

# It

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**I**T DOESN'T KNOW why it follows him, but it does. It clings to his heels, crawls over cracks in concrete, scrambles up walls just to be with him. It stands beside him when the rain soaks through it, when the wind flurries leaves and litter across it and when the sun makes it visible, definite, defiant. These are the days it likes the most. When he almost notices it. When he raises his hand to shade his eyes and it can drape itself across him, feeling the warmth of his body, his steady breathing.

In the long nights it fades to nothing, merging with the darkness that seeps in through the curtains. It is the undeath, the pre-life, the void. Anything is possible. Sometimes he turns in his sleep, rolling over so that his face becomes masked in moonlight. It feels itself becoming real, edges forming where there was only silence and air. It glides over the bedsheets and breathes him in, their lips almost touching, before he turns away and it is gone, thrown violently from this world.

In those hours it waits, patiently, concealed by gloom but always watching. It watches minutes pass, then hours, but the passing of time means nothing to it. It had lived this way for many years. It could live this way forever. The boundless stretch of limbo is worth it for that moment when the sun rises and casts an orange glow that fuses them together, united, as one. In the night he is free but in the daylight, he can't escape.

It had perfected its act when it was small. It was performance; it was art. It was the most elegant dancer, a beautiful mime, and its movements were as light as air, flowing from

him to it in fluid motion. Their fingertips dance together. A divine duet.

It remembers many years ago how he would hold his hands out in front of his bedroom wall and laugh with joy and wonder at the illusions that it created. How it was revered! How it was loved. It held a magic power that no other could rival. Together they were unbreakable.

Now it is forgotten. Sometimes it tries to wave, tries with all its strength but he just doesn't notice it anymore.

With her it is all ravens and martinis and roses and lies. It hates her. It loathes her. She has become nestled inside him like a rot, a disease growing within. It tries to pull her away but she slips through its fingers, red hot to the touch, burning bright with venom. It tried to speak with *her* it, to tell it to go, to leave, to run away but it is dead. Nothing but a dead corpse looped around her ankle. She drags the carcass across the floor as she moves. Her footsteps are murder.

It is becoming obsolete. It is dying. It spends every day with the corpse now, staring at the blank eyes and rotting limbs. They are too close. She never leaves. It can feel the corpse's waxy skin against its own. Its nails are sharp and pointed. It's worse when they have to kiss, its lips against the cold, dead flesh. In the nights It is glad it is dust.

When she leaves it's a miracle. Light floods back into the house. It wants to run and dance around the streets but he just sits in silence. He holds his head in his hands. Some days he doesn't stop crying. The sound is unbearable, but the laughter is worse. It's then that it starts to notice that their fingertips don't quite touch, not anymore.

The days become longer. It follows him through corridors of iodine, white washed buildings, desperately trying to keep up, desperately trying to hold on. The world is on fast-forward. Everything is a blur. She's back and worse than ever. It feels itself fading when she's there. It can't breathe. It can't hear. Everything is losing colour.

It is laying with him, their arms lazily overlapping on the rough yellow blankets, when it catches her looking at it. It notices her eyes are nothing but empty sockets. "Do you believe

in good and evil?" she asks him, climbing onto his lap, forcing it to fade, digging her knees into its chest, the corpse sliding across the bedframe. It notices that her long black dress is made of souls, swirling and screaming wordlessly. For the first time in its life it tries to pull away, to break the bonds, to move without him. But it is paralysed, bound by unseeing cords that dig painfully into its skin as it rips away. It feels sinews snap and veins burst; bones crunch under the pressure. It never knew It was so alive.

Her earrings are blood red rubies. It sees them reflected in her scythe.

When it looks at him it sees that he is fading too. His skin is translucent and cold to the touch. Maps of veins across his chest lead to nowhere. There is no pulse, no beat, no warmth. When it tries to reach out to him, it feels itself being dragged backwards through the air, as if pulled by a great current. It is over. It is done.

And then it feels the bindings break. There's a moment of pure fear and ecstasy, of confusion, a sense of falling and then it lashes out blindly, striking her.

She falls back in slow-motion, the souls flaring up around her, the scythe crumbling into ash. It closes its eyes, tinnitus rising, the chaos of the world crashing around it. Behind its eyes it sees a new world, beyond its own where unseen creatures roam on the fringes of reality. When it dares to look again, she is gone. It climbs up onto the bed beside him, shaking on newborn splintered limbs, and begins the tender and gentle work of connecting the broken bones and torn muscles, arteries and cartilage, sewing them back together again.