

She Waits

A Halloween Story

By

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She waits. I know she waits. As sure as the sun on a clear summer's day warms the memories of friends past and future's promise, she waits. There is nothing so sure and true in this life as love. There is nothing so strong as true love. So she waits. In the damp caverns and deep dark forests she waits. Time is life's enemy. In her death she has no such boundaries. So she waits. I have known her through all the years. I have felt her through trial and joy. She is always beside him, ever waiting, waiting to be joined, to move on together.

I had never believed in ghosts. I didn't even like the tales. Not only were they such foolishness, but the subject itself was drab and depressing. Every ghost tale began with the loss of love or denial of love. Only the truly miserable could demand their souls remain in a netherworld of limbo as they mourned the loss of love. I always pictured such despondent creatures wandering aimlessly, death rags upon their form, haunted eyes searching for what they had but could never have again.

But that was before I met her, Janice. She was light itself. Her smile, attitude, and carriage demanded your attention. She loved life and all those in it. A moment in her presence drained your despair and revived your hope. I don't really know how to describe her physical form. Each who met her in turn described only her life force. Color of eyes, hair, and lips were of secondary nature. As a man I could be condemned for not being fully aware of her physical attributes, but it really didn't matter. To be in her presence was all that was important. I knew that in no way and means could she ever, in her passing from this mortal coil, take the form of a forlorn lost soul. In no way would I ever consider her so bereft of love that she would choose to stay in a desolate netherworld.

But as sure as Janice was our light and life, her life, her soul was Jeffrey's. We envied him for her attentions. But he loved her as no other of our number. Merely coming upon them sharing a moment together caused many to turn in embarrassment for the interruption. They were in love and such love draws envy and want. This was the destiny and fate of Janice and Jeffrey.

Tom had known Janice from an early age. He was attracted to her as all others. Tom was born of neglect and abuse. His creation was the product of unwanted and forced attentions. His mother forbidden by belief to abort, gave birth. She turned the terror and helplessness she endured on the child conceived and made misery their companion. Lack of support and personal wealth condemned them to shanty towns and desperate mobile home parks. Tom grew up without love and learned hate, greed, and selfishness. His mood, demeanor, and thoughts became dark. Tom became the anti-light of Janice. Tom became Evil's child.

But Evil cannot sustain itself. It needs light to feed on and give nourishment. The consumption of love, light, and compassion are nectar to Evil. Evil shares the requirement of all nature's creatures to exist. Therefore, it must seek out and consume the sustenance nature provides, be it animal, man, woman, or child. That is the only reason, if reason is a factor, that rational men and woman can make of Tom's next actions. All other motives fall far short in their explanations.

Tom had watched Janice and Jeffery from a distance. How could he not notice them? All around were drawn like moths to a flame to witness their passing. Their happiness grated on his misery. Their smiles and friendship weighed down his loneliness. It was if they had everything and he had nothing. His Evil simmered over their light and became ravenous, especially of Janice, she of the beautiful hair, complexion, and form. How could all be so deceived? Did they not see how she manipulated them? Did they not see how she used them for her own gain?

Tom smiled at his rationality. He was not taken in by her charms. He knew her for what she was. He determined to save all of them from this menace and teach her some humility. Tom plotted his next moves and waited for his opportunity. He didn't have to wait long.

Jeffery had taken an extra shift to help out a friend. It was a second shift and he wouldn't be home until well past 11 pm. Tom knew Janice would be alone and curled up on the couch drifting to sleep as she waited for her beloved Jeffery. Tom only had to wait until dark. There would be no forced entry or security codes to avert. Small town people still left the back door open all night, especially those foolish enough to think the better of every one.

Tom could not remember any plan that had gone as well. Janice was laying on the couch, barely awake, as a program played on the television. All lights were off save the glow from the TV. Evil entered the room with Tom and consumed its meal fully, using the time to savor every nuance. It was a horrific scene that greeted Jeffery. He cried out in such anguish and despair that I awoke from a sound sleep in my home next door.

I rushed over to offer any service to assuage my dear friend, quite unprepared for what I observed. The blood was everywhere. What was left of Janice's body was of such profound horror that today I cannot discuss it for fear of losing my mind. Sanity held for but an instance as I grabbed the phone and called for assistance. Police, ambulances, and many friends soon hurried to the door. I held onto Jeffery's shoulders as they came, unable to offer more reasoned solace. I didn't know what else to do.

