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The Devil is in the Detail

by Dan Judd

Diana led her wretched husband to the abandoned stables, the blindfold cutting into his cranium, forcing darkness on what was otherwise a crisp- white, winter morning. Sometimes she forgot to guide him and he stumbled over a loose bit of paving or slid on a tuft of grass, one covered in an icy dew.

“Steady now,” she instructed, as if talking to her least favourite mare. One long since put out to pasture. There was no hint of remorse as he prodded him onwards.

“Where are you taking me, damn woman?” Giles exploded.

“Here we are.”

He sniffed in the air; his sense of smell heightened by his current lack of sight. Despite their lack of use the lingering smells of damp hay and trodden-in dung of the stables were unmistakable.

“What have you bought me here for?” he barked.

“Your birthday present, silly!” Diana said deliciously.

“Take this blasted thing off me!”

She undid the makeshift blindfold, which she'd cobbled together from a couple of old linen table napkins. It had given her a moment of satisfaction, giving a use to something they'd never need again. No one had visited them for decades. Not since their last child had died.

He blinked back the darkness as light flooded his eyes causing a kaleidoscope of colour to momentarily addle his brain. He blinked once, twice, three times, until the stable door took form.

“You’ve not bought a damned horse? Riding one would certainly finish me off!”

But perhaps that’s what Diana wanted. Get him back in the saddle. Make the thing bolt. No eyewitnesses, no evidence. End his life.

“Just you wait,” she said, her voice intoxicated with delight, as she opened the door.

There it stood, right at the back of the stable a slab of chiselled rock, the detail shadowed by the wall it rested on.

She prodded him with her walking stick. It was then that he noticed it wasn’t the one she usually used. In the confusion he obeyed, stepping closer to the gift.

It was a tombstone. With his name on it. But it wasn’t new. The inscription was complete.”

“Is that it? Confound you woman, I’m not planning to slope off this mortal coil, quite yet.”

Diana stood there, threw her head back and laughed.

She’d once dismissed a gift from his travels as similarly useless, ill-thought out, a white elephant. But sometimes a gift just needs the planets to collide. For the right moment to come along, for it to be of use. She grasped her walking stick more firmly, remembering their 20th wedding anniversary when he’d bored her with the story of its origins.

How dare he dismiss her gift as useless and in poor taste? When she had spotted it on sale how she had laughed at how the dates were almost correct. Just changing the second faded digit in each year would make the gravestone the ideal gift, she thought. The devil was in the detail.

With one swift move she swung the Polynesian tribal club and delivered the fatal blow.