

Lost Alice!

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Malice! by Christina Engela

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Wiggle Room

Imagine, if you will:

In a horror story there is no justice. There can't be, because a story where the evil villain gets their due in the end is too satisfying to the normal functioning mind.

No – in a horror story the villain gets away after having done some terrible thing, leaving the reader thrilled and horrified and the villain facing no consequences – being still at large and out there, lurking in the shadows of the mind. This offends the standard sensibility and leaves a story open ended, and not in a good way... Like a severed artery bleeding out, this is the real horror of it. This, dear reader, is one of those stories.

Cold. Wet. It was a clichéd dark and stormy night in a big city. A few street lights reflected in the water pooled in the streets, motionless except for the lashing rain and the wind wailing outside like a cold, hungry, homeless banshee, tearing at the hearts of children hiding in their beds. Our story begins here. It begins with a nurse.

Nosocomophobia – this is a little known word which is said to mean ‘a fear of hospitals’. Whether or not this fear is a rational or irrational one... well, dear reader – that will be for you to decide. Before you do, let's take a closer look at the setting of our delightfully dark and deliciously demented tale:

The hospital was old, having a history most people didn't know – and even those who thought they did, didn't know the whole story. It was an old, old story – nearly as old as the city herself – and the back cover of the book was still open, leaving the story unfinished – and leaving a doorway ajar for it to leak out and taint the world with its poison.

She walked down the corridors of the hospital, the rhythmic click of her high heels echoing eerily on the tiles and into the silent desolation of the wee hours of the night. Pale florescent lights made her pristine

white nurse's uniform shine bright white – so white as to be almost obscene, like virgin snow or like something out of a clichéd commercial for fabric whitener. Black curls, medium length, were tightly styled down with hairspray and restrained by pins. Her hands would've been white around the knuckles as they gripped the bedpan tightly, were they not already so deathly pale. She had dainty hands, long fingers. They seemed manicured in their appearance, smooth in their youthfulness, and spotless – well, except where a little blood had got under her carefully shaped finger nails. The contented smile set across her lips – her crisply outlined, full, painted lips – indicated that she didn't mind. In fact, that she enjoyed it.

The further she walked, the more the fixtures and fittings both electrical and medical – and the architecture – began to resemble a gothic nightmare. Spider webs clung to the walls, decorating the ancient wooden door frames, brass light switches and outdated light fittings. Dust coated the floors, long un-swept, except for the motion of her passing. Here, in the older part of this sprawling building, underground – where nobody was supposed to go anymore – where the lights were supposed to be off, shadows played on the walls. Strange whispers echoed faintly on the edge of hearing and faint movements that defied rational explanation danced just out of clear vision.

The old mortuary was a storeroom now – and had been for some decades, since the new section of the building had been built on. The faded and peeling walls were long obscured by stacks and mountains of stored furniture: desks, stacks of chairs, rows of cabinets, and piles boxes of discarded old equipment, with the odd worn out theater gown draped over them. Long disused, the bank of refrigerators stood empty – their battered old doors hanging forlornly open, telling the story of a journey traveled by so very many – who had apparently left the doors open behind them, as though extending a chilling invitation to the world on the other side. That other world didn't seem that far away in places like this. It was like it could be on the other side of the door, that wall – or even in this room.

A giant spider seemed to be standing in the center of the room, an ancient theater light thing with huge reflectors – some broken, but mostly still working. The light radiating from the reflectors spot-lit the dust bunnies and cobwebs that snaked across the rust and dust-covered steel. The Nurse walked towards it, almost gliding across the dusty floor, barely affecting the surface, carrying the bedpan – a look of anticipation on her crisp, perfect features.

James Booth's eyes flickered open. The lights were blinding. They were hot too, not like modern lights at all. They were blazing, almost singing him through the gaps in the broken lens covers. He struggled through the confusion. He remembered the car accident. It was night time, he was driving home alone – he remembered the dog running into the road ahead of him, swerving, the screeching of brakes, a tree on the side of the road – the awful jarring impact. He couldn't remember anything after that. Till now.

He couldn't move. Well, he could a little. He could – well, he could wiggle some. As much as his bonds would allow. Each arm was tied down beside him to something out of sight that didn't want to budge. The ropes around his wrists were tight. At least he thought they were ropes. For all he knew, they could have been nylon seat belts. Or duct tape.

