his rampage. All for one man hiding in the hospital's walls. It makes Oz sick to his stomach; how can a woman tasked with saving lives allow this to happen? She knew the chaos of war, the pain of loss, and the helplessness when you cannot save all. He caught her in his study, her judging eyes like daggers at the evidence before her.

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“Do you understand how this could impact him? Us?” She growled slamming her hands down on the desk. “You don't know what we went through, we narrowly escaped with our own lives! That was no ordinary hospital, dear.” She hissed, taking a step back to collect herself. “Is that what you tell yourself to sleep at night, mother? That everyone there was some criminal hell bent on ruining the two of you? Hoped burning everyone up would save you both from repercussions?” Oz snapped back, he hardly recognized her as his mother anymore. He couldn't look her in the eye any longer. “We didn't know it would end like that. . .I regret it everyday. You don't know the nightmares I have.” She murmured back, the guilt haunted her like a specter.

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“Then why didn't you report him? He trusts you! You could have given countless families solace. You could have solved this case. You could have avoided me finding out about the monster you let into our house!” Oz snarled, gripping the withered stack of papers in his hands. His mother seems to wilt at his words, each statement hitting her in waves. “You don't understand dear. Zayn. . . he lost so much. The man isn't well. I. . .” She struggled to speak before taking a breath. “If he finds out this got out, I can't protect you from him. I don't want anyone else getting hurt, he is a bomb wanting to go off. Are you willing to take that risk?”

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“Yes, mother, because these people deserve justice. If you're not willing to help me, then look the other way. . .that's all you've done all these years anyways.”

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Oz spent years compiling evidence that Zayn caused the fires. The threat of his actions hung over Oz like a chandelier hanging on a breaking string. It mattered not, he could defend himself. His mother. . .this would change so much between them. Would she shun him for this? The suitcase felt like lead as he made his way towards the police station. It doesn't matter, justice needs to be served.

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However, Oz had to make a stop. A small space in the center of the city, a golden plaque shined dully in the low city lights. Gifts of all sorts decorated its borders from withered flowers and soggy letters with saddened words of farewell. A tree towered over the plaque spreading crispy leaves about. ‘To those who we lost, loved, and honored : West Morgan hospital’. Oz set down his own gift of fresh flowers before the tree, he did so for the last two years. It was the least he could do.

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As he turned to leave, a shimmer of gold caught his eye. It was nestled deeply under the tree's roots caked in dirt. Oz knelt down to pry the object out of place, puzzled if it was a gift someone left. He used his coat to give it a small clean up until his heart leaped into his throat as the object twitched in response. It nearly hit the floor as he scrambled to compose himself, his eyes trailing back to the gap where the object laid to see the charred remains of a letter.

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*‘Please, take care of my child’*

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Hell no. This thing can't be alive. The hospital burned down a decade ago. No egg would survive the fires and the elements for long. It's just more evidence, yeah that's al-

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