

Secrets Within Stone Walls

As the sun descends on the horizon and the full moon begins to make its glowing appearance into the dark night sky, the wind casts a chilling breeze over the countryside. With the light of the moon and oil lanterns, a single horse-drawn carriage travels down the dirt trail leading towards the nearby forest. The driver, dressed in a suit and hooded cloak, follows the path for almost 10 minutes before reaching a rusted wrought-iron gate.

“We’re here, Madame.” the driver said with a deep voice towards the carriage passenger.

“Please open the gate, Davis.” The passenger spoke in a quiet, feminine voice.

Davis followed his given order and pushed aside the rusted gate doors, slightly amazed that they hadn’t already fallen down after all these years. As he returned to his post at the reins, with a flick of his wrist, the horse began to pull the carriage past the gate posts and down the weed-covered entrance path towards the formerly grand wooden door of a majestic, but abandoned stone castle.

The two-story high castle had been vacant and forgotten for nearly a decade, and each stone was beginning to fade in color and crumble to the ground. Weeds had taken over the pathways leading to the building and

overgrown vines began to creep alongside the castle walls, making it look like a castle for forest fairies rather than a house of stone for a noble family.

“All these years, it’s still standing. How much longer until it crumbles down, along with all the horrible memories of this place?” Davis thought to himself.

Davis walked to the carriage door and opened it for his passengers. A tall woman with a velvet black cloak over her body slowly stepped out of the carriage and settled her feet on the overgrown grass. A smaller woman appeared behind her wearing a small dark blue caplet over a maid’s uniform.

“My lady, are you sure about this? It’s been so long since you’ve been here, and this place brought you nothing but heartache and pain.” The maid addressed her lady with sincere concern.

The lady in black just grabbed a lantern from the carriage and walked up the cracked stairway towards the front door of the castle. She placed a hand on the rotting wooden door and heard it groan as she pushed it open. The inside of the castle was lit by moonlight and the lady’s lantern as she walked inside. Davis and the maid followed their mistress with lanterns of their own, keeping watch of any danger.

Dust and cobwebs covered every surface of the inside, an old candelabra chandelier laid shattered on the floor in the parlor, and old

paintings hanging from the wall with peeling paint and faded color told a story of the residents of the castle. One painting placed in the center of the wall depicted a strong man of aristocracy with his beautiful wife and two children, a young daughter and a baby boy. The woman stopped in front of the painting and stared at it.

“A happy family in portraits and in public, but only those that lived in this castle knew the truth inside these walls.” The young lady said.

The group continued their journey down the hall and followed the dusty and moldy carpet towards a set of stairs. The cloaked lady led her servants up the stairs towards the second floor. The group continued their walk down the hall and passed by rusted & cobweb-covered suits of armor, along with empty bedrooms that would’ve been the resting place of many beautiful children. A dream one woman had always wanted to come true. Once the woman reached another set of stairs that lead to a single tower, she turned to her young servants.

“I wish to head up the tower alone. Please stay here until I return.” The lady said softly.

“Yes, my lady.” Both the driver and maid spoke simultaneously.

The woman walked up the winding staircase with her long cloak trailing behind her. The servants rested on nearby chairs covering in dust, respecting the command of their lady.

“Will she be okay, Davis? I’m very worried about her. What if doing this causes more harm than good?” The maid asked with sadness and slight fear in her voice.

“Delilah, she wanted to do this. She needs to face her demons and move on with her life. Giving herself closure and getting the words out will help her in the future, and she’ll feel free.”

The woman continued her slow descent up the stairs and could still recall her memories of living in the castle. How being born as a member of the aristocracy meant she was predetermined to marry a man with enough wealth to support her and the children she would bear. A man she hoped would be for love, or at least one that would lead up to fondness. After a string of men who only had thoughts of marrying for status in their minds, she thought she met a man that would give her everything she wanted and the love she truly desired. Daniel Arrington, a man of high stature and enough wealth to put even a prince to shame, wooed her and became her fiancé in a matter of months. He had built her the castle she was in as an engagement present and lavished her with love and affection. She felt that

she finally had a perfect life and was marrying a man that loved her more than anything.

However, her life living in the castle after the wedding wasn't as she dreamed it would be. She could still remember what happened when she was inside and away from the public eye. Her husband, Daniel Arrington, was a strong and brutish man that had changed dramatically after they were married. He wasn't as loving and affectionate as he was when they first met, and would threaten the servants if they didn't comply with his demands. She was the shining light of the castle and treated the servants with respect and kindness, unlike her husband.

When the lady announced that she was expecting a child, Daniel had ordered her not to leave the castle grounds for any reason to ensure that no harm would befall her or the baby. He had made sure at least one maid was by her side and threatened the servants with severe punishments if anything were to happen to the unborn child.

"My lady, are you doing okay?"

"I'm doing fine, Delilah. Don't worry so much."

"I'm sorry, my lady. It's just that the master is so determined to keep you and the child safe. He said if I failed to keep you from harm, I'd get the whip. Do you remember what had happened to Zander when he almost

crashed into you carrying your dinner tray? Daniel whipped him so hard he left permanent scars on his back, and screamed how he almost caused harm to your child. Zander couldn't handle what happened, so he left that very night."

"I'll never understand why Daniel changed so drastically. When we first met, he was so loving and sweet. He went out of his way to show how much he loved me. Now he barely shows any affection towards me and our child, and he treats all of you so poorly."

"I'm sure once your child is born, he will be more loving to the both of you again."

