

Dust to Dust (2 1 . 0 1 . 2 3)

As if there ever wasn't, today was a horrible day for a funeral - with spring's new life gloating in the flowerbeds of the Kirk, and an empty casket twelve feet under the newly replaced soil. Elizabeth Townsend's death was as expected as the wrenching of life can be - yet her husband's petulance in relieving her soul was to be, ultimately, his own undoing.

While children wailed and unknown acquaintances fed them their false graces, her carcass was slowly being stripped and fed upon. Not by any number of lodgers of the earth, who were currently converging on the decorated coffin, but by the purifying industrial flames of the secret crematory service. Her husband - who had been bestowed the gifts of old age and three doting children - had made the arrangements for her false departure suddenly upon her death, as the permanence of the incident had endeavoured to ensnare him.

Yet he allowed his children the grace of mourning, as all fathers are expected to do in such a situation - especially considering that his own children were already beyond any real authority from him.

As one tends to do when confronted with death, the funeral party were imparted with foods to nourish their bodies - yet nothing more. For funeral food never tends to excite the tastebuds, as if the inclusion of flavour would somehow defile the period of mourning. The boisterous tannins of the wine flattened what taste remained, and obscured the decayed sweetness of the congregation.

With his children sodden with grief, heavy with the weight of the loss, he retreated home to finally be rid of this façade of loneliness.

Carefully reclaiming her from the chauffeured position of the back seats of the car, he held her as if she was a child on his hip as he climbed the remaining steps to the front door. Hands full with the warmth of the freshly made tea, he sat warily down before strenuously placing the refreshment down on its appropriate coasters. The day's remembrance and ceremony long-since forgotten as nothing more than a pantomime bereavement – a show, for the enjoyment of the children.

And with news of another political corruption, of more miles of death on the Ukrainian front, the great grieving maître d' tumbled a long a tumultuous way into the snatching hands of sleep.

* * *



Suddenly, with those hands firmly upon him, he was wrenched purposefully from his slumber – sitting regimentally poised in his leather recliner – only to be silently greeted by the youthful apparition of his wife.

The existence of ghosts is not a subject in which this tale hopes to provide an answer to, yet the plot decrees that the old man did in fact bear witness to his wife. Yet the figure did not appear to him as the corpse he had falsely buried – and succinctly cremated – not twelve hours earlier, but as if the varnishes of time had been as eagerly stripped as they had been painted on she appeared to him a young woman.

Placidly she sat, a tangible template of ethereal grace, all of a whisper's length away from him at the far



corner of the room – cross-legged on his living room dresser.

The plump eagerness of youth conformed in her cheeks, as if time had forgotten it had a role to play in the aging of this woman. For that is what he had decided she must be – simply a woman; not his woman, not his wife. He had read too many ghost stories to be deceived by the wiles of hellish siren calls – yet, as we shall clearly see, not enough to be deterred from being indulgent in his gaze.

And she sat there – at the end of the room. Not staring, or leering; but just looking at him. She was, for as far as she is to believed, a stranger – yet the strangeness itself which is expected from an unholy apparition seemingly dissipated in the many hours in which the gentleman appreciated his wife's image. So much so it seems that he was ultimately comfortable enough with the ghostly figure lounging in his living-room to fall into a shallow yet suffocating sleep.

Many who were to graze against his presence in the coming days would share anecdotes of a man whose correspondence with death had developed into a way of life. His gestures and breathing were laborious and any conversation he was to impart on his friends was as if every breath was being painfully torn out of his lungs.



But, while the muscles and sinews of his body were progressively transmogrifying into a brittle sand, every remaining second of his life was directed through the blistering light of existence which took residence in his sleeping quarters every evening.

His wife's soul had become a convent for all kinds of life in the time since its ascension, her husband was sure of that – for, if a plain of life beyond this was a reality, then no doubt her submissive nature would leave her person open to be peeled and gnawed at by otherworldly forces. Yet her body, which sat – patient and serene – in the home, was his. Every night he beckoned her to him, and every night she sat, immovable.

However – though he couldn't dare mention to anyone, lest he be thought of as having succumbed to the same illness which had lured his wife to her timely end – the urn, which he had fashioned himself, had seemingly been placed by an unseen hand closer to his newfound bedside every evening upon his wake.

The tree had been long grown even by the time the newly married couple had gazed in wonderment at the jigsaw of its many serrated leaves, and the congregations of its black pustule-like berries. And so, as the couple took the tree as their own, they sat, and ate, and shared their life with it.



Though the couple had a full family of their own, it could be said that the tree grieved more for his wife than any other. The night of her passing, as if the misery of the evening's objectives had amassed in the atmosphere, a great distress smothered the garden.

Though it only brought with it a warm fog along the tender spring grass, when the storm had passed – either due to its ability to conceal an entrepreneurial arsonist, or the release of silent lightning from its grasp – the tree lay smouldered and silent in the morning light.

