

## Ghost of the Lake

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The graveyard was barren; Maria set the roses down by her sister's tombstone for Darla and the fetus and wept. She passed away about two months, and the pain was unbearable. She walked away, her white dress flowing softly behind her. She walked passed unkempt tombstones with decaying flowers on top of them. She passed through the black gates and walked back to her place.

Two months earlier, she was planning on staying the weekend at her sister's home near the lake. Maria loved her sister's home; it was painted a bright yellow and the window sills had roses on them, and she owned many kinds of plants in her back yard. Whenever she went there she always had a good time, and at some point, they would take a long walk around the lake and see hundreds of stars gathering around the vast sky.

It was raining the day she came over. She took her suitcase out of the car and walked up to the door. There she saw her sister Darla's hanging like a chandelier on the front porch. Her white dress covered in blood, and one of her brown slippers was on the ground and the other on her foot. There were various stab wounds covering her body and her belly was purple and swollen, she touched her body; so soft and cold that she felt more like a mannequin than a human. She wept for Darla for what seemed like eternity.

She couldn't recall the police coming over. All she could remember was Darla's body going into the black bag and the paramedics driving away. They asked her a few questions; however, she couldn't answer most of them. After asking her the same questions over and over for an hours and gathering evidence, they sent their condolences and left.

Once they left, she sat on the porch and looked at the stars. They were dim and far away that night and the moon was half covered by the clouds. The lake reflected like a mirror that night; she saw her face in the water and suddenly she saw Darla's face in the waters staring back at her. She ran into the house, grabbed her suitcase and ran out the door and back to her house.

Two months passed, and something inside her told her to go back to Darla's home. It called to her in her dreams and no matter how many times she tried to fight it, the tug only grew stronger. She decided it was time to go back to her sister's place.

The next morning, she packed up her suitcase and drove to her sister's house by the lake. She stopped her red buggy close to the house and grabbed her suitcase and walked to the house. Her body felt heavier with every step. The once velvet green grass was now dry, and her sister's house looked as though it had been decayed for years with the yellow paint now a rusty orange color and the roses bent over and dried out with flies swarming around the house. She sighed as she walked on the porch.

As she turned the key in the lock, she saw Darla hanging; the blood dripped from the stab wounds like droplets of rain. Her pale blue skin covered in blood and dirt and her dress was stained and hardened with blood and other bodily fluids. She vomited in her mouth as she opened the door and walked inside the house. Here goes nothing, she thought closing the door.

She set her suitcase down by the old brown couch. The oak stand had a newspaper on top from two months ago. She took the paper and threw it away in the kitchen trash can. The place felt strange without Darla's presence; it was just an empty vessel used as a storage facility and here she was in the kitchen that she and her sister once prepared food together. She sat down at the round table in the kitchen; she remembered having wonderful meals and conversations over a cup of coffee; now those days were in the past and existed only in memory.

“Maria, it’s perfect. It was made from a lucky tree in the deepest forest of Russia, and it’s magical. It will kept in our family for generations to come, and all I had to do was give the woman three of my chickens.”

She saw Darla was sitting on the other side of the table. Her face expressionless as she looked at Maria; her mouth moved but no sound came out. Maria reached out for her and in an instant she was gone.

She cleared the house of old papers, trash, and clothes; Maria threw out all the food in the fridge and in the pantry that had molded. She took the trash outside and placed into the trash can. She looked at the lake as the sun was setting; with the fireflies dancing around the lake and the sound of hidden crickets, it reminded Maria of a fairy tale from a distant past.

Maria saw Darla sitting by the lake; she rubbed her eyes in disbelief. Her translucent feet dangled in the water and she motioned for Maria to come closer. Maria treaded towards her slowly. When she reached the lake, her sister pointed to the tree with the tire swing and disappeared.

She walked to the tire swing; she remembered how she and Darla would have their bodies dangling from the tire swing in the afternoon. The wind would carry them into the heavens and for a moment they defied gravity; they pushed each other into the cosmos. Maria saw Darla’s ghost on the tire swing; her smile illuminated the night sky and Maria touched the old tire and Darla was no longer there.

She was about to go back inside but something shiny caught her attention. It was a blade covered in blood; she picked the blade up with a handkerchief and placed the weapon into a

plastic bag. She noticed lines of dirt that had not been there before that looked as though something had been dragged and the grass rubbed off.

