

*The Reddest Rose*

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The snow falling from the darkening sky chilled me to my very bones as I made my way through the thicket. I was draped in expensive wools and furs that at one time brought me happiness and pride, but now only brought me shame to have fallen so far in society. I was once a nobleman: high in status and with money to spare, a beautiful wife who had the glint of dimes and silver dollars in her eyes when she saw me, and a house so large and with so many amenities that I only had to leave it on the occasional trip to the doctor's house when he was too busy to make a house call.

*Snap.*

I heard the cracking branch behind me. She was here. The demon that had lured me into the depths of what seemed like Hell itself followed me into the icy, wooded glen. She wasn't careless enough to give away her location by accident. She wanted me to feel fear. She wanted the dread to well up in me and spill over, so she could drink from it like a fountain. Later, she would feast on my agony as she tortured me until my death. My breathing grew sharp and ragged as I felt the demonic chill creep around my neck and extremities, strangling the heat from my body.

"Hello, love," she whispered into my ear. I wasn't even sure she was even touching the ground at this point. She made no sound save for the branch creeping up on me, but the absence of sound alerted me to her just as much as a siren. The birds didn't chirp, the deer fled, and only the lonesome wind kept me company as I made my feeble attempt to escape the glacial woodland with an injured leg.

"What do you want, Demon?"

“Awe... Now, now handsome... Don’t be so cold to me. You’re the one who let me in... Don’t you remember?”

Her voice was thick and hypnotic. I dared a glance in her direction and was taken aback at what I saw. She had cast away her horned, shadow-like form, and what stood before me was a beautiful woman with curves too generous to ignore. She had long, dark hair and eyes a shade of blue deeper than any well. She wore a small, flowy dress made from the shadows of the forest. No part of her seemed to be affected by the frigid wind around us, and I was lulled into a sense of security and warmth.

The next thing I knew, I was lying on the ground, both of my arms flayed and open. I would bleed out and slowly but surely die here. She sat above me, drinking in my pain and dread. The only way I could fight back was to let her do as she pleased and mute my feelings as much as I could. I turned my head to the side as she continued mutilating my body, as I couldn’t stand to see her true form. Four eyes with no other features on her face and hands with long razor-sharp claws for fingers. She kept her feminine, shapely form to taunt me for what I had so foolishly wanted.

I saw a small patch of flowers, but one stood out to me. A rose. Very tall and slender. It stood higher than all the rest and was the most beautiful of all of them. I learned then of my folly. I was the tallest rose. I was bright and high in the world, but that only meant that I had no protection from the outside world. The rose was covered in frost and now drooped with the snowfall weighing it down. It would most certainly be dead before morning as would I.

“At least let me know your name, creature,” I asked between my moans of agony.

“My name... I don’t know it anymore... but for you, call me Rose...”

She leaned down to my ear, giggled softly, and then separated my head from my body with a sickening rip.