

## Beauty in Repose

by Evil Dolly

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“Good morning, sleepyhead,” she said to me.

I didn't open my eyes, but I smiled and stretched on the expensive sheets, making a happy kitty-cat noise. I had slept well—as I always did in her bed—but I was so perfectly comfortable that I just didn't want to get up. I could smell her perfume. She waited patiently for me to rouse myself. She was always so good to me. She lifted my arm and kissed the back of my hand. I finally opened my eyes to see her sitting on the edge of the bed looking down at me. I had felt her get up some time earlier, but she was still wearing her lavender silk nightgown. She always looked so well made up. I don't think I had ever even seen her without makeup on. I guess that was just how she was brought up. It wouldn't have mattered to me if she didn't look like some retro icon of femininity. I would have loved her, anyway.

I never would have believed a step-away-from-homeless, runaway, part-time call girl like me would ever find herself in love with someone like her, or vice versa, but there it was. I still didn't know what she saw in me. I guess you really can't help who you fall in love with. I hardly even had any education, but I could hold up my end of a conversation reasonably well. Thanks to my voracious appetite for romance novels, I had a decent vocabulary. I was all about romance, and so was she. Maybe that's what she liked about me. She doted on me, let me live in her wonderful house, showered me with presents, and treated me like a princess. But that wasn't the reason I stayed, enduring her strange games. Well, maybe at first. There are worse things than having a sugar mommy. But before long, I stayed because I simply wanted to be near her. The past few months I had spent in her house were the happiest of my life.

“You have a big day ahead of you. You certainly don't want to waste it all in bed, do you?” she asked.

“Mmmaybe,” I said, stretching my arms above my head in what I hoped was an alluring pose.

“Of course you don't. Have you given any thought to what to I asked? Have you decided what you want for your last meal?” she asked with a slight smirk.

“Umm, how about lobster,” I suggested.

“Lobster? Where did *you* ever get a taste for lobster?”

“I dunno. I just want some. Pleeese?” I pouted. “It is my last meal and all.”

She rolled her eyes. “Alright, alright.” She took my hands and pulled me out of the bed. “How can I say no? I do want this day to be perfect for you. Go and get cleaned up. Lobster, hmm? I don’t trust myself to cook that properly. I’ll have to order out.”

I went into her marble-tiled bathroom to enjoy a steaming hot shower. As I lathered my hair, I had to smile ruefully at the mention of her having to order out. She almost always ordered out. She had never taken me out anywhere—or even let me leave the house—since she had picked me up off a street corner in her big, black car. Not that I would have wanted to leave, but she didn’t even have a telephone or anything. Who doesn’t have a telephone these days? She had come right out and told me she didn’t want a soul knowing I was here. She didn’t want me seen by so much as a delivery boy.

I guess I could understand why. Women of her class usually didn’t parade their sex toys around town, especially not the female ones. That’s just not good for a reputation. I could accept that. But just because I could understand the reasons why didn’t mean it didn’t hurt a little. I wanted to be *more* than that to her, I really did. Besides, I had to pride myself on one thing; I wasn’t *that* easy to replace. How many other people would be as willing to play her weird games? But who was I kidding... how long could this kind of luck last? Either she would get used to having me around and someday not be embarrassed by me, or she would get tired of me and send me back where she found me. What could else could I do but follow her rules and enjoy it while lasted?

For my part, I tried to help out by cleaning up around the house, tried my best to endear myself to her, and learned not to ask too many questions. Questions about her past relationships, about why she had no phones, or why she sometimes came to bed late at night, smelling of dirt, with grass stains on her nightgown. She was eccentric and I accepted that. Who was I to judge? Besides, I was in no way going to rock the boat.

She pampered me all that morning. She often doted over me, but not to that extent. She made a glorious breakfast for me. I was feeling fine, and she was in a pretty good mood, too. This day was weeks in the planning, and I knew she had been working hard on getting everything ready. Of course it didn’t matter to me if everything wasn’t perfect, but the details were important. The realism was

a big part of the fun for her.

Late morning I was watching tv when she came in from doing something outside. She seemed shocked to find me on the sofa. "Is this really how you want to spend your day?" she asked.

"I didn't want to miss my shows."

She shook her head. "No, that won't do. Come here. We're going outside. It's a beautiful day out and I don't want you to waste it in front of the tv."

"Alright, if you say so," I sighed, a little annoyed. "I don't know why you're making such a big deal out of it all."

"Not make a big deal of it? This is your big day! You won't get another quite like this and I want you to make the best of it. I want you to have good memories."

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry. I just forgot how much it meant to you, and all." I gave her a hug. "Yes, I want this to be a very special day," I insisted.

We went out to her huge backyard. Though, I guess you don't call a place like that a backyard. Probably something more formal, like 'the grounds' or something. But anyway, it was beautiful. The whole place was like one big garden, with stone walking paths winding through flowers, bushes, and trees, with those cute, little bridges going over streams and ponds full of those Japanese fish whose name I could never remember. Was it 'coins'? There were little benches, gazebo things, and stairs, and here and there were statues. Not regular statues, though. She told me those were replicas of actual grave monuments. Lots of crying angels and things like that. Morbid, I guess, but that was just part of her obsession, so I wasn't going to complain. I thought the were kind of cool, even if they were a little creepy when it started to get dark out.

And in the back of the garden, hidden by trees and surrounded by a low, rock wall that was topped with a wrought iron fence was a sort of greenhouse. She always kept the gate locked, though, and I had never been inside. She spent a lot of time in there alone, but I didn't begrudge her. We all need our privacy, sometimes. She had told me it was her private place—the heart of the garden—and that she wasn't ready to share it with me, yet. I hoped that she would, though. It would mean a lot to me to be allowed into her secret places.

