

Confessions of a Gravedigger's Daughter

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When we are young we can't help but be happy. I was happy once, always the quickest to smile. I remember that life like a distant memory clouded in the shadows of age. It's a shame that the naivety childhood affords us cannot be carried on into adolescence. Perhaps then I could feel normal.

There are days when I lie in bed. I stare out of my window into the world and watch as people pass by. They move along like ants, with no time for thought or expression, just focused on whatever trivial chore is at hand. I pity them.

My daddy had been like them since my mother left. He's more broken though. It's as if someone reached in and yanked out his soul. He spent his days working in the public cemetery across the street. He was never one to complain, but I could see the loss he hid behind that fake, chiseled smile.

Chance Mortimer was different. Hired by my daddy in the early summer, he had a quality that I had never found in another. There was something elusive, something dark that was hidden in his eyes.

Chance would often come to the house for dinner. The food was usually lacking, but it never seemed so bad as long as he was there. Afterward, Chance and I would do the dishes and sneak out to the front porch. We would dream and talk about the future. He didn't laugh when I told him how I wanted to be a veterinarian. He didn't even think it was odd when I showed off the vast array of syringes and tools from the vet kit my daddy had given me.

After a while, my daddy got wise.

"You're sixteen, twenty-three is too old for you," my daddy said one

morning. He always seemed to talk at me and not to me. "Besides, that boy just ain't right. All he has for you is bad intentions."

Late at night, I would sneak out and meet Chance across the street. It was there in the cemetery that he introduced me to many firsts. One of those firsts being love, or what would pass for it at that age.

Chance had large hands that liked to wander. He was tenacious, and I could see hints of anger flash in his eyes when I stopped him from taking things further.

"Come on," he would say. "I need you."

Secretly I yearned for more, but I couldn't give in so easily. If Chance wanted it, he would have to show me he deserved it.

"What you make of this?" Chance asked one night while we were sitting in the grass behind the cemetery's mausoleum.

"Make of what?" I responded.

"This," he said, as he extended his hand. A string of beads slipped out, each one glistening in succession as they passed through the pale glow of the full moon.

"A necklace?"

"Pearls," he said. "Got them off Mrs. Jenson earlier today."

Chance pushed in closer to me. I could smell the alcohol on his breath and scent of his musk from a hard day's work.

"I got them for you," he said, as he tried to unhook the clasp. After several moments, he gave up and placed them in my hand.

"I don't get many gifts," I said.

"I like doing things for you," Chance said. "You're my girl."

As I walked home, I found myself slipping the necklace in between my fingers. The texture of the pearls soothed me. I couldn't help but smile.

The days began to blur together. The only thing that mattered were the nights I spent with Chance. I was always careful and my daddy remained oblivious.

"Your dad asleep?" Chance asked one night.

“Yes,” I answered. “Why?”

“I got something special planned.”

“Special?”

“Don’t tell me you forgot,” he said. “Tonight makes one month since we started coming out here.”

“One month?”

“Yeah.”

Chance pushed back from me a little. I could see the disappointment on his face.

“I thought you girls wrote this stuff down and in calendars or something,” he said. “Had little codes all worked out and all.”

“I just . . .”

“It is fine,” he said, as he eased closer to me.

“Walk with me,” he whispered.

I nodded, and stood up. Chance took my hand and led me through the maze of headstones and hedges.

“Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise.”

He led me out of the cemetery and across the street.

“Damon’s Funeral Home?” I asked.

Chance smiled. We walked around the side of the building and to the back door. Chance tugged at the reinforced bars that encased the doorway. He searched his pockets for keys and after several moments he managed to open the locked door.

“This is where they bring the dead people,” he said as he moved into the dark room ahead. He switched on a flashlight and prompted me to follow.

“Dead people?” I asked.

“They drain their blood here, box them up, and then send them to us to bury.”

“Gross,” I said in disgust, hoping to mask my intrigue.

“Come on, now,” he responded. “Don’t pretend this freaks you out. I’ve heard the secret – how the cops investigated your dad, thinking he did away with your mom.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Wouldn’t be a hard thing to pull off,” Chance said. His eyes shifted to me as he awaited a response. I didn’t offer one.

“I mean, imagine how easy it would be to kill someone and then just bury them,” he continued.

Chance tugged at my dress and led me farther into the room. I stood there for a moment allowing my eyes to adjust. I could see many things, both real and imagined. The sterility of the place seemed so inviting.

“My mom left,” I finally offered.

“I’ve seen your dad. Heard how he is always talking to her when he thinks no one is looking.”

“So?”

“That’s not normal,” Chance said, before he turned off the flashlight and disappeared into the blackness.