Jeffery held Janice in his arms. Her lifeless eyes looked up towards the ceiling. Jeffery had removed a rag shoved into her mouth and was trying to breathe life into her body. The breaths of hope soon became passionate kisses of loss and love. The growing crowd brought some sense of reality back to my senses. I grabbed Jeffery strongly by the shoulders. My grasp and his loss soon allowed him to lay his love down. I then took him bodily back to my home to secure what was left of his mind.

The inquiry and investigation took well into the morning. Police came and went. Onlookers gawked at the misery. Friends and neighbors brought what food and comfort they could to my home. Each in turn was assuring themselves of Jeffery's well-being. When the body was finally removed it seemed as if the world stopped. Hardened police personnel bowed their heads and were silent. The neighbors gained the same poise. Even the local dogs would not bark, as if they knew goodness had not survived.

It took time for Jeffery to regain a sense of purpose. He could not return to his house so I made him comfortable at mine. I was alone with ample room and beds. It was no bother. Several of the neighbor ladies went into Jeffery's home to retrieve some clothes and personal items for his use. The funeral was delayed for weeks while evidence was retrieved and an autopsy performed. The delay served as a needed moment for Jeffery, as he was nowhere near ready to plan a funeral.

When the day for internment arrived it seemed the whole town turned out. It was a beautiful warm day with birds in the clear blue sky. A sadness hung over everyone until the sun began to shine inside the chapel of the service. The rays of the sun seemed to warm everyone's heart. Each in turn seemed blessed to be there. Instead of offering hope they began to receive it. Jeffery looked at the brightest ray gracing the closed casket of his beloved and a smile creased his tired face. It was that moment, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a form.

Now I am not going to say it was the ghost of Janice. It was the briefest of moments. I turned to look and see who it was, but the form was gone. So I cannot confirm. But someone or something was

there. To that I can attest. As a strident non-believer in ghosts at that moment, I could never have confirmed the existence of the ghostly presence of Janice. But there was a form.

I was not the only one to notice either. Jeffery had seen the same from his glance. He looked at me and clapped me on the back. His worn smile became wider and his presence became more alive. It was enough, whatever it was, for Jeffery. He was wounded and scarred, but he would survive.

Jeffery remained in my home for a few more weeks. I had begun to enjoy the company and numerous friends he seemed to have drop by. Jeffery seemed to relish not being alone. A routine was beginning to form and that is when some of the stranger occurrences began to happen.

As is my want, Sunday afternoons are often spent in front of a television. Sports programming or old black and white movies are the fare. It doesn't really matter because it is all just a sham to catch an afternoon nap in the comfort of the warm embrace of the couch. Inevitably, as the sun's rays fall through the high windows, I fall asleep. Jeffery goes out at these moments to allow me some privacy. A kindness he returns for my little assistance.

Now as a confirmed bachelor it is always the way that I never remember to bring a blanket to this routine. I always remind myself each Sunday to gather up the small comfort. But I never quite succeed to make it to the closet and retrieve the object. Each and every Sunday when I wake I curse my forgetfulness and resolve next Sunday will be better.

This Sunday as I drifted off to sleep my mind's eye caught an image of Janice smiling, hands on hips, tsking at me. You know what I mean. That small sound women make as they shake their head when men do something wrong. It sounds like tsk, tsk, tsk.

Understanding I was scrunching in on a good nap, and aware Janice could not be in the room, I ignored the vision and fell to a sound nap. It wasn't too long before I nuzzled in even tighter and suddenly realized I was covered with a blanket, not only a blanket, but the one from the closet. I awoke quickly and looked around. I called out for Jeffery and anyone else that may have been in earshot. But no one appeared. Shortly Jeffery pushed open the front door and noted my look of disbelief.

Jeffery inquired as to my condition and I related the event. He assured me that he had not been paying tricks and knew not who would have been so considerate. But he did smile a knowing smile and I left him as suspect.

These were not the only incidents throughout the time that followed. Eye glasses that had been lost once again mysteriously returned to the very place I had looked. Car keys were found quickly on the stand by the door. Mail was collected and placed on my desk while the visions of someone looking quite like Janice continued to, well haunt, my days. Jeffery smiled his knowing smile which continued to irk me just a bit. But he was quite a dutiful houseguest, so it didn't offend.