She spoke to me as we walked along the path. "I want you to get in the right mind set. Pretend you would never be able to see any of this, ever again. Soak it all in as it were the last time. Take note of everything and recognize how fleeting and wonderful it all is. It is your last day on earth, after all," she added with a smile.

I was used to this sort of talk from her so it didn't disturb me. It was all role play. Just part of the game. Of course, I couldn't really imagine any day as my last day alive. Who thinks about things like that? You'd go nuts if you did that too much. Not at my age, anyway. I was still immortal. But what I could do was draw upon my fears by imagining that she was kicking me out, making me leave, and that this would be the last time I would get to see her magnificent garden and be in her company. That was enough to make everything more, well, poignant? I think that's the right word. But that feeling never lasts for long. Like when you see the most beautiful sunset you ever saw, but then life goes on and a little while later, you've completely forgotten it.

We strolled around and I paid extra attention to all the little things: the flowers, the leaves, the sounds of the fountain and the bird songs. It was good to be alive, especially when you didn't have to be alone. She hugged and touched me a lot, as if she wouldn't be able to soon. I suppose she was getting into the mind set, too. It was already starting to feel a lot more intense than the other times we had done this.

Later we made love, during which she was a lot more passionate than usual. She was usually fairly cool and passive during sex, but this time she practically devoured me. I couldn't complain about that. It was great. And if the sort of role play we did was enough to get her so turned on, how could it be a bad thing?

Afterwards, she held me and told me how much I meant to her, and how beautiful I was, and how she couldn't bear to have me leave. Hearing all that, and the way she said it, was enough to make me cry. This was getting a lot deeper than it ever had in the past. But then again, it was a special occasion.

Despite the intensity, I wouldn't have thought of calling it off. I trusted her completely. I knew she knew what she was doing. There had only been one accident during our games. It had been a few weeks earlier when she had wanted to give me knockout pills, just to see what it was like with me as still as possible. It didn't take much convincing for me to take them. Honestly, it had kind of excited me, just a little. The mix of anxiety and anticipation, knowing I would be powerless and totally oblivious while she could do anything she wanted to me... it was secretly exhilarating.

I took the pills, fell asleep, and awoke all tied up, with a headache from the pills and a lot of pain in my fingers and toes. She was very apologetic. She had wanted to tie me up, she explained, just to see my reaction when I woke up in bondage; but since I was out like a light and couldn't give her any feedback, she

must have had me tied too tightly for too long. She said I probably suffered a little nerve damage, but that I shouldn't worry, it wouldn't last long. I was pretty upset, but since she was so sorry, and since she bought me some gorgeous new outfits to make up for it, I couldn't stay mad for long. Weeks later, my fingernails and toenails still felt kind of funny and numb. She promised it would pass and that she would never be so careless again. She was always extremely careful and considerate with me after that, so I knew she must have meant it.

My last meal was delivered from some gourmet restaurant. I got to have lobster as a late lunch. I had never had it before. It wasn't as great as everyone made it sound, but it was still very tasty. It was almost more trouble than it was worth, though. I couldn't crack a lobster shell to save my life. She did it for me. She was always so patient with me. How could I not love her? She told me to savor every single bite and every sip of wine. In truth, I didn't have a taste for wine and didn't like it very much, but I didn't say anything. I didn't want to sound like I was bitching after all the trouble she went through. I certainly didn't want to spoil the mood.

Then it was time to start getting ready. She had me take a bath first. The water swirled with bubbles and expensive, scented oils. It was pure luxury. I had never taken such wonderful baths like that before she had taken me in. After she dried me with her thick, fluffy towels, she told me, "Now for the hard part."

"Oh, I hate this part!" I whined. "I was feeling so good. Can't we skip it? Isn't there another way?"

"I'm afraid not," she said. "It just wouldn't work otherwise."

The part I hated involved getting catheters in my butt and bladder. They didn't hurt so much as feel alien, strange, and way too invasive. I tried to keep my complaining to a minimum and let her do it, but I sure as hell wouldn't have put up with it for anyone else. And then, even worse, I had to swallow this thin, hollow tube that went in through my nose. She had practiced this on me before, so it went smoothly and I knew what to expect, but it still sucked. It made me gag a lot. There was no point in stopping her from doing it, though. We had already had the discussion about how it was important for the illusion and I had already agreed to it. In for a penny, in for a pound, as she sometimes said, though I'm still not sure how a penny could buy a pound of anything. I just hoped this would satisfy her needs for a while so that I wouldn't have to do this again any time soon.

She finished drying my hair and brushed it for the longest time, styling it into shiny, full waves. I had never been able to get it looking that nice on my

own. I had to turn my face this way and that as she did my makeup. She layered it on pretty heavy and the foundation was too pale for my skin, but it still turned out looking reasonably subdued and sophisticated. I loved being pampered like that. She painted my fingernails and toes with a thick, dark red enamel. Blowing on them to help them dry, she asked me if they felt any better. I replied that they didn't. They still felt numb. "I'm very sorry about that. They'll get better. It won't happen again, I promise," she told me and patted my hand lovingly. I smiled. She kissed each fingertip one at a time. I couldn't remember her being so tender. She finished me off with a few spritzes of perfume

Next came a flesh-tone bodysuit that was new to me. It covered me from my toes to my neck, and even had built in gloves. It was really thin and stretchy, and felt strangely repulsive to the touch—almost rubbery—like how old spandex feels when the elastic starts to rot. When I asked what it was for, she simply said it would keep me clean, since I wouldn't get to have another bath for a while.

"How's it work?" I wondered, pulling at the fabric.

