

Meeting with the Devil

It was a sunny winter day.

The shafts of sunlight sparkled on the pure white snow. Icicles hung down the roofs and children were fighting with snowballs.

A young woman named Elizabeth sat on an old red armchair in a little book shop. Her hair was dark brown and pinned up to an aesthetic chignon at the back side of her head. Through the little quadratic windows shone enough light so she could read a Charles Dickens story in the newspaper.

She loved his stories. What a pity there was only just one part per day coming out. Sometimes she lay awake asking herself how the story could go on, but Dickens has always found a different but better answer on that question.

On the second floor of the little grey book shop with the black roof an old man named Albert stayed in bed. The skin on his face was nearly as white as the snow outside. Only his nose was as red as pure blood.

Elizabeth smiled. He has always been good to her.

After eighteen years she could still remember the day when he found her on a bench nearly starving and freezing to death. How naïve she had been with nine years. After running away from the workhouse she really thought she could do better alone on the streets.

Albert offered her something to eat, something to drink, a place to sleep and at last a place to live.

Every day she was thankful for all that he had done for her.

When she arrived she used to watch her rescuer arranging the books in the right order. It didn't take a long time when she learned the letters and started assort the books, too. Of course she was interested in learning how to read.

And Albert showed her.

They profited both from this relationship, because the nice man became older and like that day he has often been ill. Elizabeth felt really sorry for that, but she didn't mind to attend him. Furthermore she felt like giving parts of his love back by helping him.

The loud ticking of the clock reminded her, that she still needed to go to Frank's, which was a little shop with many things nobody had ever seen before.

Besides he owned some products made out of herbage which were pretty useful against sickness.

Before she left she looked into Albert's room. As everything appeared to be fine she closed the front door and went off into the dark and cold arms of a starry night.

While she made her way through the masses of snow she thought about William. Since two months he was her fiancé and everything was happening like she has always dreamed of. They decided to marry in the first week of spring. Although a lot of time would go by until this date, she was really excited about the ceremony.

He was a great man and had always a polite behaviour. Last but not least he had a good working place at a bank in the middle of London.

Elizabeth arrived at Frank's, stepped into the little, narrow market and bought a tea with ginger and anise.

Afterwards she left the store. Some cold gusts of wind blew into her face. Therefore she draped her scarf closer around her

neck and stretched the cap more into her face.

Just as Elizabeth wanted to turn off into the next corner, all at once William appeared on the other side of the street. She reached out her hand and nearly began to call his name, but then a thought rushed into her mind. "What is he doing here?" she asked herself. "Didn't he say he was going to go to the men's chess club?"

The young woman was astonished by his arrival in this quarter, because the meeting of the men always took place on the different side of the Thames.

Although she tried hard to find a reason, she wasn't able to make head of it why William appeared near to Frank's out of the blue.

He crossed the street and started to hurry. "Where is he going?" wondered Elizabeth.

Because of finding no answer and her not becalmed curiosity she followed him through the darkness. He covered a big distance and Elizabeth thought if he maybe was going to the chess club. Perhaps he was at the book shop to visit her and because she wasn't there he had to hasten to the club now.

She considered how ridiculous her tracking was and meditated going home.

But abruptly William stopped. Her curiosity awoke again and so she cowered down behind a corner of a house. All she could hear was the heart beating in her chest. It felt like it wanted to jump out of her body.

After a few minutes, which felt like eternity to her, a creepy man arrived.

He wore a black coat, flared trousers and his face was covered with the black shadow of his big fuliginous hat. Around his boots knives were attached, all ordered by their sizes.

Altogether just his outer appearance let Elizabeth's heart sink into her shoes.

The mysterious and William greeted like old friends. The young woman wondered who the strange man was and why her fiancé met with him.

Just within seconds he turned his face into the crepuscular light of a flickering gas lamp. His evil glistening eyes stared right into the direction of Elizabeth.