His upper body felt naked, the skin on his back felt stuck to – what was that – vinyl? His feet were tied down too, and the bed he was on – if it was a bed at all, squeaked and rattled and rocked considerably as he struggled. He couldn't see much, despite the blinding light that surrounded him. That would be due to the blindfold – a rough piece of material that appeared to have been wound around his head to cover his eyes, and knotted. There was a gap, positioned just so that he could see a tiny amount through it with one eye. A body board and restraints were pretty much to be expected for such a collision, he knew. He'd watched enough medical emergency TV series to know that. But he had no neck brace – and he was pretty sure the blindfold wasn't standard issue! He cried out – in confusion, but mostly in terror – but some kind

of hard thing that tasted like plastic or rubber had been forced into his mouth, stifling him. Definitely not standard issue!

His heart was racing, his breathing labored – and under the blindfold, his eyes were opened wide, searching. His ears, straining, heard his own breathing. What was that? Whimpering? *Pathetic!* He heard his inner macho cursing. *Fucking pathetic.*

Then he heard it. Faint. In the distance, growing gradually louder. Rhythmic. The sound of shoes clicking in the distance. Women's shoes!

"Hello?" He called in his head, even as his ears heard his own pathetic muffled cries. *"Help!"*

The clicking of the heels grew closer and closer, keeping the same detached and intimidating rhythm throughout his vain struggling, punctuated with the clanks and squeaks of the bed or bench he was strapped to. He broke into a sweat. Closer and closer they came, until they stopped somewhere near his feet. He ceased the pointless struggling to try to see the body attached to the shoes he'd heard. All he could make out was a white shape. Indistinct.

"Hello?" He called in his head again. *"What's she looking at? Don't just fucking stand there! Help me!"*

The shape moved round him distantly – maddeningly silent, as he watched through the gap in his blindfold and turned and tilted his head as best he could – his heart beat drumming in his ears. In the midst of this mind numbing terror, a tiny part of his brain managed to retain a quiet, level headed and analytical view of the whole thing – a small, shrinking reserve perhaps best described as something like 'the eye of the storm'.

Goosebumps rose all over his naked upper body, despite the warmth radiating back from the vinyl under him. He knew by now whoever it was at his bedside was probably female – a woman, from the sound of

the shoes. She was wearing white, as far as he could see. The most puzzling and maddening – and terrifying part so far was that she hadn't said anything or done anything – other than to hover. Hovering meant trouble. Not saying anything meant trouble. Not helping meant trouble. He was in trouble.

She moved round to his head, until she was behind him where he could no longer see her, and stopped. His body was soaking wet with sweat, his muscles tense as he tugged ineffectually at his bonds. She wasn't going to help him, he realized – otherwise she already would have by now. The only thing that part of him wondered now was, how this was going to end.

He felt pressure on the blindfold, a tugging, and then the rough material was removed. The light was even more blinding now that he was getting a full dose of it. He blinked, squinting. Then he saw her, standing there, at the foot of his... bed – looking at him. The Nurse. It was then that he knew it was all over, or was going to be soon. It was all in the eyes. They were dark and black and soulless, framed perfectly against the white pallor of her expressionless face by their dark outline and long dark lashes and the dark curls of her head. They bored into him, unblinking, burning through his eyes and along his fraying synapses into his very soul!

He couldn't speak, even if his mouth hadn't been restrained. She didn't speak, even though she was clearly unimpaired from doing so. He surveyed her features. Her lips were red and full, framed in a soft smile, which under the circumstances he found himself at a loss to use any word other than vacant to describe. The lights made her look harsh and intimidating, like a *domme* – well, how he would have imagined a *domme* to look. He wasn't the submissive type.

James Booth watched, mesmerized as the Nurse tilted her head almost theatrically, and produced a shiny scalpel in one dainty hand. Seeing his numbed expression, she proceeded to reach out to his left ankle and began to cut his pants away from that point. James raised his head to watch her automaton-like mechanical movements as she

calmly and smoothly sliced through the material, not so much as nicking his skin even once, despite his involuntary jerks. She appeared to be in no hurry.

He noticed with dismay and mounting embarrassment as she worked her way up the inside of his trouser leg, that he had wet himself – a great wet patch had soaked the fabric of his track pants and had smeared on the ancient vinyl beneath. This scenario was taking on a hint of erotic thriller with a taste of psychotic horror! Why did she want him naked? Was she going to eat him? Or was she going to actually eat him? His involuntary response immediately stifled and effectively cancelled by his intense resurgence of fear, and feeling even more naked than before, he watched helplessly as the Nurse removed the remains of the ruined garment – along with his underpants – and folded them into a neat bundle, before placing them precisely on top of an old gurney nearby, beside a shiny metal bedpan. James felt his Adams apple bobbing nervously up and down. She had kept her eyes on him the whole time. *Those eyes. Those. Terrible. Frightening. Black. Eyes.*

Are they contacts? Does it matter? What the hell is this? Was this a prank? He wasn't getting married. He was pretty damned sure he wasn't! He didn't have any close friends here. Enemies? He swallowed again drily. He supposed anyone could have enemies. He couldn't think of any at the time, though. Least of all any with the resources to pull this off! All he could hear above the deafening silence in the room was his raging heart beat and breathing. An occasional grunt or moan rebounded from his plugged mouth and escaped through his throat.

