

Orchid Bulbs

By

R Alan Burgess

She liked it best when fresh rose petals were meticulously positioned around her, the sweet aroma of love's flower always present. He washed each petal after slowly picking through those unworthy of her garden. He put them – no, *placed* them – each exactly where it was meant to be. In her dress pockets were garnishes of herbs and spices, the harvests of earth against her skin. He ensured all the candles were perpetually lit to light her path in a world he thought to be so dark and shameful; not like her, she was everything beautiful and bright and honorable. She was what he always should have had, she was his prize after they took away everything else important to him. He had her now, in his castle.

They wouldn't understand even if they tried. It was their fault he lived here. They took his job and their machines took *parts* of him. They only ever called him names and hurt him.

They hurt other things, too. Beautiful things. That made him the most angry, the world had so few beautiful things. Clyde knew he wasn't one of the beautiful things, but he also knew the beautiful things were worth protecting. Now he had beauty all his own, and he would treat her the way she deserved to be treated and she would love him for it. He would show them all what it was like to be a king in a castle and have a queen. He had no mirrors or unwrapped windows, both only showed him ugly things, whether it was the world outside or his deformed skull and hunched shoulders, incapable of beauty. He was a monster, but he tried so hard on the inside. The world, the people in it, his own form – all incapable of beauty. But not her; she was beautiful, and he would protect her from all that was ugly.

That was why he had to remove her eyes, to protect her. He couldn't bear the thought of her seeing the ugly world for a moment longer, even if it caused her a little pain. He replaced them with orchid bulbs and gazed upon her for hours imagining the triumph of their majestic blooms against her regal backdrop. They were right about his body and his face, and he wouldn't allow something so beautiful and loved to be corrupted by his hideous outside. It was his inside, tender and innocent and devoted, that he wanted her to feel. Of course, her eyes were small, perfect portions of her perfect whole, so he kept them. He kept them in a special box, in a special dark place so they were safe from the ugly world.

A bang at the door, an insistent pounding interrupted him. It was followed by a loud, angry voice he didn't doubt was from something ugly and wicked.

"NYPD! Search warrant, open up!" Again, the banging, this time louder.

"Search warrant, coming in!" The door crashed and light flooded his safe darkness.

"Freeze, motherfucker!" Clyde made a mad and possessed dash for his weapon, which he kept close by to protect his beauty from the invading monsters of a monstrous world – he knew

this day would come. He held the axe high and with a firm resolve began a murderous lunge to take the life of those who would dare impose the slightest ugliness in the haven he created for the only thing truly beautiful in this world.

The commotion extinguished the once peacefully still candle flames at her feet. Now her path was dark, as was his.

“I love her...I love her...I love her...” His voice trailed off as the red life drained from his dying body and pooled around the altar adorned with roses and herbs and wax candles now unlit.

“Clear!” The officers cleared the apartment and circled the scene. Once the adrenaline subsided, the nauseating stench of decay crept in. Only, it was slightly infused with a hint of freshly blended spices, which made it worse. A plainclothes Detective Lieutenant approached, and the officers broke their circle but kept their eyes trained on what they were desperately trying to make sense of. Only two turned away to vomit.

“Been looking for this motherfucker for over six months.” Satisfaction and disbelief consumed the visage of the detective.

“Is she...real?” grunted a confused voice, unsure if he wanted the answer.

“Embalmed. Sick bastard used to work for the docks in the Upper Bay, unloading American corpses shipped in from overseas. Took this one back in July.”