Eventually Jeffery moved back to his home next to mine and the terror that we had shared had cemented our friendship. His lack of presence didn't diminish my occurrences, which confused my rationality even more. But the greatest occurrence took place outside of the home.

I am a bachelor. I stopped looking for companionship some time ago. I sincerely loved women, but alas they seemed to have more sense than I and never loved me back. That was until I met my Molly, or rather until my Molly was introduced to me. I never take lunch at my desk at work. I enjoy a nice walk and a brief lunch at my favorite restaurant. This morning, on the only day that Molly would work the lunch cart, a cup of coffee fell in my lap from the desk. Now there are two things about this event. I don't drink coffee and a warm glow had flooded the office. Not from the sun or heaters turned on for fall's chill. It was just a warm glow.

I of course stood up at the drenching of hot coffee and danced as I had not danced before. Sarah, laughed her small laugh, trying to keep from laughing out loud, and quickly came to my assistance. She assessed the situation quickly and took me to the men's room to remove my pants. Having little alternative I complied. She gave me a towel to wrap around myself and then took the pants to the drycleaners across the road.

I thanked her profusely, but I was now chained to my desk as lunch approached. I was ravenous as there had been little time for breakfast that morning. I didn't know what I was going to do for lunch. Just then, at the corner of my eye, the vision of Janice appeared. She smiled and through her fading vision walked my Molly pushing a lunch cart. We spoke, we laughed, and we loved. We loved deeply and quickly like we had been waiting to find each other over centuries. She became my daily and eventually my life's companion.

All through the recovery and aftermath of Janice's death no one had found her attacker. It was a constant worry for each and every one in the town. My good fortune to find my Molly served to lighten the mood. Jeffery was so much more than happy for us. But the Evil that was done lingered on our minds. I was even more concerned, and felt more empathy for Jeffery, as I became closer to my Molly.

Eventually fall became that time before winter, and Halloween was close at hand. The dark movies and TV dramas of the season did little to relieve the tension of the lack of finding Janice's attacker. Evil seemed to stare at us from our living rooms. Evil still lurked inside Tom and it was still hungry.

Tom had been satiated for some time. The misery that his actions had created allowed him to wander around town and soak up sustenance. It was as if Evil was in a candy store and everywhere he turned was free candy to savor. But the supply of remorse, sympathy, and terror were drying up as a new normal was overtaking the town. It was getting really close to Halloween and the combination of hunger and celebrated terror was driving Evil to maddening lust for food.

Tom looked around and spotted Jeffery. His early pain and anguish had been a strong source of food and pleasure for Tom's Evil. But, shortly after Janice's burial, it seemed to almost disappear. Tom was to awash in plenty to care early on. But the lack of pain and anguish had made Jeffery a beacon of hope and light once again, a strong beacon of light and hope. The Evil in Tom began to salivate at making it a twosome. Plans were made for All Hallows Night, the perfect cover for Evil.

Tom made his plans and so did Jeffery. Jeffery asked me to join him on Halloween night. It was a strange request made with whispers and secrecy. I was to come early and let myself in. He wanted to make sure no one knew I was there. I followed his instructions and moved to the guest bedroom to wait. I turned on nothing and carried but a book to keep me company for a few hours.

Jeffery came home as usual and lighted the porch for all the little ones. He and Janice had been great about handing out the best candy and he wanted to continue the tradition. Each and every child came by and wished him the best Halloween as he doled out their fare. Too quickly the night was over and the porch lights were turned off. I sat upstairs listening to the frequent commotions on the porch, smiling at each small transaction. Jeffery came up between visits to the porch and informed me of his intentions.

Jeffery was convinced, and he wouldn't tell my why, that the attacker would return this night to seek his vengeance on Jeffery. I strongly suggested he contact the police, but his arguments as to the lack of proof swayed my efforts. Instead I bought into his plans to remain at his side. If indeed the attacker did come to I would offer assistance in his defense and summon the police. Jeffery quickly followed his

practices of retiring for the night and turned out all of the lights. Both of us then went down the stairs to wait upon the attacker's arrival. It didn't take long. At the chime of 10 pm Jeffery and I head the back door squeak open. Jeffery had ensured it wasn't locked, just as it wasn't locked the night of Janice's death. We held our breath as we heard footsteps enter the front room where we sat back in the dark shadows. It was the very room Janice had died in all those months before.