What the fuck does she want with me? His thoughts ran in an impotent mad circle of expletives and questions that had no answers. *How do I get outta this? Help! Fuck!*

It is at times like this, that people tend to ask what they feel are the 'important questions', where they become introspective and consider existential matters. They become concerned with things like who, where, why etc. Did James Booth have enemies? Did he have friends?

Was this a prank? If it was, it was being taken a little far! Some say, if they are around afterwards, that their 'life flashed before their eyes'. It was currently what the people who had no 'afterwards' saw that occupied James Booth's thoughts.

Was Mr. Booth a lawyer or a bank clerk or a loving husband or a doting father? Was he a hero cop? Was he an airline pilot or a university professor? Was he a pastor at the local Baptist church? Did he donate to charities? Was he kind to women, old people or animals? Was he a bigot, a rapist, a murderer – or was he a scam artist or a career criminal? Could he have been a generally nasty person who deserved this?

In a normal, ordinary every day story – say, one about butterflies and warm puppies – the reader celebrates the demise of the bad guy, the villain – and mourns the loss of the good guy... if there is really such a thing. They cheer when the bad guy takes a hit, and they cry when the hero falls – but isn't the main difference between a hero and a villain often only *slightly* a little more than timing? Or perspective?

The typical readers of such humdrum tales – the sheep who accept the blue pill and swallow it with glee – would rejoice at the death of a bad person who did x, y, or z to deserve – at least in their minds – the fate they meet. To them it all makes sense – this is how it is supposed to go. It is right and proper for the bad guys to meet a nasty, sticky end – not so? No, dear reader – that would be far too mundane a scenario to apply here. And far too easy.

When dissecting a story, most people search for answers within the lines of pretty prose and philosophical ramblings. They look for meaning in the storyline, they look for the hand of Fate, the fingerprints of Destiny – sometimes for the shoeprints – or even, perhaps in his case – the tire-treads of Karma. They ask deep, meaningful emotive questions with – if ever answered correctly – life changing answers. *What was it all about? What was it for? Why is this happening to me?* And so on. Without meaning, life is pretty pointless, isn't it? Without meaning, there is no point. They seek truth. But the

question is: ‘What is the truth?’ The truth, dear reader, is for armchair philosophers and – possibly, for ministers of religion – who deal with the abstract concepts of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ – which are often difficult to define and can be highly subjective in and of themselves. Perhaps it’s best that we stick to facts in this case? And what are the facts?

James Booth was a man, a confused man – a naked man, in more ways than one – tied to a table in a deserted basement, facing... *her*.

The Nurse slowly tilted her head askance, still looking at him – seeming to savor every moment of his torment, and then slowly to the other. Her lips parted slowly, almost hypnotically – and mesmerized, he gawked as the teeth – if they could be called that at all, were revealed. Framed by those lush red lips, they were starkly gray and all of them sharp and vicious looking. Black gums dripping with equally black mucous clung to them, that looked more like flecks of running motor oil than either blood or saliva – or any other bodily fluid that came to mind – dripping slowly from the upper row of teeth, across the maw down to the lower. What could only have been a tongue – mottled brown and purple in the blinding light of the ancient theater lights, pointy and slime covered – flicked and wriggled in the darkness between them. It dramatically stroked the sharp tips of the teeth in a theatrical fashion. The pungent reek of decay emanating from it hit him like a blast of hot desert air, reeking like very old, very ripe death. It was right then that what was left of James Booth’s hopes sank to the cold hard concrete floor. He knew this was no mere human being – twisted or otherwise – and his repository of expletives completely and utterly failed him.

Then she... IT – closed its mouth and slowly turned and walked very deliberately to the gurney, stopping in front of the bedpan. Very quietly, with its back toward him, it put down the scalpel, reached into the bedpan and produced what looked like an old fashioned bone saw. This it placed onto the gurney, beside the bedpan and continued to produce more baffling and terrifying devices from its shiny fathomless depths.

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