

The Resurrectionist

By Ariadne Zheng

The moon had begun to rise over the fog as the man drove his spade into the earth. The cemetery was void of even the ravens' caw, empty except for the statue of Death who watched expressionlessly, a scythe in its right hand and a bottle of gold in its left.

Only now, the statue's left hand was empty, and a malicious smile twisted its stone lips.

Ignoring the weight of the bottle in his pocket, the man continued to dig. As he worked, he wondered what his wife's eyes would look like when they opened. He wondered whether they would reignite with life, or if they would be as dead as they were when they stared up at him from the bloodied kitchen floor. And when he wondered, he wondered of regret and love, and whether it were enough to cleanse her blood from his hands.

The spade hit wood and stuck. The man crouched and reached deep into the grave for her coffin. He lifted the lid, gagging at the stench of the decaying corpse. The wedding dress she wore was untouched by death, yet her limbs were skeletal, bones jutting through rotting skin. The man grimaced at the sight, reaching for the bottle of Death's elixir of life. Dipping his finger in the swirling gold, he brushed the liquid gently over her gray lips.

When he had bargained with Death, he felt hope, wanting nothing but to revive his wife. Yet when she began to stir, rotting arms jerking as she staggered out of the coffin, he only felt a creeping sense of foreboding settle deep in his gut.

When her eyes snapped open and landed on the man, they were dead pits of rage and ruin. Tears of blood streamed down her cheeks, staining the white of her wedding gown scarlet.

The man dropped his spade and released a shrill scream, but as he tried to run, gnarled hands grabbed onto his ankles and dug deep into his flesh, pulling him towards the mouth of the grave. He thrashed and yelled, clawing at the dirt as he was dragged towards the coffin. He fought as he was thrown inside, yet the pain was blinding. It was when the lid of the coffin snapped shut did he recall the words of Death that had sealed their bargain in fate.

When you empty her grave, another will take her place.

The man screamed and screamed, banging his fists against the lid until his knuckles turned red. He screamed with all his regret and love, yet as he felt the coffin hit the pit of the grave, he knew that it was not enough.

When the moon fully rose over the fog, the man lay in the coffin. He could no longer see the statue of Death or the diabolical smile that graced its lips, but over the thudding of grave dirt piling back onto the coffin, he could've sworn he heard it cackle with glee.