I could barely see Jeffery in the cold moonlight, but he was still as visible as the massive force of Evil I saw before me. I had never known Evil before. Not like this. It was massive and its intentions of rot and despair filled the room. I moved my arm to make a call when Jeffery placed a finger against his lips. He pointed across the room to the kitchen's entrance. There, in the doorway, a circle of green mist began to swirl. A blood curdling scream filled the room freezing Evil in its tracks. Evil turned to look at the source and a ghost leapt out of that green mist its eyes ablaze with anger. The fingernails on the ghost's hands grew as claws and the teeth became as long as a saber tooth tigers. It was a horrible sight. It shook the ground on which Evil stood as it bellowed and screamed and slashed at our attacker.

Evil was stunned. But Evil wasn't afraid of the dead. Evil's eye's glowed red and it raised an axe in its right arm. The axe glowed with an unnatural glow that pierced the fabric of the ghost's garments. The surprise at being able to be injured stayed the ghost but a moment. But in that moment I saw Janice. Janice was our ghost and she was protecting her Jeffery. She lunged again, but while she lunged she gave out a pale mournful cry that tore at the heart of all lost loves. Suddenly, the green portal opened again. Into the room poured dozens of ghosts of all ages and sex. They tore and screamed at Evil as if righting some terrible wrong. Evil began to weaken. In one instance Evil turned towards us and I witnessed the lost face of Tom.

Tom fell on the floor and with his fall, Evil fell. The ghosts swooped in and engulfed Evil. Quickly Tom and Evil were whisked off this plain of existence into the next netherworld. All but one left as quickly as they had come. The slight wisp moved over to Jeffery and hovered in faint form. A face appeared and Janice, with a tear of love stood before us. She smiled ever so much at me and then reached for her Jeffery. Jeffery reached out and his hand grabbed but air. A soft smile of loss was expressed on those faces. Janice began to retreat to the portal, but stopped and turned. She lifted a ghostly finger as if asking us to give her a moment. Jeffery understood and smiled. With that final gesture Janice disappeared into the misty portal.

Jeffery turned on a light and nothing seemed amiss. I stood transfixed and looked up at the time. Fully two hours had passed. The clock was striking the last hours of midnight. Jeffery smiled while offering me a drink and explanation.

He knew I did not believe in ghosts. So, he did not try to persuade me. But he had seen Janice at the funeral as I had. The revelation let him know he could go on living. Over the following months Janice had made herself known at my house and his. She was working from the netherworld to protect and care for us until Jeffery would join her. It was in this state of undead that she had discovered who had killed her and the plans he had for Jeffery. The fact that Evil had taken a home in a body allowed her the ability to strike. Evil took residence in the netherworld. This made any form it took vulnerable to ghostly presences.

I asked about the other ghosts that appeared to help. Jeffery could only assume these were other lost loves waiting for their chance to seek revenge. He, like I, had never seen the like of it before.

I stood to go with all my belief systems laying in a puddle on the floor. I had to reassess what I knew to be true. It was at this moment when I asked Jeffery what was meant by Janice's gesture. Jeffery smiled. He told me that Janice was telling him that she would be waiting, waiting for him to join her

when it was his time. She was letting him know their love would always last and she would always be here for him. I smiled. There was little to say to that. I headed out the door and went home to rest. I looked forward to my time with my Molly. I had a lot to tell her and I am not sure she would believe me.

Molly did believe me though. She was a lot smarter in the affairs of love than I was. As time passed we looked forward to the small moments of warmth and bits of help in our day to day lives. We knew Janice was still watching over us and Jeffery as she waited for her love. We had a few children. We named the girl Janice, or course. Jeffery was just thrilled. We never did leave my old house. This allowed me to see Jeffery quite frequently.

It came to pass though that one of us had to move on. Jeffery was still with us, although a bit anxious himself for the trip. He had a good life, many friends, but Janice was his only love and he so desperately wanted to see her. But the time had come and the life force faded. It was at this point just before death, that I looked up and beheld Janice. She was so beautiful, just as I had known her so many years before. She held her hand out and I took it. She pulled me close to her and smiled. But just before we faded away, I turned and held up a finger to my Molly.

She smiled and nodded. So did Jeffery. They both knew Janice and I would be waiting for our true loves.