I searched the space ahead with my hands and moved forward until I met a cool, smooth surface.

“Marco,” Chance said.

“Polo,” I laughed.

I swept my hands across the surface and found a metal latch. The mechanical lock clicked as it released the bolt. A rush of cold air met my warm skin.

“Marco,” Chance whispered in my ear, as he pressed himself upon me from behind. He pushed me forward into the cold, crisp air. His hands were rough and dry. They felt like sandpaper as they brushed up my thighs.

“Sometimes I come here and just look at them,” he whispered. “They are kind of like my audience.”

“You’re scaring me,” I said, but he didn’t listen.

He pressed me farther until I met cold steel. My chest burned as he forced me against the frozen wall.

“You’re hurting me.”

“That’s the idea.”

I clinched my teeth and tightened my jaw in an attempt to ease the pain. Soon the sounds of his grunts and moans were replaced by the methodical knocking of my skull against the wall. It was vicious, but all the while exhilarating.

When Chance had finished, he pulled himself away and looked me over. There was a flash of anger in his eyes. At last, his secret was out.

“You can’t tell anyone,” he said.

“I won’t,” I promised. And I meant it.

The flesh of my body was frozen in place, but my mind wandered. I tried to process the whole event and found it all a blur. The rustling of metal forced me from my stupor. Chance fastened his belt and gave me another quick once over. Our eyes met. He knew I wouldn’t tell.

I listened as his footsteps grew distant, and the door shut behind him. I allowed my body to slide to the frozen floor. I sat there dazed. I searched the lifeless eyes of his audience, but there was nothing.

The next morning I lingered in bed. My body was wracked and tired. With a thick coating of makeup, I finally met the new day.

I passed the morning in quiet. Breakfast was uneventful. My daddy didn’t even offer me a single glance. My thoughts kept returning to the night before. I finally realized what I had seen in Chance those months before – the savageness that comes with knowing and realizing your desires, and not being restrained by the rational. Perhaps he was a more evolved being, or at least more evolved than me. I envied that.

At midday, rain clouds rolled in and blanketed the area in light showers. I sat on the front porch, gazing off into the rows of distant headstones. Each one glistened like polished pearls against a drab gray skyline.

"I'll get us a drink and a sandwich," I heard my daddy say. "Just wait here."

The porch boards creaked as he moved across them and went inside. I could feel Chance's eyes on me. He lingered just beyond my periphery, hesitant.

"Are we okay?" he managed. "I mean with what happened last night."

"We're fine," I responded.

"You're not mad?"

"Should I be?"

"I could understand if you were," he said. "We can talk –"

"Later," I said.

After the lights had gone out, I slipped into the promising night. I crossed the street and entered the safety the cemetery afforded. I waited at our spot.

"I didn't think you would show," he said.

"I want you to take me back," I responded.

"Why?" he asked.

"I want to go back."

"Okay," he relented.

Like the night before, I followed him across the street and into the inviting confines of the funeral home.

"Now what?" he asked.

"Was I your first?"

"What do you mean?"

"The first girl you did that way," I said.

"Yes," he admitted.

Chance turned from me, as if it pained him to admit the truth. Or was it remorse?

"Are you ashamed?" I asked.

Deflated, Chance turned to me. His eyes shifted away each time they met mine.

“I didn’t mean for it to happen that way.”

I moved over to him. The man I cared for and loved collapsed in my arms, but he was no longer the man who had made love to me the night before. He was an imposter, driven by impulses and not some greater desire. He was nothing.

“I have a confession to make,” I said.

Chance looked up at me with his defeated blue eyes.

“What?” he asked.

“I know what happened to my mother,” I said.

“What?”

“She was broken,” I said. “I fixed her.”

Chance looked up. His eyes met mine. He guessed my intent and tried to pull away, but he was too slow. The syringe pierced him as he stumbled backwards.

“Please,” he begged.

“Animal tranquilizer,” I said. “You shouldn’t feel a thing.”

Chance swooned and his limp body hit the floor. He struggled for several moments. The drug worked its way through his system, making it easy to maneuver him into a prepared casket.

“Why?” he stammered.

“You need to be fixed,” I said. “I had hoped this wouldn’t be necessary. I really hoped you would be different, but like all the others you disappointed me. You’re just another ant.”

I didn’t wait for a response. I strapped the gag in place and proceeded to bind the rest of his body. I took one last look at him before closing the casket lid. As I stepped back, I could hear him as he struggled to free himself. I waited. His muffled screams began to wane and soon turned to mournful cries. I tried to imagine the horror he must have felt. But I couldn’t feel a thing.