

"THE ARTIST"

Isabella Cho

The Artist

(Lights up. A dim glow pervades the stage, indicating night. MAN sits on bench beside ELDERLY WOMAN, tossing a Gatorade between his hands. ELDERLY WOMAN sits looking straight ahead. There is a cane propped up against her side of the bench. The dim drum of rain can be heard.)

MAN

(Thoughtfully, to no one in particular)
Like mouths.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Craning her head towards MAN, as if to understand him through her failing hearing.)
Pardon?

MAN

(Pointing towards the audience)
You see the gutters?

ELDERLY WOMAN

Why yes. Yes, I do.

MAN

Those gray pipes with the water rushing out of em. They look like mouths.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh.

MAN

You see?

ELDERLY WOMAN

I do young man. Yes, I do.
(After a moment of thought)
Why, that's rather thoughtful. Artistic, really.

MAN

(Shrugs nonchalantly)
I guess you could call me that.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Leaning slightly towards MAN, as if something he said spiked her interest)
You guess? Well, that's a rather funny way to answer a question.

MAN

(Sniffs, placing the Gatorade on the ground.)
Everyone's an artist, in some way or another.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Now I'm curious. What is it really that you do?

MAN

Nah, ma'am. Better to just sit here in the rain, with a whole lot of impersonal between us. Trust me, it's better that way.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Slightly offended)
Oh. All right, then.
(Clicking her tongue in disapproval)
Young folks these days. Just give them a little push, and they're all beside themselves.

MAN

What was that?

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, nothing. Don't even mind me. No use for your sprightly young ears to hear.

(MAN and ELDERLY WOMAN sit soundlessly, staring blankly ahead. Then, MAN squints up as if trying to make out something in the night sky.)

MAN

(Squinting at the rain, pointing to something far off in the distance)
You see that?

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Concentrating hard to see through the rain)
You mean that building? The broken down one?

MAN

Yeah, that's the one.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, yes. Now I see it. Weren't they planning to make a strip mall there a few months ago? Happy Town, was it called?

MAN

(Laughing hollowly)
Happy Town. That's funny, isn't it?

ELDERLY WOMAN

You know my husband, (makes the sign of the cross on her chest) bless his sweet, sweet soul, he was a good friend of one of the architects.

MAN

Was he now?

ELDERLY WOMAN

If you know anything about the history of that place, I know just what you're thinking. It really gave my husband a shock, the poor thing, when it happened.

MAN

I can imagine.

ELDERLY WOMAN

You know, it still haunts me sometimes. What happened there.

(After a moment of thoughtful silence)

They still don't know what happened. Can you imagine? They were scrambling to find some sort of evidence, but in all the rubble, it was impossible.

(Placing her hands on her temples, as if overcome with a sudden headache)

Oh, I just think of all the families, you know, and my heart stops. It just stops.

MAN

My brother.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Pardon?

MAN

He worked there.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, no, no. Don't tell me—

MAN

Nine to three shift. I still remember calling him that morning.

(Smirking wistfully)

I was so hung over, you see, I didn't even realize who called. I just mumbled something before hanging up on him. Fell right back to sleep. Then I woke up to the news.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, I'm just— I'm just so, so sorry. It's just such a shame, how they couldn't even find anything to explain what— (Pauses, attempting to find the right words. MAN stares at her

intensely.) What I'm trying to say is, it's a real shame they couldn't find anything pointing to a reason. A reason would've at least given a little peace, relief, you know, to all those families. I can't even imagine ...

MAN

(Growing agitated)
The reason's staring at us, ma'am. No need to look through all the ruin and all those smashed bodies-

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, don't, don't, please-

MAN

(Voice mounts as his anger ascends)
Oh, you better believe they were destroyed. You know what they said when I went to the hospital? (Pauses, then enunciates the word slowly) Un-iden-tifi-able. They said my brother's face was so messed up, I couldn't even go up to the third floor to claim him. And I know exactly why he died that day. You know too. Don't you, ma'am?

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, don't, it's too horrible ...

MAN

It's cause of those goddamn city planners, the ones your husband was friends with. It's cause they wanted the building up as soon as possible so the revenue'd start flowing.

(After a moment's pause)
And compensation? Apologies? Don't even think about it. They just disappeared. Like goddamn ghosts. (Chuckling softly, defeated) Can you imagine? Committing murder and just floating off like that?

(MAN and ELDERLY WOMAN sit
in tense silence, both immersed
in their own thoughts.)

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Quiet, reflective)
Something awful happened to John.

MAN

John? Who's John?

ELDERLY WOMAN

The architect. The one my husband was friends with.
(Softly, after a moment's pause)
He was killed.

MAN

Well, you know what they say. Justice is a funny thing.

ELDERLY WOMAN

My husband was never the same after that. John, they found him
in his apartment, all bruised up, and there was this horrid
knife—

MAN

(Abruptly)
Gatorade!

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Disoriented)
Pardon, what was that?

MAN

(Bends down and grabs his Gatorade)
My brother loved this stuff. Said it was his lifeblood.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh. I see. It's a bit too sweet for me, you know, but I've heard
it works wonders for athletes.

MAN

It's why I came out today, actually.

(Holds up the Gatorade)

I'm going over to the site. Gonna put this by the ruins. For my brother, you know?

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh.

MAN

Someone's got to remember. Somebody's got to honor them.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Struggling to rise from the bench, reaching for her cane)
You know what? Let me go with you. I have qualms about what happened too. Now that you mention it, it's about time I send my prayers—

MAN

No, ma'am. That's awfully kind of you, though.

ELDERLY WOMAN

But what you said, it keeps cycling through my mind. You're right. John, he told us once, when he was over at our house, how he was worried. How he thought he was rushing the project. You're right, young man. You're right.

MAN

(Smiling sadly)

Thank you. It's just that I'd like to be alone.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Well, all right. It's the least I can do, give you the space you need to mourn.

MAN

(Getting up)

It was a pleasure to meet you, ma'am.

ELDERLY WOMAN

I'm still curious.

MAN

What was that?

ELDERLY WOMAN

You're an artist, you said. You paint?

MAN

There's a lot more to art than a brush, ma'am.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Oh, silly me. You a photographer? A writer, maybe? You act?

MAN

I remember.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Pardon?

MAN

I remember those who aren't with us anymore. I do for them what they can't do for themselves.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Nodding slowly)

I see. Why, that's rather thoughtful. Philosophical, really.

(MAN walks a few steps from the bench, then turns back.)

MAN

Ma'am! I need to tell you something.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Pardon?

MAN

I said I need to tell you something.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Well, all right then. Go right ahead.

MAN

You're a good person, ma'am.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Laughs gently)

I've known you for about as long as it takes me to find my glasses in the morning. But thank you for that.

MAN

Don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Why, that's not too hard for an old woman like me. I don't do much these days. Just hobble around town until the sun sets, then go right on home with my cane and wait for the moon to-

MAN

Solid!

ELDERLY WOMAN

What was that?

MAN

You're a solid person. With dignity.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(Chuckles softly, putting a hand to her heart)

Why, thank you son.

MAN

We lost your kind. Lost it a long time ago.

ELDERLY WOMAN

(With fondness)

Go on, now. And again, I'm sorry. You take care of yourself.

(MAN pauses in the rain, suspended in thought, as if contemplating whether to say one last thing. After a moment's hesitation, he keeps walking. As he disappears into the distance, the faint sound of feet rasping on the wet sidewalk can be heard.)