"Don't tear it. It wasn't cheap. It's the latest thing," she said. "They take bio-engineered microbes and infuse fibers with them. It makes a cloth that absorbs odors, eats bacteria and dead skin cells, and then casts the detritus off as a fine powder. They normally use it for socks."

I looked down at myself. "You mean... you're saying... this thing is alive? Eww!"

"Stop that. It's perfectly harmless. Do you really want to be in that small space for days all unwashed and sweating?"

My skin crawled. I was holding my arms away from my body as though I had been doused in something disgusting. "Eww! Eww!" I saw her start to grin. "This isn't funny! Get this thing off me!"

"Would you relax? I was just teasing you. It's just thermal underwear to keep you comfortable. You should have seen your face," she said.

"Not funny," I repeated, scowling. She sure had me going. "Thermal? Do I need that?"

"Better to have it and not need it, since you won't be going anywhere."

"It still feels weird."

"You won't notice once you're dressed."

"I guess not," I said skeptically. "Okay, so why paint my nails if I'm going to be wearing this thing?" I wiggled my fingers in the bodysuit's gloves.

"Because I would know they weren't painted. I want to know that you're pretty and perfect... underneath it all," she replied. "Here, put these on. I

picked them out for you the other day.”

She gave me white lingerie to put on, brand new for the occasion. They were heavenly, as expensive as you could get in the way of underwear. It felt funny to put everything on over the bodysuit, though, especially the bra and the opaque stockings. I had to put on satin, opera length gloves that buttoned at the wrist. Sewn into the palm of the right glove was a squishy bump, like a squeeze bulb, and there was a wire that dangled out of the sleeve of the glove. It made a little clicking noise when I squeezed it hard enough. “That’s for later,” she said when she saw me squeezing it. “Something to keep yourself entertained.”

“Like a toy?” I wondered. Sometimes we used remote control toys when we played. That could make things more interesting.

“Something like that. Here, hold open your panties.”

“Aha!” She slid a slim, vibrating pad into the crotch of the panties. That must have been what the squeeze bulb was for, so that I could turn it on and pleasure myself. This was going to be interesting.

Next came three pairs of matching, full length slippers. I needed her help putting them on so they wouldn’t ruin my hair. “Jeez, why so many?” I asked. It felt like being in a nylon cocoon.

“Just a precaution. A certain amount of sweating is unavoidable. You really don’t want to soil this lovely dress, do you?” She went to her closet and pulled out a long dress wrapped in a dry-cleaning bag. She peeled off the plastic to reveal a glorious gown, all satin with lace panels. The sleeves were poofed at the shoulders and the skirt was ankle length with a short train. It was simple, form-fitting, and luscious. She had always had me wear something nice for these things, but never anything quite like this.

“It’s beautiful. But it kinda looks like a wedding gown.”

“An apt observation,” she said. “It *is* a wedding gown. It’s just for you. And before you go jumping to conclusions... well, yes, the symbolism is intended. If you go through with this for me, well, I’ll consider us far more than just lovers. I want you to be with me always. That is, if that’s what you want.”

“Oh, wow!” It was all I could think to say. I ran up and hugged her, crushing the gown between us. She really did want me! She wouldn’t make me leave, after all! Maybe she would even not be ashamed and let me be seen in public with her. She had better, after I went through all this just for her.

After a few moments, she untangled us and told me again how much she appreciated my willingness to do all of this for her. I blushed. Sliding into the dress was like sinking into a slick, cool cloud of absolute femininity. It was

heavier than it looked. She fastened the little pearl buttons on the sleeves, making them snug around my arms, and zipped the dress up the back. "I had a zipper installed back here in place of the buttons," she said. "Wouldn't want those buttons digging into your back, small though they may be." She was always so considerate of me.

She took the cutest little pair of satin bridal slippers and knelt to lace them on my feet. I looked at myself in the big mirror in the corner. I had never felt so lovely in all my life. There was the stupid tube in my nose, but other than that, I really did look like a bride on her wedding day. Just as I had imagined it. Well, it wasn't actually a wedding and the circumstances were truly bizarre, but it was still so romantic! I silently promised myself that I'd comport myself well and make her proud of me, and once this was over I'd make sure she never regretted her trust in me.

She turned me around and used a fabric knife to cut two slits in the back of the skirt and the layers of slips, just above the back of my knees. I whined that she was ruining it.

"You know why I'm doing it," she said "Don't worry, it's easy to repair. Here, face me." She placed the 'bracelets' on my wrists. They were covered with fat, padded sleeves of scrunched up satin to disguise them, but on the inside they were regular, steel handcuffs. She tightened them before pulling back the padding so she could lock them. That way they wouldn't tighten by accident and risk damaging my nerves again. She gave me a small bouquet of flowers to hold. They were fake but they looked very lifelike. She had sprayed them with her perfume so that I could smell her in them. That was a nice of her. She dressed in a simple, slinky black dress with matching gloves. We were in stark contrast.

"You're an absolute vision," she said. "It's time. Are you ready?"

I nodded with nervous excitement. I grew even more nervous when she lead me out of the house and into the backyard. I wasn't expecting to go outside for this. Along the winding path we went until we got to the greenhouse that was always locked, only this time the gate was standing open. "In here?" I wondered.

"Oh yes. I'm ready to share it with you. I have it all set up."

Giddy, I stepped through the door and gasped. It was amazing in there. On shelves along the walls were growing all kinds of beautiful flowers. There were lots of lilies. Blooming creepers hung down from the ceiling. They were all so fragrant. Around the edge was a stone path, but center of the floor was actually a thick grass, though most of it was covered by lumpy drop cloths. To

keep us from getting dirty, I supposed. There were other things, like cabinets beneath the shelves, a stack of sod, and the usual gardening tools leaning against the walls. I didn't notice any of that. My attention was on the empty casket sitting on a low, cloth-draped bier, framed by funerary floral arrangements. The casket was a mauve-colored metal, with fancy brass corner pieces. The lid was wide open, showing off the shiny satin lining. My knees went weak at the sight of it. This was where I was to spend my weekend.

