

## Nothing Left for Isaac

Please enjoy this tale from my book, *The Black Mirror*.

Isaac was loved. His tender hand had nurtured his family and they had sprung up from the bed of his sacrifice as perfect blossoms to unfold before the sun. His wife who loved him, and his friends, and all were his friends, knew him as their "slow Isaac," for he always gave pause before speech, and hence was kind. How else might one who knows not what to say, find the word which fits best in the ear, as the truth which brings strength to the hearer, is that word which lies sweetest therein? All loved Isaac, for one who is kind bestows treasure, as they betray themselves. All love such a man who lays at one's feet and brings one new height to tread upon his back.

But some twenty years past, Isaac was not slow or kind. He wrote tales with a quick wit and pointed pen which carved a terrible truth. His tales were as a blood wine which stained the teeth of all who drank it, so they were as the teeth of a beast which understood what is strong and what is beautiful, are but the same. The heroine of his tales was such a beast. Her name was Althea, and her Norse laughter was clad in black armor, and carried a sword of legend, hammered from folds of black steel.

As Isaac knew the days pass under the brown sturdy bridge of his kindness, he saw his children leave and prosper and the days passed into their autumn, and he, slow Isaac was beloved by all, and long had known the winter which laid before his season, but grew as age, so slow, to remain a hidden frost within his still heart. What need had he of its murmurings, for its cavity was filled with the knowing of his deeds, and this was a beauty beyond himself.

Isaac was to be alone for nearly a month, twenty-four days his fond wife would be away visiting home, her mother and in-laws, then her friends. Isaac felt unaffected by her absence, peddling his routine around the day as if she were there. Evening brought night, and night its sleep where the dead may rest and the living awake.

Isaac's eyes opened in wide amazement, and to his horror he could not breathe or move. Soon his panic subsided, and the nature of his state befell him completely, for he was both wide-eyed and dead. First, there was an odor which he could not have known, for the dead are grateful of but one thing, not to be the sick! But his fate must be as a denizen of the unholy lair of the tortured dead, because the scent remained, burnt and rotten, feces and iron in his nose, the smell of shame! The sound was next. The music of noble ruin he had written himself, the sound of her armor like bells, knives and stones in a sack, which clatter and ring in time with the strike of her footfall. Only one sound remained to fill his dead empty ear, and then he heard it, the fierce wind of her laughter; and so the dead did tremble to know her and fear they may yet be slain!

Her pure gaze fell upon him as steel upon a rotten thing. Her words fell from her smiling lips, they fell as hot lead stones into his distant soul which raised up with their terrible

fire. A strange animal pressed from within his breast as she spoke her invocation, "I will raise thee dead thing, I will bring shame upon my lips and speak your name Isaac, as *you* have forgotten *mine*. I will bring shame to my lips to kiss your dead sick mouth, and raise up your soul into my own. I evoke thee to rise in agony, as a coward stung, and proclaim the shame to burn you and fill your withered lungs with hot stinking air, so you may know what you have brought upon yourself. Awake you fetid thing which did give as a dead one gives, so did you heap earth upon the living, and forbade them breath! Rise up and know thy shame, awake in pain and know my beauty! Find your torment, and so become! Awake and shed your mask, you rotten fruit, you hollow skin with its ugly mouth but a mute hole! Awake now the living heart which beats step upon step to know its end!"

A cramp closed its fist within his gullet, and the corpse sat up with a sudden lurch, and a putrid breath was squeezed from its stiff chest. His heart beat and his agony flowed through him like blood. His shame sickened him and so found him legs, and Althea's laughter put them to use, "Walk here," she bade him come to the kitchen counter, her armor sparkling as a black gem in firelight. "You have shown that you have no need of it, so we shall find its purpose again. You have something you do not deserve. You soil it to own it because you make it dead, the slave of a dulled soul, the undeserving pitiful soul of your kindness is a tepid thing made of a fiery life, a shining flame quenched in the dew of your mouldering soul, the dew of tears unknown and blood unspent. You lazy wretch, present me your hand, for I will pierce it from back to palm, as your cross is to be struck away, and then surely you will dance for me, for I will show you the steps, my unworthy dead friend!" Isaac placed his hand upon the counter and she struck a pen through it from back to palm, and then another and three more! Her gaze fixed upon his eyes and her will was his, so she tore him asunder and said to his soul, "You are unworthy of your left hand. You must give it to me. I command the filthy coward: Cut it off! Cut it off, coward!" She presented her sword, its hungry blade black as creased ink and he took it from her in his right hand. She spoke to his soul which raised up in anguish to meet her, "Sometimes the truth is a thin blade which fits between that which is separate, and cleaves the kindness which falsely holds it fast." Her words released the blow and the black blade parted the hand from he who was undeserving of it.

The hand leapt away from the arm, a bit of wrist was attached to it with a small protruding bony nub from which all manner of translucent and opaque secretions began to flow. The hand which had retained possession of the pens thrust through it, began to crawl around the room under its own volition, spraying arcs of color, ink and image which merged and dispersed to become landscapes and murders, evil and knowledge, lust and the tranquility due all who surrender to chaos befell the room, which was now alive in its own right.

Isaac awoke with a start to hear his dog Daisy barking happily, inviting him to play. He had been sleepwalking and was standing before the kitchen counter with a cleaver in his right hand, and the dog in possession of his left, which was now missing two fingers, much to Daisy's delight. He fainted. When he came to, the hand was a snarled remain, and he had barely enough strength and blood left in his body to tourniquet and treat the

wound. The hospital would be of no use now, but he did not care and felt a giddy bubble of laughter rise from within his belly, as he saw the blood spattered walls from he and Daisy's exploits. Evidently the hand made Daisy a fine "work and chew toy" as her rubber bone, which advertised the same.

As slow Isaac cleaned up the mess, he noticed he was no longer slow. He knew what he felt and proceeded rapidly with all things. He began to write. First he composed a story about a priest who could not contain the sin in his secret heart, who could not resist but to kiss the mouth of one of the corpses left in his charge for interment. The priest found that upon kissing the body, he changed places with it, noticing, sensing the alluring pallid face, and still lips stained as blue gray ash were now his own, and an angel of light was bestowing its kiss upon him. His writing continued at a pace to drive horses past every cliff, and to much laughter he found they might sprout wings for him. His remaining hand worked for a double share, too eager and glad in its labor to restrain. Upon returning home his wife could hardly believe the furious joy her Isaac possessed. His right arm was a blur in constant motion, the hand writing and gesturing in an energetic ecstasy, and he beamed at her despite having no left hand! She was amazed and aghast, so to voice both her curiosity and consternation she exclaimed, "Isaac your hand!" Isaac acknowledged her arrival and her alarm, and answered her while gesticulating and gesturing at a frenetic pace, "Oh do not worry, I have never been better. I had a dream and did some sleepwalking to discover something wonderful had happened. When I awoke my hand was gone and I am actually quite relieved, so please don't fear. You see I most correctly understood my condition, I had to admit it: There was nothing left but to write."

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