

His suit is an impeccable ash grey, though not quite as bright as the streaks of silver in his meticulously combed hair. He's quite aware that his coat-tails are probably being horribly crushed underneath his weight, but it is of no great importance to him anymore. Natalia had pressed his suit this morning, because Amanda had been... *indisposed*. It was to be expected for her to feel under the weather after he had broken the news to her.

It's not often you get told your husband is leaving you on your wedding anniversary. It had been quite funny, actually, the way her smile faded slowly while she still held the cake knife in her hands. He had taken it from her – very gently; you could never be too sure about these things. The sheen of tears that glittered in her eyes brighter than the diamonds biting her throat. So, so very beautiful. One of the reasons he'd made her his. His doll, his flawless, little trophy wife. Flaunting her in front of his friends, turning a blind eye when they'd sidle up and make lewd eyes, retaking control when he felt threatened.

He *had* to have power.

But he'd started noticing things, recently. So many things. Horrible things. That was the problem with love, it blinded you. But, goddammit, the light wasn't bright enough to wipe out the image of the lines that had appeared on her forehead, the unseemly protrusions of skin in those dresses she favored. There were no more lewd eyes. Why weren't there jealous eyes eye-f\*\*\*\*\* his trophy wife? Why the f\*\*\* weren't there any men approaching her when they thought his back was turned?

He'd contracted a horrible case of wandering eyes. While walking the dog, dropping the brat off at kindergarten, in meetings. Sylvia from accounting, Jane the young teacher, Maria the dentist. Looking up skirts surreptitiously when no one would notice these horrible shifting wandering eyes of his. Bloodshot, from left to right, they reeked of desperation. An inaudible stench. But it didn't need to be loud, for his eyes spoke volumes.

Staring straight ahead as they drove home, a hand gripping the steering wheel, the other one on the clutch, thumb skimming over the surface, in time with her sobs. Shaking her head, her curls flying maniacally. Stirring up anger that settled on him like a fine layer of gauze. Disturbing what lay in him from slumber, coating his throat in a thick wall of blood. He stopped the car, only boredom in his eyes. Still staring straight ahead, waiting. She stopped writhing in her seat, trembling, turning to face him with her pink lips quivering, her body humming as if wound with the tightest string. Watery blue eyes only serving to anger him further. He couldn't see, but he *knew*.

*Smack.*

Amanda was quiet on the ride home. Tired after the festivities of the evening. He let go of the clutch to place his hand on her thigh, stroking the soft fabric his money had clothed her in.

Her voice caught in her throat, high notes of tension and terror, soft fingertips trying to pry off his own. "Please... Please stop. Take your hands off of me."

He turned to face her; a quizzical look in his eyes; a cruel smile on his lips. He cocked his eyebrow and stared into her for a few long minutes, the road stretching out endlessly, his foot pushing down harder on the pedal.

"Look at the road! My God, we're going so fast!"

"What hand?"

"The road, please! We're going to die, please, look at--"

"Don't cut me off. What hands? Both my hands are right where I want them."

"Please don't... Don't do this, we're going to--"

"Answer me."

A hiccup stifled by a sob, or a sob stifled by a hiccup. It didn't matter. Nothing she did ever had. The lowering of eyes and turning away of a head, the silent acceptance, heavily carpeted under his dominance. The turning up of lips, the invasion of places already torn apart.

Maybe he had dreamt it. She never refused, the disgusting, eager little strumpet. Maybe she had sat there, cold and stiff and unmoving, turning her head away. The end result was the same though. Such a mess had been made. Such a mess. Maybe he should have done it differently. They would have gone in the right direction. He had no idea what the right direction was, but it was a place. An event --- very foreseeable on his horizon. But that would have happened if he had been human. If he were human. Humane. Human. What difference did it make? The slits of his eyes were the same either way.

She was right next to him in bed after they got home. Sprawling unceremoniously, her hair in disarray, her dress sticky. It was still cold, despite the covers. Probably because he was lying next to the epitome of frigidity. He worked himself into a rage, the same venomous words crawling around through the folds of his frontal lobe, seeping out his ears, swirling in his eyes until the words clouded his vision, and all he could see was her.

He had work to do tomorrow. Important work. It would determine the course of the rest of his life, and he couldn't face the thought of what might happen if he couldn't. Work that was more important than the sluggish beat of a heart overworked at a middling age, more important than sensory nerves fraying at ends, more important than the grooves on his palms, more important than the chemical imbalance in his brain, more important than the sweat that showed through his shirt, more important than the shit in his bowels. No, it was much more important than all of that.

Grandeur.

Except what he is doing now isn't very grand. Crushing his coat tails beneath him, sitting on a tuft of grass, listening to everything he can listen to. Birth isn't grand. It's messy and involves guts and blood and alien fluid. Death is much the same, or so he thinks. What he knows of death, anyway. His knowledge isn't extraordinarily extensive. Birth and death. Two sides of the same coin.

Does he remember what cake it was? It could have been chocolate. Amanda loved chocolate. She'd sneak off to the kitchen and stuff it in her mouth when she thought he wouldn't catch her. They had been out once. She kept going back for more and more of the cake. Exclaiming at how good it was. Laughing with the wife of one of his colleagues about how she could have made something so delicious. He'd tried his best to warn her, tried to make her stop. He hated gluttony. She'd ignored his enlarged eyes, *chosen* to disregard what he wanted her to do. When she sat down with another helping of cake, he turned to her, a glint in his eye. He drew his booted leg back, held it for a moment and smiled. Looking her in the eyes, he raised a toast.