Shortly after I had come to live with her, she had introduced me to this strange fetish of hers. She liked to see live women laying still in coffins, as if for a viewing. It did kind of freak me out at first, but she explained that it was perfectly harmless, and she showed me pictures of other people doing it. She said it wasn't about necrophilia or fantasies about a corpse, just that the image itself was beautiful. She said that for her, the sight of a pretty young woman in repose was beautiful, sad, and even somewhat arousing. The fact that it was a live woman playing dead made it 'safe'; no guilt involved and everyone was happy in the end. It was strange thing to get turned on about, but I had done a lot weirder things for people, from time to time, just to have a roof over my head. She even had one of her spare rooms in her house done up like a funeral parlor, with a big, black casket and everything. If it had been anyone else, I would have said no, but I was already falling for her. I decided I'd give it a try if it would make her happy.

It was eerie lying in a casket the first time. I fidgeted a lot and that tended to spoil the illusion for her, but overall it wasn't that bad. Kind of cozy, really. I almost cried when I saw the pictures she had taken of me, though. They looked so real, and it made me sad to see myself as if I was dead. But I couldn't stop looking at them. I was fascinated by the way I looked so beautiful, the way she had dressed me and made me up. It made me feel like an actress in scene from some tragic romance, which was cool. I guess there was also an element of excitement, too. It was like toying with death in some way, and given my history of risky behavior, that appealed to me. After that, we did it once or twice a week. A lot of the time, I just fell asleep in the casket, which was fine by her, since it meant I wouldn't fidget. Except for when I would start to snore.

She liked to role play, too. It was an emotional rush for her to pretend that it actually was my last day alive, and then pretend I was dead in the coffin. It got so intense for her sometimes and she would get very emotional. And then, when it was over, it would be like I had come back from the dead and she would welcome me back and cover me with kisses. It was nice to know that someone

would miss if I was gone and then be so happy that I wasn't, even if it was all just pretend.

It wasn't long before she started using bondage as a part of it. She loved the fact that once I was tied up in the casket, I was totally powerless. That added something to it for me, too. It made it riskier. Made it sexier. Feeling helpless, the way I did growing up, was rarely a good thing. But with her, helplessness could be exciting. Besides, it cut down on my wiggling. She did mess with my head sometimes by saying she wouldn't let me up. Sometimes she even closed the lid and pretended to lock it. I didn't like that very much. I knew she wasn't serious, but there was always that part of my mind that got a little frightened. I had to admit, though, that it was a hell of a rush.

That all lead up to the day in greenhouse. This was going to be the most elaborate scene yet. I had spent most of a day and night in the casket before, but this time was for the whole weekend, and maybe even a little bit longer if I could take it. Other times I kept 'breaking the mood' by having to go to the bathroom or needing to eat; that's what all the tubes were for, so that I wouldn't have to get up or even sit up. I would be in repose for days. Even if I didn't like it, I'd be tied up and not have a choice. That was kind of an exciting thought. Though she did promise she would let me up if I got too uncomfortable. I knew it wasn't going to be easy spending all that time in one position, but I was determined to stay there as long as I possibly could and not spoil it for her. Especially not since she had put me in a wedding dress for the occasion.

"But why are we out here? What's wrong with inside? Why the new coffin?"

"This just seemed like the perfect place," she said. "What better place to do this than in my secret place. And don't you like the new one? That old black one has seen so many 'bodies' in the past. This one I got just for you, and nobody else will ever lie in it."

"But wasn't it expensive?"

"That's not important. Besides, this one will last a long time. It has all the amenities of home. Even the pad is a special foam that will prevent you from getting any kind of sores from not moving for so long."

I walked across the covered, grassy floor to get a better look. I could see the connections for the food and waste tubes imbedded in the satin lining and going through to the outside of the casket. Those were so the lid could be completely shut without worrying about blocking the lines. And there, hidden inside the cabinets, were the machines that would do all the work. The was a

pocket-like sleeve with a rectangular cut-out sewn into the lid's lining, but I didn't think to ask what that was for in all the excitement. There were seven nylon restraints that were somehow fixed to the floor of the casket and passed up through the satin pad. They were covered in satin sleeves that matched my dress. They were flat and wide, so they wouldn't cut into me or show beneath the dress. The idea was that I would be restrained without *looking* like I was restrained. It had all been discussed beforehand, but seeing the whole setup was something else. "Wow." I looked up at the ceiling and the trees outside. Something had just occurred to me. "Uh, wait..."

"Wait? It's a little late for that," she said in good humor.

"I mean, am I going to be all alone out here at night? Outside? All by myself?" I shuddered at the thought of being tied up at, practically out in the open, while she was far away in her bedroom. "I don't want to be away from you."

"That's sweet. I promise you'll never be far away from me. Just picture how you'll look in here, under a ceiling of glass, beneath the stars. It's so romantic, don't you think? And, technically, you're not outside. Besides, the lid will be closed for the night. You won't see or hear a thing. It wouldn't make a difference if you were far out in the woods or in the same room as me."

"Yeah, but... *I'd* know. What if something, you know, goes wrong?" I asked. "What if I run out of air?"

"Nothing's going to go wrong. Don't get yourself worked up. There's going to be air flowing through the casket, and it has backups. It's redundant. I've explained all of this. You won't run out of air. There's even a microphone inside the lining. I'll be able hear you if anything comes up. You're perfectly safe now," she said soothingly. "Trust me."

