T U R N B A C K

She had haunted the manor for a hundred years.

The early decades were the easiest. What kept her busy was her anger; she drifted from room to room, destroying the furniture and throwing their possessions at the walls. There was his pipe – *crunch!* It shattered with the force. There was his shaving brush – *rip*! The bristles came apart like straw, scattering all over the floor. And here, here were the spectacles he’d worn, delicately perched on the bridge of his nose, the ones he had been wearing as he’d packed. She had watched him lay his carefully-pressed shirts and trousers into the same bag he carried to the Spookane Public Hospital each day. At the time, her lips had been bloodless with tension and anger. Now, they were simply bloodless.

Mrs. Rosemary didn’t remember how much time had passed between his leaving and her returning. Maybe it had been a while. She had been sitting in the garden with her hands folded tightly in her lap, watching the path down to the main part of town. It was the end of October and there was a chill settling in the air. It was a long walk, she reasoned, and he always came home late, puffing his way up the walk in the dark. So she sat, late into the night, hoping he would see reason. Hoping he would realize he was making a mistake.

She sat and sat. And then, nothing. Suddenly, she was alone, and the servants all vanished. Then the anger came.

It wasn’t right away, of course. Their bedroom, their sitting room, her precious kitchen were just as they’d been before he left. The many rooms of the manor were as clean and well-kept as ever. And she didn’t want to do it – she didn’t want to give in, but then the servants returned to start taking everything away. They started with her dining room, taking the china and stuffing their apron pockets full of silverware. Mrs. Rosemary sat by, shocked. What did they think they were doing?

In the guest bedrooms, they stripped the bedding and unscrewed the crystal knobs from the dressers. Irritated, now, she retreated to the basement, locked in the sitting room she and her husband had shared their evenings in together. He was a violinist, she a pianist; they had played together often in this windowless room, the sound of laughter their only distraction from the music. He loved music – so did she. Now, though, the violin was gone. The piano sat in the corner, collecting dust, the flowers she had placed on the lid long dried-out. The chaise lounge where he had loved to sit was nearby.

For days she hid in the basement, willing the servants and her nephews and the auctioneer to go away. The noise from above was deafening. The scraping against the wooden floors as they dragged away the Rosemary furniture was galling, but she did not protest. Let them take it all away! When he came back, he would find all his things gone, and then he would be sorry. When he came back, he’d see.

They left the basement for last. She heard the approach on the stair, and pounded on the door from her side. Soon they were trying keys in the lock. They cleared it of everything – the paintings, the hearth, even the chaise lounge.

When they came for the piano, though, she could take no more.

“Stop,” she cried out, but no one seemed to hear. The scuffling continued, greedy hands scrabbling on the glossy black surface of the piano.

“I said *stop!*” Mrs. Rosemary repeated, and then the anger flared. Zombie rose from the dust of the earth around her, and they burst forth, eliciting screams from the servants. Suits of armour from the hallways upstairs came to life and began clomping down the stairs. Ghosts poured like liquid out of the walls. There were crashing sounds as the looters scrambled to escape, and even more clamour as the armour struggled to pick itself up. Mrs. Rosemary huddled in the sitting room, eyes blazing, until all sound had faded away.

The house was in shambles. Upstairs, the rooms had been picked over by her unwelcome visitors. The valuables were almost all gone, and piles of items were strewn about. Her wedding dress was heaped in a corner. The only things untouched were the photos on the mantelpiece – the Rosemarys pictured in happier days; smiling slightly in their grainy wedding portraits.

Enraged, Mrs. Rosemary hurled the frame at the window, shattering both. The release of the anger felt so good that she followed it with another photo, and another. A lamp went out the window next. Well! It wasn’t like he was coming back now that she was… well, without her, what was left for him here besides memories? Maybe she wouldn’t leave anything for him to come back to *at all.*

And so it began. Over the years as new generations of looters came, she was ever more sure that her husband would not return. Deep inside, she yearned for it, though whether it was to apologize to him or to berate him she could not say. As time passed, though, that anger too dissipated as the manor became emptier and emptier, reduced to cobwebs.

She turned to spending her days at the piano, playing endlessly and tuning its dusty keys. a few bars of the same tune came to her mind over and over again – she thought that perhaps she had known this song a long time ago, but the memory had slipped away. She could not recall the rest of the melody, so she simply played the same few bars endlessly.

At some point, a family tried to move in – her nephew’s son, she thought. She didn’t care, as long as they stayed out of the basement. The piano sounds attracted the youngest boy, but her cackle as he came down the stairs was more than enough to send him flying. “You’ll never make it…hee hee hee.”

The other ghosts who had come to settle in the manor soon drove the young Rosemarys away. They could not live with zombies and bats, exploding dust balls and living armour. Mrs. Rosemary was used to it – the monsters left her alone. They could come and go as they liked. The living, though, they were a different story - she was as finely attuned to the sounds of intruders on the stairs as she was to the perfect pitch of her music. In a hundred years, no one had made it to the door.

How many years passed between her death and the young family’s arrival, she couldn’t say. Nor could she tell how long they stayed. Soon, then sounds from upstairs vanished, and the zombies retreated to the empty rooms, waiting for new prey.

She was waiting too, but she was never certain what for. When she sat at the piano, however, she played and played, always the same tune. Always her concentration was on that song.

And then, a sound on the staircase. Intruders, again. They were hardy to get past the zombies, but she would not let them in. Mrs. Rosemary lifted phantom fingers from the keys. “T U R N B A C K . . .”

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