

Shadows

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"The Shadow predates any myth known to man. It has the power to inhabit the souls of men, and drive those who harm it to the edge of madness."

20 year old Jenny Sutherland holds a secret. One which she has kept from all ,save her beloved Fred for

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1 - The Man With The Knife

"Get away from me" Her crouched form backed terrified yet still determined against the wall. He loomed, seeming to tower over her. As he brought the silver blade towards her throat she heard him draw a shallow, shuddering breath causing his ribs, protruding grotesquely through the rag of a shirt he wore, to rise and fall in a jerky, clumsy way. The hand holding the knife was long fingered, spider like, so frail and fragile looking, it seemed as if the fingers would snap like a dry twig and yet they held the handle with extraordinary strength. The skin, pale, pallid, like parchment hardly covered the bones and network of muscles beneath. He brought the knife closer still and she felt the cold steel edge nick the skin, biting into her flesh and watched as a lone drop of scarlet trickled sedately onto her collar. She kept her mind resolute and fixed her startlingly blue eyes upon his cold grey ones. His eyes. They brought a wave of cold dread that washed over her. No living being had eyes like that. They were the eyes of a corpse. They looked as if they had been plucked from a grave and merely transplanted into this living frame.

"Father, Father" she screeched into the night. She had not intended to say it, whether it was a plea for help, or a desperate attempt to evoke some compassion in the emotionless being she could not have said. Whatever the intention, it only seemed to increase the pressure with which he held the knife pressed tight to her jugular. She realised that this man had no single drop of feeling left in his soul. He drew back the knife intending to deal the lethal stroke, when out of the shadow came a shape. No name could be put to it; it held no true form it was like dense smoke or a veil swaying gently in a breeze. Light seemed reluctant to fall upon it, making it a shadow within shadow, as if it sensed the malice in the two tiny pinpricks it had for eyes. Slowly it rose and its malice grew and filled the silent room. It turned to the man holding the knife and his cold indifference vanished in an instant. It was like looking into the eyes of a different man. The fear she perceived was beyond anything she had ever seen, ever felt, ever imagined. It was tangible. And her heart burst with pity for him, for that broken man, who not two seconds before had been about to kill without reason feeling or remorse. Tentatively she stretched out her arm and with her small smooth hand grasped his rough papery one. The shadow diminished as if this one kindly act was harmful to it. As she watched it slunk back into the darkness of the night. She felt its baleful eyes upon her and then it slide away.

He sank to his knees his legs, no longer able to support his weight, had collapsed from under him. She knelt beside him; their hands still clasped tightly together. For a minute the room was filled with a silence so heavy it seemed to press in upon them. Finally she spoke "who are you?"

When he answered in was in a voice so low and husky that in was almost inaudible and his lips spilt with the effort of opening his mouth. "I have no name I am not worthy of such a privilege."

"I once had a name this much I know, but the Shadow drove my memories from me. It now controls my mind, I cannot think a word against it, it will know and its punishment will break me." He said in a low saddened voice.

"Why does it hunt you what can you have done to deserve such cruelty, such torment."

"I let loose the Shadow, I tore it from its body and for that it shall pursue me till the end." He paused and looked deep into her sky blue eyes, thoughtful, calculating, then he spoke again "Why do you pity me? I would have killed you and left the body to rot. I would have enjoyed it. And yet you pity me? I cannot understand you. I let loose the Shadow I have destroyed so many lives."

"You are not evil, you are not wicked or cruel, you are driven by fear. To be controlled is worse than death for that I pity you." She took his hand again and held it tight, but he pulled it roughly away.

"I deserve no pity"

"Tell me what you did and I will make my judgement."