"I do," I insisted. I tried to put that stuff out of my mind. If anything *did* come up. She could be out here almost as quickly as she could if I was in the casket in the funeral parlor themed room inside.

"Are you ready to go to your eternal rest, my love?"

I turned to face her. I let out a shuddery breath. "Y-yes."

She took my cuffed hands and placed them over her head so that we were embracing. "I need you to get in the right frame of mind. Imagine this is the very last time you'll be someone's arms. The very last time you'll ever kiss anyone's lips. Imagine that the memory of this kiss will have to suffice forever. One last time for all time."

I did as she said. I kissed her, desperately, as if to say goodbye forever. I

melted against her. My heart was pounding. It was so great to be wanted by somebody that much.

When we finally broke the kiss, she sighed. "My, my. Yes," she murmured. "That was definitely one to remember."

After a few more quiet whispers of encouragement, she took me to my coffin. I leaned against her, needing her support. I felt light-headed, but that wasn't unusual once I got deep into the scene. She helped me in and I stretched out on the satin pad, resting my head on the satin pillow. She told me to get comfortable, since I was going to be there for a while. I laid there, clutching my bouquet to my chest as I stared at the clear ceiling and hanging flowers. The sun was about the set, and the clouds were spectacular.

She reached under me to smooth out my dress so that it wasn't bunched up. She lifted up the front of the skirt and slips so she could have access to my legs and the slits she had cut in back of the dress. She connected the tubes to my catheters to the waste tubes that went between my legs and out to the bottom end of the casket. Through the slits she fished out a pair of woven nylon restraints, one for each leg. I breathed heavily as I felt her make them snug around my thighs, just above my knees. There were another two restraints for my ankles, but these were far enough down that they didn't need to pass through the dress; it could just be hiked up a little on the underside without showing from above. Once my legs were restrained, she stroked my thighs lovingly. I sighed and looked up at the clouds again. It would start getting dark soon. "How are you doing? Are you nervous?"

"Oh, I'm okay," I replied shakily.

"You're doing fine. Now your arms." Satin, padded restraints went around my upper arms and were made snug. They forced my upper arms to lie my sides, almost flat on the pad, and the prettily disguised handcuffs I wore kept my hands close together just below my breasts. Finally, she spread my hair out over the satin pillow and secured the last restraint around my neck. It even had a cameo on the front, so it would look more like broad, satin choker than a collar. "Alright. Now. Struggle."

So I did. I strained and pulled at the restraints as if trying to get free. It wasn't just to test the effectiveness of the bondage, but it also let me prove to myself that I really wasn't going anywhere. I couldn't lift my legs off the pad at all, though I could rock them from side to side a little. My butt could wiggle a little; all those layers of satin and nylon made me feel almost frictionless against the pad. I could turn my head and raise it enough to look down at myself, but

the collar kept me from sitting up. My fists could pump a few inches up and down my midriff, but I couldn't reach my breasts, much less reach my face or the collar around my neck. All I could really do comfortably with my hands was rest one on top of the other, as I did when I settled down in a bed to go to sleep. I was truly bound inside a casket and the only way I was going to get free was when she let me loose. It was enough to make me wet. My sex life sure had changed a lot in a few months.

"Perfect. Just relax and stay in the mood. I'm almost done." She arranged my hair to fall naturally around my head. It completely covered the pillow.

I closed my eyes and tried to keep my heart from racing. A minute later I opened to see her using a needle and thread on the hem of the dress, down by my ankles. "What's that for?"

"I'm just sewing some of the dress to the pad. I have it all nicely arranged, and I know you're going to start wiggling sooner or later. I want it stay perfect and not get mussed."

There was no point complaining about it. She was a perfectionist when it came to that stuff. She always wanted everything to stay just as she liked it. I had gotten used to that about her. At least this way I would have to worry about the dress getting bunched between my thighs or riding up if I moved. Once she was finished with the stitching, she closed the lower half of the casket lid and patted it.

"All done. I think that's everything. Is there anything I've forgotten?" she asked.

"I don't think so."

"Are you comfortable?"

"Yes."

"Alright then. It's time." She rubbed the back of her fingers on my cheek. "Be quiet, now." That meant it was time to play dead. I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and slowly exhaled. Almost immediately, my nose began to itch. It did that every damn time.

I had gotten pretty good at not moving. It was just a matter of letting my whole body relax and letting my mind wander. There I was, a pretty girl tragically cut down in her prime, laid out like a princess, her beauty frozen in time. Surrounded by flowers and the affection and sorrow of those who loved me. Never to age, never to move. I was like Sleeping Beauty. Except I wouldn't be brought back to life by the kiss of some prince charming. Only *her* kiss could awaken me. I loved that fantasy.

I could hear her moving, and sometimes she would say things to me, like

how lovely I looked or something like that, but I wasn't supposed to answer. Sometimes I would zone out or even doze off while she was talking, and I would miss some of what she said. I was brought out of a reverie about the passionate sex that afternoon by sound of glass clinking against glass. I realized she was drinking wine. That was strange, because she never drank while I was I tied up like that. She always said it wasn't safe.

That's when things started to get weird.

"Are you asleep? It's hard to tell. You're very good at this, when you want to be," she said. "Don't mind me. I'm just drinking in your beauty. So peaceful. You know, you'll again never be as perfect as you are right here, right now. Isn't that sad? This perfect moment. This perfect love. One day you'll want to leave me and all I'll be left with is memories and a broken heart. Yes. Just like all the others."

I wanted to assure her that wasn't the way it was, that I didn't intend to leave. I didn't want to upset her by moving too soon.