Her breath caught. She hastened away some metres and hid at the back of a big stinky waste container.

"Body Snatcher!" crossed her frightened mind.

She had seen his picture in the newspaper this morning. It has been published on the first page with the big headline, "Body Snatcher WANTED".

A quiet desperate cry of astonishment left her mouth.

Instantly she put her hands in front of her stoma. The blood rushed into her ears while she wondered if the mysterious men and her almost-husband had heard the interjection.

In her fear she tried to make a plan how she could help William.

"Does he know with whom he is talking? He has to know, he has always read the newspaper in the morning, hasn't he?" whispered Elizabeth. "But why does he meet with him then?" she asked herself.

All of a sudden her monologue was interrupted by a blood-curdling cry.

Where did it come from? Elizabeth's face burned like fire and with shivering knees she converged to the corner.

And what she saw horrified her to death, a nightmare out of which she just wanted to wake up.

She witnessed how William and the Body Snatcher hold knives in their hands, how they surrounded a little blond boy with a dark green jacket and trousers and a tiny hat on his head. She cringed as she saw the look on William's face.

Like wolfs their preys the inhuman evils surrounded their victim.

Suddenly they penetrated the knives into the chest of that little helpless child and his voice cried the last time.

As fast as her legs took her, she fled from the situation.

Her heart pounded. Behind every corner she saw the murderers hiding for her.

Elizabeth was so horror-stricken that she couldn't even think. The cold wind burned in her face, but it didn't matter. Tears ran down her jowls and the environment became blurred. All the other people were faceless figures just standing in her way.

It started to snow again and the little white snowflakes admixed with her wet clothes. Her chignon was destroyed and her hair adhered on the neck.

Anyhow she arrived at home, opened as apace as she could the door, rushed into the house, closed the door with her last power and then sank down on the floor.

Her whole body trembled with fear, strain and pain. She was a picture of misery as Albert walked in.

"Oh Lord, what happened?" he yelled. "I...I...I a-am sor-ry." was everything Elizabeth was able to reply.

"My little girl, tell me! What happened?" Albert asked again, but she didn't answer. Her tongue was paralysed and her body was still shaking. Never again she wanted to think about what happened this night in the dark bleak streets of London.

The old man took Elizabeth's hands, hugged her and brought her to bed. The desperate woman recognised that he was about to leave, but she didn't want to feel alone. "S...S...tay..." she said with a shivering voice. Albert sat down in the red armchair next to her, grabbed her hand with great carefulness.

Elizabeth couldn't stop crying. She has never expected William doing cruel things like that. Accordingly she didn't want to close her eyes because everything she saw then, were the dark eyes and the blood of the little boy on William's hands.

After hours the exhaustion overcame her body and so she began to sleep.

The following day Elizabeth sat on the old red armchair in the little book shop. Teardrops ran down her face again as she read the article in the Times Magazine London. It headlined "Famous body snatchers caught". Under the title there were two pictures, one of the man and the other of her fiancé.

She felt a twitch in her heart when she touched his face on the paper and looked into his brown, trustful looking eyes.

The silence and her loneliness were broke away by the voice of Albert: "It was necessary, my dear." "I know." she answered absently.

"I am so sorry." he said.

Albert laid his hand carefully on her shoulder. She snivelled because of his gloriousness. Elizabeth was the one who should attend him now, because he was still ill, but in spite of everything he worried about her.

The old man shuffled into the next room and left her alone with all the pain and the shards of her heart. He knew that she needed time for herself now and that was something she liked about him very much.

As the church bell struck twelve Elizabeth straightened up and went to the little quadratic windows. Through the dark glass she could see the masses of people running through the streets. Like yesterday children were playing with snow but today there was no sun shining through the cloud covered sky.

The last stroke of the clock faded away. Elizabeth turned around and realized that the man she loved was dead now, hung in front of thousand people.

"But maybe", she thought, "maybe he has never existed."

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