

There were certain rules that had to be followed. Laws of the undead that simply couldn't be broken. I can't affect the world after sunlight. I can't enter a house uninvited. And I couldn't harm a living creature that didn't deserve it.

Fortunately for me, most of them deserved it.

I'd examined the house hours ago. Every room and every corridor. Still, it was almost time and I did one final pass, drifting down the bare wood stairs to the unfinished basement. The floor was littered with cigarette butts and trash from a few dozen squatters. Right now there was a man in the other room, high on some drug or another. He wouldn't bother us. I'd cast a glimmer on his mind, extending whatever dreams he'd slipped into. And for good measure I'd bricked up the only doorway to the room he was in.

He'd get his comeuppance. In due time. Tonight I had a bigger priority.

The house wasn't mine of course. I couldn't own property, being dead and all. Nor did it belong to the methhead dozing in the basement. It was new construction. Or it had been once. Now it sat abandoned, waiting for a construction crew that was never going to come.

It had a history, I'm sure. Sudden economic downturn caused by some subtle but predictable change in the market.

It didn't matter the reason. What mattered is that it was perfect. The perfect place for another murder.

His name was Sean. Sean Desmond Owens. Not the most lyrical of names, but he'd told it to me eagerly enough, his mouth greased with expensive liquor. I hoped his blood would flow better than his name. I liked when that happened.

Sean was married. He wore a silver ring on his left hand, inlaid with a band of titanium. The inner band had his wife's name written inside it. It's a trivial thing to learn when you're dead, even if the ring never leaves the hand. And it hadn't. Even while he leaned close to me he kept the ring on. Kept it where I could see it. He whispered his name to me, leering at the image I projected behind his eyes. His voice wasn't even slurring. He couldn't blame this on the whiskeys he'd ordered. This was a choice. And choices have consequences.

I'd lain a small glimmer over the house. Nothing fancy, as the brickwork had taken most of my energy. It's a lot easier to change perception than it is reality. Which is nice for me, because of the two, perception is far more important. It's why living people pay hundreds of dollars to see magicians, even though they know they're being lied to. It's the reasons politicians have PR teams. And most importantly of all, it's what gives a simple glimmer so much power. People are predisposed to seeing what they want to see, believing what they want to believe.

Once again, I checked my work. I spread pale rose petals up the walk, leading to the "bed"—really just a sheet of plywood and a suggestion. I didn't bother giving the roses a smell. One on hand, I wanted to see what I could get away with. How much people are willing to ignore. To feel the rush that comes with risk. But there was more to it than that. I wanted to give him a chance to notice. To back out. To listen to that nagging voice in his head and return to his wife. To Rose, the woman to whom he'd spread his alyrical name like so much oil...

But I knew he wouldn't. Knew that no matter how sloppy the glimmer, he'd hush the voice and ignore the discrepancies in the hopes of chasing, and of finding something new. They always did.

Now I heard the slam of a car door, and I sighed. I was out of time to hope. Sean was about to disappoint, to choose lust over love, and I'd have no choice but to punish and remove his evil from the world.

But when I looked outside, it wasn't Sean, but a stranger. A woman in a sharp suit. She looked to the house with her hard eyes and spoke my name. My real, almost forgotten name.