He made no answer he merely turned and walked silently towards the open door, the floorboard creaked under his heel. For a moment he looked back towards her and she heard him whisper in near inaudible tones, "I have killed, murdered on It's behalf, I will not let you become one of the many, you have saved tonight me by your kindness, but the Shadow grows strong again and must leave you." Her eyes brimmed with silent tears as he left her. She had known him for less than an hour half of which he had spent attempting to kill her and yet she felt a great loss as though a hole had opened in her heart and only he could fill its emptiness.

2 - Memories and Nightmares

She stood on the doorstep, sodden, dejected. She felt the cold stares of the neighbours, hovering like vultures, in rapture at her misfortune, delighting in her despair. As she fumbled desperately with the key in the lock she began to shiver violently. Finally wrenching the door open, slamming it firmly behind her she stood, exhausted in the shabby hall, breathless with fear, her eyes wide and staring. Gazing with dismay at the tattered remnants of her clothes and her missing left shoe, she began to breathe harder. Taking in great shuddering breaths that felt like piercing knives. Her stomach churned as her knees buckled and she fell to the floor. Everything was still. She lay inert upon the threadbare carpet. Her eyes slid shut. The effort involved in keeping them open was killing her.

"Jenny, Jenny" a voice cut through her reverie, shattering the still air like glass. The door was thrown open and a man stood framed in the entrance, his brilliant, blue eyes scintillating in the silver moonlight. Tall. Handsome. Powerful.

"Oh Fred" she moaned in almost inaudible tones, her voice cracking. A flash and he was at her side, wrapping his strong arms around her fragile frame, pulling her close to him. Even though he never said a word she knew he was telling her he'd never let her go.

"Fred" she repeated a hint of desperation in her voice now. Reaching up to caress his face she brushed a stray strand of ebony hair from his eyes, smiling up at him as if he held the secret of life itself. With the utmost tenderness, he drew her close and pressed a kiss to her forehead.

"I love you, you know that?"

"I know Fred."

"It kills me to see you like this, so helpless, where you were once so strong. Everyday you seem to float further away from me and I can't reel you in. I don't want to lose you."

"I can't keep doing this. Running away. You think this is killing *you*? I'm the one with the knife in me and running only drives it further in."

She fell asleep folded gently in his arms. He sat in silence, running his hands through her flaming hair. She stirred restlessly in her sleep and let out a fitful murmur, "Shh" he cooed soothingly, rocking her gently back and forth until she lay still again. His eyes drifted to the scar on her neck and he relived the night he'd first seen her, the wound still open, tears streaming down her face and yet she had seemed so strong. If he ever found the man who had done this to her. They never spoke of that night out loud but often when she whimpered softly in her sleep he suspected that she was replaying the events in her dreams.

3 - The River

Darkness fell, like a smothering blanket over the silent valley. She sat and dipped her toes in the freezing water, recoiling slightly as the wave of cold hit her. Everything was still; there was not even a breeze to stir the branches of the ancient, knarled, oaks hanging over the stream bowed and bent backed. She took out her pad and set it upon her knee, and held a torch to light the page in the fast fading dusk. Her pencil touched the page and moved with swift light strokes curving and twisting in what seemed like a frenzy and yet was so controlled. For an hour she laboured at her work until all natural light had faded and only the torch beam guided her hand. When she had finished, she held the sketch gently, tenderly caressed the image of the man she had depicted. Fred. Her Fred. She remembered the night they'd first met, she knew she'd loved him even then. Even as the tall, strong 14 year old had held the cowering, slight 12 year old girl gently in his arms. She drew her thumb across the image once again, the ghost of a smile flitting across her features, then she lent down a gently kissed it. When she drew back, something had changed. A horrible transformation had come across the sketch. No longer did it show her darling Fred. No. The face was haggard. The body so thin that it was more bone than flesh. The eyes hollow pits unseeing and seeming to see all. Him. All at once a rage came upon her and with a desperate cry of anguish she tossed it into the stream, tears streaming down her face as she watched it float steadily away. Howling with despair she alighted and fled downstream stumbling as she groped blindly in the dark.