

Carola Wolff: Death in Love

He didn't go to parties, Halloween or otherwise. He didn't have fun and he never wore a costume. That wasn't his style. He stood quietly, in the midst of the living, and tapped those who had to leave on the shoulder. That was enough. That was his job. He was the door opener. The others were always the ones who went through.

Sometimes they even fell.

Like the woman who had just fallen into his arms. From the roof of a large, dark brick building, along with tumbling, dark brown autumn leaves.

"It's good to see you," she said in greeting, and cast only a fleeting glance at the shattered creature in the rain-soaked gutter, its white nightgown speckled with red. She looked him up and down intently instead.

"No hooded cloak, no scythe, no hourglass," she noted with satisfaction. "I knew it!"

Most people who saw him were unsettled. Because he didn't match their expectations. Not this one. She was also the first who was ever really happy to see him.

"I like the pants. Leather? And that shirt. Black with ruffles. It's a bit rockstar-like, with a dash of pirate mixed in."

He raised his eyebrows. A siren sounded in the distance.

"I have read everything about you. So much has been said about you, throughout all times, in all nations. But is it true?"

Most of those who saw him just wanted to know why he came too early. Or too late. Or why at all. And what would happen to them now. Questions to which he had no answers. Questions that were outside his area of responsibility.

None, not a single one of them, had ever shown any interest in him.

"Most of it is wrong," he said, surprised at the sound of his own voice. A rusty coffin hinge, unoiled, uncleaned, unused.

She beamed, put her arm through his and pulled him away just as an ambulance pulled up to the curb.

"I thought so. Tell me about yourself. What's it like being you?"

This wasn't right. This wasn't the planned sequence. He had to touch her and then the door opened and she left. But this one wasn't going to leave.

"What do you do all day and how does it feel? What music do you like to listen to? What is your favourite colour? Come on, I want to know everything."

As they passed by, people shivered involuntarily, as if a cold wind had touched them, and pulled their scarves closer together. None of them required his attention right now. And so he thought about the questions. And his lack of answers. He had no free time. He had no vacation. He never got tired. He never dreamed because he never slept.

"I don't know," he said hesitantly.

Elvis stood in the driveway of a house, wrapped in a large dark red cape, singing 'Love me tender'. Even the hurried passers-by slowed down and most of them threw a few coins into the black hat at his feet.

"It's really good," she said appreciatively.

He nodded to Elvis, who saw him, nodded back and, with a mischievous grin, started singing 'You ain't nothing but a hound dog'.

"Now tell me, is it real?"

"He comes back sometimes. He says he enjoys it more when he sings here."

Her cheeks were red and the childlike joy in her face touched something deep within him that he thought was long gone. "Would you like to dance?"

"I'd love to. But I can't dance," she said.

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"Now I do," he said, taking her hand.

They floated over the pavement together, spinning wildly, throwing up leaves. He had never held anyone like that before. It felt good. She was light in his arms and surprisingly warm. And when she laughed, again, out of pure joy at the moment, he could feel it in her body, a gentle vibration.

Elvis finished his song.

"That was nice," she said breathlessly.

"Yes," he said.

"Time for me to leave the building," said Elvis, grabbing his hat and fading into the dusky autumn afternoon.

Above them, an old gas lamp flickered into life.

"You must be lonely," she said.

He had never thought about that either. There had been no reason for it. Now that she was here, he felt it even more clearly.

"And you?" he wanted to know.

"Very."

He bent his head towards her. Her lips were soft like satin coffin fittings, her kiss tasted of light and infinity.

"What made you jump?" he asked.

"I wanted to get to know you." She snuggled in his arms and whispered, "What do you want? From the bottom of your heart?"

That I had never met you, he thought. Because now he knew what he had missed without knowing it. He tapped her gently on the shoulder. Next to the gas lamp, a crack opened in the fabric of the worlds.

"How did you do that?" she wanted to know.

"You must move on now," he said.

"There?" Her eyes reflected star-speckled galaxies and a distant, warm light. "So..." she struggled for words, "...so wonderful."

She broke away from his embrace, her feet moving as if by themselves. Just one more step.

"I'm tired," he said, quietly surprised by this realization. "I don't want to be the doorkeeper any more".

"Come with me" she said, taking his hand.

"No. I have a job. I can't neglect it. Just imagine what would happen if I were no longer here. Overpopulation, famine, disasters."

"Oh. I didn't think of that." She looked into the infinity beyond the door. "It really is wonderful," she sighed softly.

"Yes," he said.

"What if someone else takes your position?"

"Nobody has ever wanted to do that. Because the person has to wait until someone takes over. Voluntarily."

She hugged him, held him tightly. She tapped him gently on the shoulder.

And he walked through the door.