"But no, you won't hurt me like that, will you? I won't let you. You're mine forever. You know what my problem is? I love beauty too much. I fall in love too easily. It's my weakness. Falling head over heels for every beautiful young thing, and that's a terrible fate. You pretties don't know about *real* love. Passionate, obsessive love that demands you do crazy things for it. No, your hearts are wild and free. You can't be bothered." She took another drink. "You go into people's lives, make them fall in love with you, and then move along once you've gotten what you want. Skipping blithely from one bed to the next. A trail of broken hearts. And still I can't help falling in love again and again. You take my love, my gifts, sometimes steal, and then you disappear, leaving me alone again. Always alone in the end. That's me."

I couldn't understand why she was saying all this. She had never talked about her past relationships before. She was always secretive about that. It made me sad to think that she had been hurt like that so many times, but it made me even more sad that she thought I was anything like those others. I had to say something. My eyes fluttered open, the harsh brightness of reality briefly stunning me, as it always did.

"Oh, there you are. Did I hit a nerve?" She was sitting in a chair with her cheek resting on her arm, which was resting along the edge of the casket.

"W-what?" Normally she would have gotten mad if I opened my eyes too soon, but this time she didn't seem to care. "No, I... time out. Why are you saying this stuff? Are you talking about me? I'm not like that. I love you."

She smiled, her hand dropping into the casket to stroke the edge of my gown with her fingertips. "That's always nice to hear. And maybe you even mean it. But sooner or later you'd grow tired of my morbid proclivities, or your flighty heart would find another nest, and you'd be gone, too."

I groaned in frustration. I had been in such a good mood, now she had gotten drunk and all... maudlin. She was making herself depressed about things that weren't even true while I was helplessly tied up. Talk about bad timing. "Would you stop it? You've got it all wrong. I'm not going anywhere."

"Oh, you've got that right, sugar pie." She sat up. "That's the whole idea. Years ago, you see, it all just became too much. Everything would start out so perfect, and then it would all fall to pieces. Every time. I couldn't stand it anymore. And then it became clear. I knew what I had to do to keep them from leaving me. Ever."

"You're starting to scare me."

"I'm sorry. I didn't want to upset you. Am I sounding a little crazy?" she chuckled. "I've wondered. If you're aware that your actions are crazy, does that mean you're not crazy? Or does it make you extra crazy?"

"Please, I don't understand what you're talking about."

She stood up and leaned over the casket. "I'm talking about love. Undying love. Surely you must have read about it in those little romance novels of yours."

"Can't we, uh, talk about this later? Like, when I'm not tied up? Please don't get upset. Don't you want to enjoy this?"

"Oh. I am enjoying this." She looked up and the ceiling, then back at me. She looked energized. "Though I don't expect you'll be enjoying it before long. But I want you to know that, no matter what happens, I love you so much. I truly am grateful for your cooperation in all this. It makes everything so much easier."

"I don't get this. Why wouldn't I cooperate?" I asked.

A strange smile played at her lips. "Because I'm going to bury you alive," she said.

I stared at her, shocked, but only for a second. Then I understood. So *that's* what all this was about. It was just part of the game! A mind game. I knew she was joking. I guessed I would have to play along. If I didn't, she would probably get mad at me for ruining the scene. "Why would you want to do something like that?" I asked coyly.

"Well, think about it. You'd be hidden away, a concealed treasure that was

all mine and no one else could ever touch again. No one else could ever have your heart. You wouldn't have a choice but to let me love you forever and ever. And, of course, I would visit your grave all the time. I would be so devoted to your memory."

I tried to keep from laughing. "But I don't think I'd be very happy like that."

"Oh stop being selfish," she scolded. "Don't you see what a sublime act of sacrifice this is on your part? To become a shrine dedicated to eternal love. Now *that*... my dear... is romance."

"Sounds great," I said. "But I'd rather not be dead to do it."

"Who said anything about dying?"

"It's kind of hard to be buried and live through it," I replied.

She took another drink and waved her hand. "Death is a relative condition. You'd live forever in my heart."

"Yeah, well--"

She leaned forward. "Say it. Say you want to be buried for me so that you can never leave. I want to hear you say it."

"Uh..."

"Come on," she said. "Humor me."

Under different circumstances, I might have said it, just to play along, but I was just too uncomfortable with her drinking and the things she had been saying. "No. That's too weird."

She frowned, then shrugged. "Was worth a shot. Doesn't matter. You'll be buried, anyway."

I had to laugh. I couldn't help it. This was definitely the strangest funeral scene we had ever done. Except she wasn't laughing with me. She looked dead serious. My laughter faded. "You... you *are* kidding, right?"

After an uncomfortable pause, she smiled and patted my cheek. "Of *course* I'm kidding. Just relax. Want to see something amazing?"

I heaved a sigh of relief. She had said things like that while I was in a coffin before, but her drinking had definitely given her notion of 'kidding' a cruel twist. I had never known that about her. I didn't like it. "What am I supposed to see?" I could barely peer over the edge of the casket.

"I know, just hang on. Patience, child. First, let me get this out of the way." She reached into the casket to connect the flexible feeding tube, the one that passed through the casket near my head to the tube in my nose. It made an audible *click* when it connected. She arranged the tube so that it curved down the

side of my face and disappeared under the satin pillow. I shook my head a little in annoyance. I wasn't sure I wanted to stay out there long enough to need that thing, not with the way she'd been acting.

She then pulled a laptop from a bag and set it up on a bench that was cluttered with empty pots and gardening tools. I tried to relax like she said, but the mood I had achieved had been shattered. She had never been so chatty during a scene before. I almost wanted to call it all off and try it again another time when she was more herself, but that would mean having to get those stupid tubes put in again.