As she walked back to the house, she saw Darla standing on the porch; she tried opening the door but the door wouldn't open. She turned around and looked at Darla who stared vacantly pointing to the lake.

"The lake," the voice of Darla whisper to her.

She looked at the lake; the. The star ran away and the moon was hidden in the shadows. She went inside the house for a moment, found a candle and lit it. The wind went through her like a knife. She wanted to turn back, go under the covers the way she and Darla did when they were children after watching a frightening movie, but this wasn't the time to do such things.

She went to the lake; black and reflective she looked into the waters. Instead of her reflection, she saw Darla staring at her. She was floating around in a white dress covered in blood. Maria dived into the waters; a chill ran through her body. She swam around with Darla for a moment like they used to when they were children.

She saw orbs of light floating around in the water. She swam over to them and reached out for them. She touched one and looked inside; colors swirled around. She looked deeper and then she saw a face, one that she had not seen before. Her heart ached; the face went inside a building and the door read Gregory Jones. The orb popped in her hand, and she swam to the other orbs but they disappeared.

She got out of the lake. She went into the house and dried off. She jumped in bed and went under several layers of covers. The room was icy and the wind blew through the closed window. She wished that she was at her place instead of this cold place with her sister's ghost haunting it.

She wondered who Gregory Jones was. In her dreams that night she saw him floating by. His dark eyes stared right into her and he felt his hands, so cold yet soft she thought as he held squeezed her hands. When she awakened, her body felt cold as ice. She closed the window, put on a thick robe, and went into the kitchen and made herself some coffee.

After her morning coffee; she went on a walk into town. She and Darla always went into town to see all the shops selling their wares; they go and see a movie and have thin pastries with vanilla ice cream with strawberries as garnished washed down with a mint tea. She enjoyed seeing elderly men playing chess and women gossiping about who was sleeping with who.

The town was empty for the most part as Maria stepped onto the paved streets. A few people walked around with phone attached to them. When she entered the stores, she didn't have the same warm feeling she did ten years ago. God, had it been that long? She pictured Darla trying on different dresses, seeing which one was suitable for her.

She stepped into her favorite place. It was a small dress shop that sold both new and used dresses. Maria looked around; she felt the different materials with her fingertips gently. Then something caught her eyes; there was a dress made from deep purple silk with gold lacing. She grabbed the dress and bought it before she could change her mind.

As she was about to leave; she bumped into a man. He swept his dark hair away from his face. He smiled brightly dusting off his suit.

"I'm sorry ma'am," he said.

"It's okay. I was the one who bumped into you though," Maria said smiling.

"Well I assume you are new here?"

"Actually; I've been here before, it's just been awhile."

“Well my name is Gregory Jones, if you need anything my office is just across the street,” he said pointing outside.

There she saw it, the glass door with his name from the orb. She gulped; as soon as he was out of sight she ran. She ran out of town and back to the lake. She sat down for a moment to catch her breath. When she calmed down she got up and put on the new dress.

The dress fit perfectly, so much it was almost as though it was meant for her. She twirled around in front of the mirror. She looked at herself for a minute; suddenly, her image disappeared and turned into Darla. The purple dress hung like rags on her emaciated body and she was covered in bruises and cuts. Gregory was behind her kissing her gently on the cheek. She turned away and ran to the bathroom.

She turned the faucet on and splashed warm water on her face. She looked down and the clear water turned crimson; she turned the faucet off and she ran out of the house breathing heavily. She felt something cold touch her shoulder. She turned around and Darla smiled at her. She quickly grabbed her frantically.

“Sister, don’t leave me. I can’t sleep and I can’t rest. You torment me Darla!”

“I am tormented between worlds,” Darla cried as she disappeared

She sat down on the ground. She wanted Darla back; she wanted the endless talks and the shopping, and she wanted the arguments back. She wanted Darla’s loving presence not her torment and anguish.

“Look in the pocket.”

She placed her hands in the dress pocket and felt something. A gold heart shape locket was in her hands. She opened a locket and inside was a picture of Darla and Gregory holding hands. She gripped the locket tightly in her fist and went back inside the house.