From that residual limb, the husband had persevered to form the marble-like urn. A receptacle which contained the woman of which that Elder had been custodian to for all those years.

Struggling to inspect the figure of the urn, as it seemed to have its outline drip and contort as if made of wax, he was once again made aware of her presence. Now draped over the bulges of the far sofa, her own outline was no more discernible than when she had been seen



originally -
skulking in the
darkened corner of
the room.

And in this state
she stayed - as she
had done every
night, for he had
never once been
present for her in
motion - and was
surveyed by the
husband. He had
now come to the
convincing
delusion that she
was an apparition
of his subconscious
mind - an
extension of his
loneliness,
contorted through
the lens of all the
photographs and
camcorder footage
he'd been subjected
to in the run up to
her funeral.

To say he fell
asleep is an utter
falsehood. He
didn't fall asleep,
he didn't trip into a
slumber - his
consciousness was
dragged, revolting
against its
assailants, into the
nothingness.

Morning no longer came with a shining promise of a day renewed; the sunlight which tickled his nose into ringing the bell of arousal now let loose the steam at the end of shift.

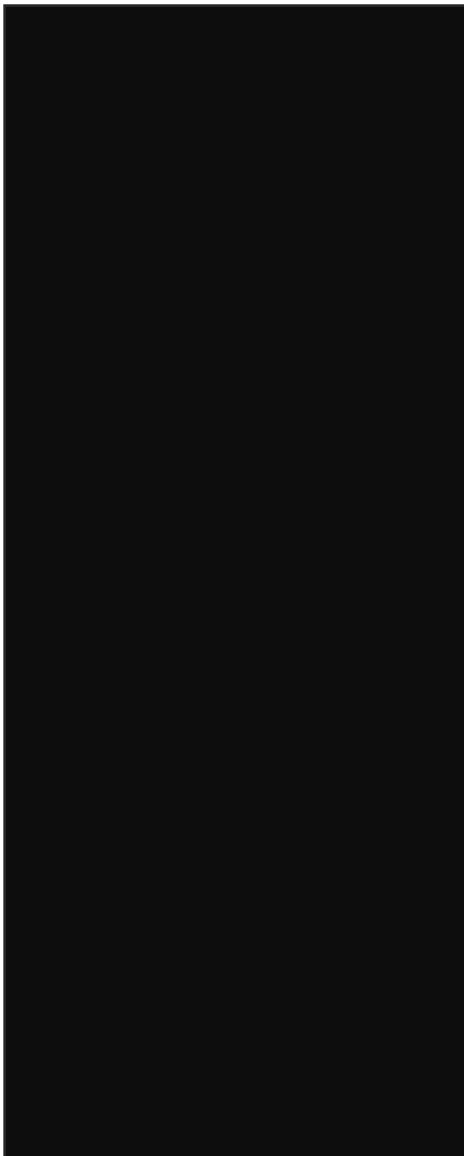
Bodies need energy, so breakfasts are required. Milk curdles, and bread breeds mould, so a pilgrimage to the shop is necessitated.

Bones ache and muscles tremble in anticipation of every step, until the shackles of consciousness are thrown off once the sun is drowned below the horizon.

In a flurry of self-service, he had prepared his living-room into a bordello in all but name. He was preparing to receive his wife's image with the curtains drawn

close, a snifter of blended whisky and a heavy tartan throw over his lap. He had stirred the urn to his 'bedside'; his sordid tongue moistening at the image of his sultry bride by his hand. He rattled a handful of sleeping aids playfully in his hand before swallowing them with the *sgaile* of drink in the other.

The matter of the whereabouts of the newly widowed Mr Townsend was not a topic of great controversy or controversy in the local community. His family were content with the



idea that he was an elderly recluse; not only because it was a viable answer to such a query, but as it gave them an ardent moral alibi to live their lives as they saw fit without his inclusion.

As such, when a curious neighbour sought to call for a policeman after they thought they saw evidence of distress in the household, it was regaled by all as a

fruitless
venture.

However,
once the
aged front
door had
been
forcibly
opened for
fear of his
safety, the
circumsta-
nces of his
being
were soon
determine-
d.

Edward Townsend sat, preserved, in his armchair.

With the windows firmly shut, and the curtains drawn tight, the living room had become a sealed antechamber.

While the police autopsy would clarify the specifics, all the officers at the scene would continue to comment on what lay before them in the coming days.

Townsend's ashen face was directed skyward, with dried eyes fixated by the ceiling. Lacerations all over his body appeared at first to be from a weapon of some kind, yet were quickly determined to have been accidental.

Blood and powder had mixed on his crotch and chest to a coppered paste which eluded to the significant time which had passed until his discovery.

The powder itself needed no elaboration, for what body remained uncovered by blood was dredged in a layer of ash and the urn lain strewn around him in blood-stained splinters.

And the aforementioned police reports state extreme amounts of pulverised human bones were found not only lining but compressing his lungs.

Quantified cause of death:

Suffocation