She had connected some cables to the laptop and I could just barely see the screen. It looked like there was a webcam window on it. To the laptop she plugged in a small, flat panel monitor, barely seven inches across. She brought the monitor to the casket, sat it on my belly and propped it against the closed, bottom half of the casket lid so that I could get a clear view. "Pretty fancy, don't you think?"

"Hey," I said, "that's me!" On the screen was a live video, the same view that was pictured in the laptop's window. It was a view from the greenhouse as seen from above. I looked up, and there it was—a kind of security camera mounted up high on the wall opposite me. I hadn't noticed it before. I wiggled my fingers and saw the tiny, immaculately-dressed figure in the screen do the same. It was weird. I had seen pictures she had taken of me while I was in repose, but had never seen myself in a coffin as it happened. "Oh my god. You're not, like, showing this on the internet, are you?"

She laughed. "Oh my, no. No, this is just for you and me."

"Huh. That's cool, I guess, but why?"

"Because I wanted you to see this." She went around gathering up the sheets that were on the ground until they were rolled up in a fat bundle in her arms. She tossed them out the door. The newly exposed center of the room was covered with a lush, green grass. There was something on the ground, lined up with the head of my casket, but what I saw didn't make any sense. My stomach tightened. It *looked* like a pair of low, slanted headstones spaced several feet apart.

"W-what? What am I looking at?"

Silently, she went to the laptop. A few seconds later the view on my screen zoomed in closer to the ground. They *were* headstones. The surfaces were made of polished rose granite. One read *Carrie* and the other one *Jessica*, but neither had last names. Below each name were two dates, a birth year and a passing

year. They were both young, like me. The death date under *Jessica* was a year ago, and the one under *Carrie* was two years old. I shook my head in confusion. Before I could think of anything to say, I watched as she got down on the ground and tenderly kissed one of the headstones.

I gasped nervously at the sight of it. On the screen I saw her turn her head towards the sound and look at my casket. She just looked at it, not saying a word, all the while tracing the engraved name of the headstone with one of her fingernails. "Isn't it wonderful?" she finally said, breaking the silence. I wasn't sure what she was referring to.

"Who are...?"

"These are my lovers, of course. The best of them, anyway. Naturally, I can't keep *every* pretty thing that catches my eye. That would just be impractical. Years ago it occurred to me that the only way to keep them from leaving me was to make it so they couldn't. Now they have no choice but to let me love them. As I said, your cooperation makes this so much more pleasant. Carrie would never let me tie her up. I had no choice but to knock her out. You should have seen her expression when she woke up tied to a casket." She chuckled. "She thought she could steal from me. But now she'll always get to wear my jewelry that she coveted so much. That's my little gift to her." She looked back at me. "Just between you and me, I think you're the sweetest. So eager to please. I wish I could keep you with me in a way that I could still touch you, feel your eager warmth against my skin. But don't let them know that. They might get jealous."

They had to be props, I decided, placed there just to fuck with my head, and she was just reading a script. Elaborate props. They *had* to be, because if they weren't...

"I'd like to get up now, please," I said in a small voice. "You're scaring me and you said I could get up if I really wanted to, and I'd like to get up now if that's okay."

"But the scene isn't over, dear," she said, getting up. She took the flat panel screen away and placed it on the bench. Then she raised the lower half of the lid, which was a good sign. She didn't reach for the restraints, though. Picking up my bouquet, she inhaled its perfume. "If I let you out, what would you do?"

"I-I don't know. Go to bed?"

"Would you leave me?" she asked, speaking into the bundle of silk flowers.

"No!" I insisted. "Why do you keep saying that? I keep telling you I love you, but--"

"I love you, too."

"But can't we talk about this when you're not drunk?" I asked. That made her laugh, but I didn't think any of this was funny. "I know you're doing all this just to freak me out," I said, "and it's working. I'm freaked out. I want to get up."

She shook her head. "You're not leaving me."

"I never wanted to! I just--" I strained against the handcuffs. Then I remembered the safe word she given me in case anything ever got too intense or uncomfortable for me. I had never had to use it. "Red. Okay? Let me up now."

"Be serious," she said with a touch of irritation.

"Red! Red, red!" I cried. "I'm not happy!"

"But you're so beautiful. Oh, I am going to miss that lovely face. You have no idea."

My gloved fists were clenched. Honestly, I was sure she was still teasing me, goading me into something. She *had* to be. This was all some elaborate head fuck. What made me furious was that she had told me she would always stop if anything got too intense or painful or scary for me. She said all ever had to do was tell her and she'd stop. But now she was ignoring me. She was betraying my trust, and that hurt so terribly much. I thought if I could trust anyone in this world, it was her.

"I. Want. Up. *Now!*"

"Get up, then," she said with a smirk, "if you can."

I gaped at her. She had never said anything to me with such cold disdain before. Why was she being so mean to me? What if she really was serious? What if she really was intending to bury me in there? Of *course* she wasn't serious – that would be insane! – but *what if?* My barely-controlled panic bubbled to the surface at the mere thought. I fought against the restraints as hard as I could. My legs were completely useless; I couldn't even kick a little with them tied down flat like that. I pulled against the cuffs and arm straps until it hurt. I clawed at the air. Finally, I sank back into the pad, gasping for air. I was trapped. In the end, all I had done was exhaust myself and given myself some bruises.

She had just stood there and watched it all, as if she was enjoying a mildly amusing comedy. She looked down at the headstones. "Don't feel bad. They didn't fair any better."