"I hope so. Daniel is so adamant about having a son as his first-born; he refuses to even consider the possibility that it might be a girl. I just want him to love our child no matter what gender it is."

She prayed every night, hoping that God gave her a son to bear and bring into the world. When the lady went into labor, she gave birth to a healthy and beautiful baby girl. The lady was ecstatic to know that their newborn child, Lucy, was healthy and a part of their lives, but slightly disappointed that Lucy wasn't a boy. Daniel wasn't pleased with having a girl as his first-born child, and left all the caretaking to his wife and the servants. The lady tried her best to get her husband to be more involved with

her and Lucy, but all Daniel did was lavish her with gifts and not pay much attention to Lucy. When the lady was pregnant again a year later, she was happy that her daughter was going to have a sibling, and that she was going to have the big family she always wanted.

“Daniel, isn’t this great? We’re going to have another child and Lucy will have a sibling to play with.”

“I pray it’ll be a boy this time. I need a male heir to carry on the Arrington name and make great decisions with the family business and fortune. A boy is needed in this house to ensure my legacy and follow the footsteps of his father.”

God had heard their prayers, and she gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Daniel focused all his attention on his son and made an effort to ignore his daughter. The only attention he gave to Lucy was when she was misbehaving and punished her by hitting her. The lady was horrified that he would do that to their child and tried her best to get him to control his anger. She would try to get her husband to show any sign of affection to their daughter, but he only paid attention to his son.

One night, the lady was putting her son to bed when she heard a crash coming from her husband’s office. When she walked in and saw the most horrible sight a mother would never want to see: her husband standing over

their daughter's limp body holding a bronze statue covered in blood. Her screams resonated throughout the castle and woke the servants.

“What have you done?!”

“She didn't want to sleep, and she kept pestering me. It's better this way though. I never wanted a girl as our first-born. We have a son that can keep our family line perfect now.” Daniel said, devoid of any emotion.

The lady pushed her husband out of the way and cried over her baby girl's dead body. Daniel threatened the servants with the same fate if any of them spoke of the incident to anyone outside the castle. Davis had helped the lady bury the little girl in the garden and had told anyone who asked that Lucy died from a horrible illness and to never mention her name. The lady had kept Lucy's room just the way it was before the incident, and forbade anyone from going inside without permission.

“My child is gone, and my husband acts like it's for the better. Like he didn't just murder our daughter in cold blood and leave it to me to bury her. Acting like she never came into this world and putting all his time towards our son. He changed after we married and no longer cares for me like he did before. All he wanted was a wife and someone to bear a son. All that attention in the past was to hook me in and ensure I would marry him. I

married a liar, an abuser and a murderer. I need to end things before it gets any worse."

She hadn't stopped thinking about her daughter and wanting to avenge her death, so she discusses her desire with the only two people she could trust: Delilah, her trusted nursemaid, and Davis, her butler and childhood friend. She had asked them to meet her in her bedroom when Daniel left the castle to handle business with his family.

"My lady, why have you called the two of us here?" Davis asked.

"Because you two are the only people I can trust. Daniel went too far when he murdered our daughter in cold blood and doesn't even care or feel any remorse for what he did! He killed my Lucy!" The lady fell to her knees and cried in her hands.

Delilah ran to her lady's side and comforted her. Davis looked out the door to make sure no one was near the room or could hear the three talking and locked it.

"My lady, I can't stand to see you this way. Since we were children, you had always wanted to make a true family of your own with a man that loves you. I can see now that Daniel is a monster, and if he killed Lucy without a second thought, he might do the same to you and Henry."

“I know. That’s why I need your help to avenge Lucy and punish Daniel for his actions. I have a plan, and I can only trust you two to help me with it.”

“We will do anything for you, my lady. The Master deserves to be punished and suffer for what he did to little Lucy. Tell us what your plan is.”
Delilah responded with great determination.

The woman reached the top of the tower and opened the wooden door to reveal a small dark room only being lit by moonlight. Rats had made this room their home and scurried away in fear when the woman walked into the room. She could still see what she had done years ago after the death of her daughter. A skeleton with its wrists bound by chains was picked clean by the rats. All that remained were weathered bones, sun-bleached clothes, and a gold wedding band on the left ring finger.

“I loved you so much, and I thought you loved me. You were an amazing man at first, but all that changed when I married you. You were cold, unfeeling, and threatened anyone that didn’t do what you wanted. If you killed your own daughter, what would you have done to your son and me? I wasn’t about to let you hurt another child or anyone else. Little Henry is being raised with more love and affection than you could ever give him now, and I know he’s safer without you in his life. I had thoughts about

killing you instantly, but realized you deserve to suffer instead. This is the first time in years anyone has come up this tower, and you still remain here. I doubt anyone is worried about you now or even wondering what has happened to you. I hope your soul is burning in Hell, Daniel.”

The woman walks down the steps to find her servants waiting for her.

“Are you okay, Lady Sofia?” Delilah asked.

“I’m fine. Take me home now. I want to write a letter for my little boy and have it sent to my sister tomorrow.” Sofia said sullenly.

“Yes, my lady.”

The servants followed their lady out of the castle and towards the garden. Sofia places two lilies on the grave of her daughter and a wave of sadness mixed with joy washed over her. Her daughter had been avenged, her sister is helping her raise her son, and her husband has suffered for his crime. She leaves the garden and climbs into her carriage, ready to be back home. Sofia looks back at the castle she had once called home and hoped that the walls will soon come tumbling down, leaving nothing but a pile of rubble, stone and memories of a family she once had and the pain she endured losing the happiness she always desired.