“To my beautiful wife.”

Then his foot shot forward and caught her exposed leg on the shin. Her fork clattered to her plate and her sharp inhale was like music to his ears. Her neighbor ask her with concern in her voice whether she was alright. He inclined his head slightly, holding her gaze steadfastly. Without breaking eye contact, caught in his glare, she murmured an assurance to her neighbor and pushed her plate away from her. With a tilt of his lips, he went back to flirting with the wife of his subordinate.

He wonders who'll drop the brats off wherever they need to be today. Amanda can't drive. The idea is abhorrent. A stupid bitch like her shouldn't be let anywhere near a steering wheel. She can't drive in more ways than one today, though. He cracks himself up. Natalia will probably take pity on the kids and let them stay at home and do whatever it is they do. Or shoo them out and call over the boyfriend she always calls over when they're out. She thinks he doesn't know. She doesn't know about the cameras he has in every room. Every single room. He loves watching the footage.

Power. That's all it really boils down to, isn't it?

Natalia will busy herself around the house. Cleaning up however much she can of every room. Hesitating at the handle of his room, before resolving to go in and clean. Maybe she'll notice the sheets bundled on the bed first. Maybe she'll notice them last. She'll walk around the room, quietly, inherently jealous of Amanda's belongings. Cussing her out for being a rich bitch. Maybe she'll only notice the mess of the bedsheets on the bed after the prevalent stench hits her. Or maybe she'll be too enamored by Amanda's open jewelry box. Maybe she'll be trying on her earrings, a tight choker biting at her neck, her eyes glimmering with lust, before she turns

around. Maybe she'll choose to clean the room like that, to exact her revenge on Amanda simply by being a maid wearing her jewelry. She'll prance around the room in the jewelry which costs more than her life, not exactly cleaning anything, just pretending she is the mistress of this room. Maybe she'll continue this for a few minutes before she comes to a stop before the bed. Maybe, today, she'll decide to throw caution to the wind and slip out of her maid's uniform, letting it pool at her feet. She's not wearing much underneath. Maybe then, Natalia will perch tentatively on the bed. Her nose still hasn't picked up the smell because of the clamoring of her brain. Her nervousness will evaporate and she'll fling the covers off the bed and slide in hurriedly. Natalia will draw them over her head, reveling in the rick silk Amanda so insisted upon for her duvet. Then Natalia will settle down and take a big sniff of the air around her. When her lungs will start to constrict, she will turn slowly to her side, for Natalia will feel a presence. And maybe she will finally notice the smell. And maybe she will already know what she is going to see. And maybe she will have her eyes closed as she's turning because she's trying so desperately for it not to be true. And when Natalia opens her eyes, they'll be met with the cold, dead ones of his wife.

He can't for the life of him remember where he put the knife after he gently took it away from her shaking hands. Maybe he put it on the table next to him. Maybe he cut a slice and left it embedded in the cake. Or maybe he left it nestled in the small groove of her stomach between her abdomen and ribs.

He's never had a good memory.

He wonders if the children will be the ones to find their mother. He chuckles at the thought. A heartwarming sentiment. A mother and her children, nestled in bed. But scenes rarely ever stay as perfect as that. It would be so very easy to subdue each component of the picture and arrange them as he wanted. And leave the eyes open. He loved it when the eyes were glassy. Much better than when they were wet, watery blue. Glassy eyes evoked such a response in him. Sometimes he could barely contain himself. The world could be so beautiful.

He's found hell. He's found something. He's found heaven. Nirvana, held between the handle of the knife he twirled in his hands. But only to cut the cake. Only. Nothing more, nothing less.

He checks his watch again. The children should be returning home by now. If they had left for school in the morning in the first place. He knows undoubtedly that it is time to leave. After all, he has work to do. Work that is more important than anything else right now. Wholly more important than his life. More important than anything he can comprehend.

He's already checked his watch, but now he must wait for a window. An opportunity. Something hurtling his way, enough momentum to bowl him over.

It's unfortunate, really. He can't stay to watch the breakdown of his wife for a few more days. He doesn't notice the stench. There's not much he doesn't notice, but the stench is

something he does not. He's entranced by the eyes. Glassy marbles. Beautiful, beautiful. So lifeless. So much more expressive than the watery blue ones that had preceded the marbles. But he's had more than enough, more than his fair share. It's only fair to be generous.

He can hear it, now. The loud, cacophonous sound of a large body with numerous wheels hurtling forward. It must be nearing his stop, and just in time, too. He really has to admire how seamlessly everything has melded together. All such fragile elements coming together so wondrously. Impeccable. Impeccable.

It draws nearer. He checks his watch once more and proceeds to fix his tie. He stoops infinitesimally in order to retrieve the briefcase by his side and then stands up straight, the smallest of smiles gracing his drooping, jowly face. His wandering eyes flicker once more, making sure that there is enough momentum, that everything is just as it should be, and then he takes a small breath.

*Inhale.*

*Exhale.*

With the smile plastered on his face and his hair impeccably brushed to one side, in order to minimize the exposure of the bright silver hairs indicative of his age, he steps out onto the road, his fine Italian leather hand-made shoes coming to rest on the asphalt before the timing clicks into place and the momentum pays off.