

The Silent Witness

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“As the un-coagulated, crimson liquid trickled down every limb of his body . . .” *Slap*, the novel closed. A hand, aged with rheumatism, reached out to place the novel on the bedside table. The reader stood, wincing as he cracked his spine. His hand painfully grabbed a rosary embedded with diamonds. He made certain the cross was always in his right hand and the beads in his left. He walked unsteadily over to the window, pulled back the drapes, and looked out. The moon glared through resembling a lamp in a forest. The moon flooded the red room. The diamonds sparkled under the gracious light.

While reciting the rosary, he wandered toward a painting in his room, hung on the wall over the mantle. The moonlight illuminated a porcelain visage. The face belonged to a woman, the original owner of the mansion, named Laurie. She had departed from this earth almost a century ago. The man studied the portrait intently for several minutes, recalling how she had died. The night before her wedding, her fiancé wrote a two-page note describing to her an unfortunate situation. He had fallen in love with another woman. She took a candle and sent the letter up in flames. Overcome with grief, she took her fiancé’s dagger, cut her ring finger off, and thrust away the hated symbol still gripping her flesh in desperation. Wailing in agony, she then plunged the tainted blade into her crippled heart.

The day of her wedding had arrived and no one had heard a word from her. The young lady’s father ran to her room. There, he found the bride to be in her ivory wedding gown lying in a circle of blood with a dagger in her right hand. Her ivory wedding dress was stained forever. There was no note, no reason why she had done herself harm; no witnesses. For almost a century, the questions of her death had gone unanswered.

When the reader finished reciting the rosary, he walked over to his bed. Although his eyelids were heavy with sleep, he lay restless for nearly an hour. He tried reading his novel, without prevail. He closed his eyes and fell upon his pillow. The sound of the grandfather clock marked midnight.

All was silent, except for a breeze coming in through the open window. The clock struck two. The man, deep in sleep, could not hear the corridor floors creak although the unnerving noise grew louder with every individual footstep. The door’s silver handle slowly turned. Within a minute, the door was ajar. A tall, muscular figure walked through the doorway and stared into the moonlit room. The intruder seemed to be looking for something. Quietly, he searched through the chest and desk drawers. He searched around in despair until his eye caught a glimpse of the bed and its occupant. He crept to the bed grabbing the footboard. He saw the man there, deep in sleep and breathing laboriously. The intruder moved toward the head of the bed where he spotted what he had been looking for. There, on the bedside table, was the novel. He took the book in his hands and carried it with him to the chair near the window. His eyes slowly became accustomed enough to the moonlight to be able to read the weathered pages. When he finally finished, the clock was chiming four o’clock in the morning. He closed the novel, quietly stood, and gently placed the book in the chair. The intruder moved to the end of the bed and the sleeping man awoke.

All he could see was a dark silhouette. His countenance turned from waking innocence to terror and pleading. The intruder pulled out a knife and held it up so the moon would shine down on it. The man begged for an explanation of why this was happening. He brought the knife closer and closer to the man's face. A strangled squeal escaped from the man's throat, like a pig being dragged pitifully to the slaughter. The knife struck the cheek first, then the neck. Not a single soul heard the penetrating cries of the man as he lay helpless in his bed. He was alone. Eventually his entire body was covered in cuts and bloody gashes. After the torture was completed, the intruder raised the knife once more and said, "As the un-coagulated, crimson hatred oozed from him, body and soul . . ." At these final words, the intruder cleaned all evidence which would link him to this outburst of hateful passion. He wiped the novel clean and made certain the man lying in bed was never to awaken, as if deep in sleep. However, the intruder could not know that someone was there that night who witnessed the crime.

The sun rose gloriously the next day, oblivious to the eternal night of the old man. Its rays were returned to it thanklessly, reflected in a pool of blood. The housemaid came and went about her regular, mindless chores, also oblivious to the events of the previous night. On her way to her employer's room, she took her time, unaware that time no longer mattered to the owner of the house. When she reached the top stair, a strong, unfamiliar stench attacked her nostrils. The corridor smelled of rotten eggs and old blood. She tried to hold back the flow of vomit as she entered the room. She heard herself as she screamed. There, on the bed, was her employer, brutalized and dead. She ran downstairs to the phone and called the police.

The rest of the day was filled with questions, responses which could not be answered, and confusion. Chairs were turned upside down, clothing was strewn everywhere, and pictures were torn off of the walls. Only the portrait of the lady was left on the wall. It was examined carefully. The officials found no evidence; there was nothing to explain what had happened.

That night, the bedroom was cold and silent. Rain poured in from the open window and drenched the blood-red carpet. The room was in turmoil from the events that had taken place earlier that day. And yet, some items were still in their proper places. The rosary was on the bedside table. The chair was near the window. There were two striking differences about the room, however. There were now two portraits, one of a woman in an ivory gown and another of a frail, old man whose mouth was opened with an eternal scream and in his hand was the rosary. Both were ruthlessly murdered by a dagger thrust into their hearts. If only the portrait of the lady could speak, it would tell you of the horror-filled night. The eyes of the only witness were lifeless; her mouth was painted shut. The portrait would hold the secret for all eternity, never to speak the truth.