The next day she went into town; the sky was gray and not a ray of sun shone on the town. The flowers wept and the people walked looking down at their feet. She opened the glass door that read Gregory Jones.

He sat at his maple desk scattered with papers and pens. The smell of fragrant flowers filled the office. She stood in front of the door admiring the large wooden clock that stood behind his desk.

“Sit down.”

Maria sat down. He smiled as her knees and hands quivered.

“How may I help you?”

“Explain this,” she said tossing the locket on the desk with force.

He grabbed the locket and opened it. His eyes darkened as he looked directly at Maria. She froze. His icy look was like death. She wanted to run out but she was frozen in place. The clock that was on the wall stopped ticking; she glanced out the door, the people stopped moving. She and Gregory stared intensely at one another.

“Where did you get this locket?”

“From the dress I bought at the store yesterday.”

“Darla’s dress! My poor sweet Darla.”

“She was murdered,” she said tensing up.

“How tragic. She was very sweet.”

“You killed her,” she screamed, “I want my sister back,” she said shaking all over.

“What evidence do you have that I murdered Darla?”

“My sister haunts me. No matter where I go, she follows me and won’t move on because of you.”

“That is not evidence. That is imagination. I’m sure it has been stressful. I think you need to relax,” he said gently pulling her up, “why don’t you get some rest, and when you are good and ready we can discuss how you are feeling.”

He walked her out of the door, and she pulled his shirt before he could close the door.

“What did my sister see in you?”

He smiled closing the door.

As soon as she got home, she placed her feet in the lake, and the cold water felt good against her sore feet. Maybe this Jones guy was right and that she was just grieving, but something tugged inside her. She couldn’t forget the words Darla said to her; she wanted to free Darla from the torment that haunted her deeply.

She felt a chill run down her spine.

“Go under the lake,” a voice whispered to Maria.

She dived into water; a few small fish swam by her as plants gently stroked her feet and legs. Something pulled her deeper into the waters, she tried swimming back to the surface but she sank deeper into the waters. She then saw Darla floating by; her body bloated and her skin bluish. She looked at Maria, her face covered in cuts and bruises and her hair knotted and torn; she grabbed Maria and held her tightly.

“Help me,” Darla cried.

She pushed Darla away and swam up to the surface. She ran into the house and saw Darla sitting on the couch, her head hung low with a noose dangling around her neck. Maria screamed. Darla looked at Maria.

“You must go back to town and go into Gregory Jones home.”

“I don’t know where he lives,” Maria said.



Darla pointed to the bookshelf and vanished. Maria went to the book shelf; she saw a photo in the corner and picked it up. It was Darla and Jones holding hands and smiling and behind them was a small yellow house. Maria had always loved that house; it was surrounded by flowers and smelled of baked goods; they called it the Fairytale House and she and Darla dreamed of living in the house when they got older.

She called the police and told them everything that was going on as calmly as she can. They listened for a moment and then said,

“Ma’am you are on your own. Now my advice is that you accept the death of your sister as a suicide and leave good Gregory Jones alone.”

“He killed my sister; is there no justice?”

They hung up on her, and she screamed slamming the phone down.

The town was pitch black except for a couple of dim lights in the distant. Shadows touched the walls and pavement as they moaned passed Maria. She held her coat tighter as the icy wind blew passed her. She stood in front of the yellow house; however, it wasn’t as she remembered it when she was young. The yellow was a sickly orange, and the flowers that once filled the front yard were replaced by weeds. She rang the doorbell and waited.

Gregory opened the door staring at her expressionless.

“What are you doing here?”

“You killed my sister. Now she is gone, and I will never get her back.”

“I didn’t!” He said as he flung the door.

Maria held the door open with her foot and walked inside. Gregory pushed her back and she pulled out a gun from her coat that she had grabbed from her closet before coming. He backed away as her body trembled holding the gun in front of her.

“Don’t make me use this.”

“If one of us must die then I fear that it will be you; I have yet to lose to death and today won’t be the day.”

“Before one of us dies, I would like a tour of the house. When I was a child I dreamed of living in this house and drinking tea with my sister Darla,” Maria said.

“I’ll give you your last wish, and if it makes you feel better, you can have solace in knowing that your spirit will be trapped in your dream home.”

He showed her the living room. It was small and there was a large wooden table surrounded by tree stumps, pictures of nature hung on the wall and there was a glass case covered in fine china. She noticed the bear rug in the middle of the floor; the face stuck out to her, it was strong yet timid. She stroked the fur on the rug, soft like spring grass. The fire place mantle had photos of several women and one of them was Darla.

“I loved those women,” he said, “but they didn’t love me back.”

“So you killed them?”

“No; I preserved their memory. I drank from them, the sweet nectar that poured like a flower in spring. I wept for days when Darla died; she was the last person I expected to leave me.”

“Why did she want to leave?”

“She was pregnant with my child, and wasn’t willing to give it up. So two months ago, I soaked a rag with chloroform so Darla live in a dream. I went behind her and grabbed her; poor thing struggled to be part of reality. She took the knife from my pants that was held by a clip and she stabbed me in the knee. I placed the rag quickly on her and she was gone; I dragged her body and then hung her body in the white dress she had been wearing that day. I stabbed her several times and cried as I saw her body become pale and lifeless.”

“You monster!”

“I am in pain; I couldn’t have that child, I refuse to allow my name to continue and I wanted to die with me.”

“Why would you do something so heartless?”

“I have already said too much.”

He showed her the kitchen; there were pots and pans on hooks and the tiles had yellow daisies on them, and there was a small stove in the corner. They entered the bathroom which smelled like maple, and everything was brown and green. She loved the pictures of nature that was on the walls; it reminded her of grandma’s place before she passed.

They entered his bedroom; it was bare except for a bed and a dresser as though he just moved in; the walls were brown and the window was covered up by a grayish green curtain. She suddenly saw a flicker of light coming from his closet that called for her, and walked towards it ready to open it. He pulled her by the arm and moved her away from the closet.

“Nothing to see.”

She turned around and Darla lie in the bed. Naked, scared, and covered in blood; she moaned and Maria cried as she reached out. Gregory quickly grabbed her by her hair and shoved her head in the closet and she screamed as he laughed. He tried shoving her in the closet, but she pushed him back holding a gun to his face.

Bodies dangled in the closet. They looked like dolls in the closet wearing fine dresses on their decayed bodies. She turned around, and he taped her mouth shut.

He tied her body with rope and took her gun out of the coat.

“You just had to look in the closet. I told you not to look!”

She wiggled her fingers in the rope that bounded her hands; her mind only focused on the rope as he continued to babble on. She loosened up the rope as she smiled at him as his face turned white. The ropes slipped off and she pulled the tape off her mouth; she got up from the bed and kicked him in the abdomen.

He kneeled over and she took her gun back. She took the bullets out from the chamber and tossed them on the ground.

“I won’t do you in by a gun. Such a death would be too merciful for you.”

She dragged him into the closet. As she was about to shove him into the closet, his eyes grew large and he screamed grabbing her throat. Her arms dangled on her side and her eyes bulged; her energy was draining as her skin turned pale. She quickly pulled her hands up and grabbed his neck. His face turned red and he loosened his grip. She grabbed a knife that hung on his pants and she slit his throat from left to right quickly before she could change her mind.

He let go of her neck and she coughed and vomited.

“Cut out his heart,” voices echoed from the closet.

She cut him from bottom to top exposing his vital organs. Blood dripped on the floor, as his body flopped. She cut out his heart and held it tightly in her hands; the body was nothing but an empty vessel as his soul flew around the room screaming and crying in pain.

“Burn the heart.”

She went to the fire place. The flames danced wildly leaping for the heart.

“Now rest in peace my dear sister,” she said tossing the heart into the flames. It roared like a lion and the flames danced around devouring the heart. Bright orbs of light filled the house, and she felt at ease. The orbs of light danced around and she looked into one; they were old memories of the women that he killed. She held one of them in her hand; it was with her and

Darla taking turns on the tire swing when they were children. She left the yellow house and walked back to the lake mediating on everything that just happened.

Her sat by the lake with a smile on her face. A bright light glowed around her. Maria ran and touched her sister's hand. It was warm and calming like the real Darla. Darla pulled Maria's hands away.

"Thank you," Darla said.

She disappeared and left a small silver ring. Maria picked it up and placed it on her finger.

"You will live in my memory," she said looking at the lake as the sun rose swallowing the last bit of the night sky.