"Stop it, *stop it!*" I burst into tears. Huge, shuddering sobs racked my body. "You lied to me. You said I could trust you. You made me trust you. Everyone always hurts me. Now you're doing it, too! Everyone always lies to meeee," I wailed tearfully. "I can't trust *anybody!*"

She blinked as if startled, as though my cries had finally gotten through to her. For the first time that evening, she looked genuinely uncomfortable and self-conscious. "Stop it. You're making me feel guilty here." She gave a nervous, little laugh. "I-I'm not doing this to hurt you, sweetheart. I'm not. I'm doing this for *us*. If I could do this without making you sad, I would, but there's no other way. But don't you see? This... this is a good thing I'm doing. I'm going to keep you safe. This way no one can ever hurt you or lie to you again. You won't have to worry about any of that anymore! You don't even have to worry about growing old, or being unloved. You'll be free from all that!"

I shook my head in denial. "I just wanna goooo," I cried.

"Oh, honey, don't cry. I'm sorry. Please don't cry. I hate it when you cry," she said. She sat down near the head of the casket so that she could lean over and stroke my cheek. "It's all right. Shhh."

"Please tell me this isn't really happening," I whimpered. "This isn't real. It's just a game."

"Relax, sweetheart." She brought her lips close to my ear and whispered, "*It's just a game.*"

"Really? You promise?"

"I promise," she said.

"W-what about those h-headstones?" I asked, my voice catching from the sobs.

"They're not real," she said. "Just a game, baby, like you said. I'm sorry I said those mean things, I just got carried away."

I was so relieved I could hardly catch my breath. It was still just a scene, after all. A scene that had gone horribly bad for me, but still just make believe. Tears continued to trickle down the sides of my face. She wiped them away and kept stroking my cheeks for a long time, murmuring in my ear, telling me it would be okay and that she was sorry for scaring me. That was more like the woman I knew. After a couple of minutes, my breathing finally began to slow down. She had begun to sing something under breath as she gazed off into the distance:

*"Go to sleep my darling, close your little eyes.*

*Angels are above us, peeping through the skies.  
God is in his heaven, and he watch doth keep.  
Time for pretty darlings to go to sleep."*

It was a lullaby. I could only guess it was meant to soothe me, which was nice of her, but I had never heard her sing to me before. The fact that it was a lullaby sung to a girl in a coffin made it downright creepy. I was feeling a little more calm, but I also felt heartsick. I wondered if I could ever completely trust her again after she had intentionally frightened me and let me freak out to the point of screaming. Also, it hadn't escaped my attention that she *still* hadn't untied me. "Um..."

She looked at me and nodded. "I know. I'll let you up, but before that, can you do something for me?"

"I don't know," I said wearily. All I wanted to get up, get those tubes out of me, and go to bed. It wasn't so much to ask. "What is it?"

"I know you want out of there, but do this one last thing for me, okay? Before we end this? I just want to see how it looks in this setting and then I'll let you up. Everything's going to be fine. Okay, angel?" she asked. I mumbled something noncommittal, which she took as a yes. "Excellent. This will only take a minute. I just need to get this stuff organized first, and then we're done. I know I went to far tonight and I'm sorry. Maybe you're right. Perhaps I shouldn't have been drinking."

"I don't wanna wait." But what else could I do? Start shouting again? I couldn't see her, but could hear her doing something with the computer. She returned with that flat panel monitor and slid it into the pocket that was sewn into the casket lining's lid. The screen fit perfectly into pocket's rectangular cut-out, though it wasn't showing anything at the moment. She plugged in some wires in here and there. "Please....." I began. I was so fucking confused. Her tone of voice, her expression, even her body language said that she was genuinely concerned about me. Everything except her actions. She still wasn't untying me!

"Just putting this away, I don't want it to get damp leaving it out here. I never got to show you what it was for," she said. "But that doesn't matter. Here, this is what I wanted you to try on."

From a velvet bag she pulled a face mask made of what looked like porcelain. The cool, statuesque features were those of a young woman. The mask was improbably beautiful, so much so that I was sure it had to modeled

from someone's imagination rather than any girl's actual face. Its lips were painted matte red and they had a narrow opening between them. It also had eye and nose holes, but the eye holes were covered with ovals of some fine, white, stiffened mesh, giving the impression of closed eyelids. There were straps attached at four points that were meant to go around the head and hold the mask on. On each side, at the edges, were narrow metal posts that stuck backwards. If someone was wearing the mask, it looked like the posts would go across their ears or something. "Isn't it perfect?" she asked me.

"I don't get it. Who is that supposed to be?"

She turned it to face her. "Just someone from long ago. I think of it as the epitome of a nearly unattainable, youthful femininity. Don't you think?"

"I don't know," I said miserably.

"I want to see you wear it. That's the last thing."

"What? No! It's weird."

"It's only for a minute," she insisted. "I just want to see how it looks on you like this. Come on now, you agreed."

"I didn't agree to anything! Noooo," I moaned as she ignored my protests and pressed it to my face anyway.

It was surprisingly heavy and the inside was covered with that same rotten elastic-like material as the bodysuit I was wearing. My eyelashes brushed uncomfortably against the mesh panels over the eyes, but I could see alright through them. The tube in my nose was pressed against my cheek. She had me lift my head so that she could connect that straps that held it on. One attached at the temples of the mask and went around the back of my head, while the other was attached below the ears and went across the base of my skull. The two straps were linked together in the back. It would be impossible to take the mask off unless those straps were undone. She carefully arranged my hair so that the straps were hidden.

"I don't think I like this. Can you take it off, please? Hey, did you just lock it on? Wait, what're you doing?" I demanded, my voice muffled by the mask. She was taking the earrings out of my ears—the nice, pearl earrings she had given me as a gift a couple of months ago.

"Hush, hush, hush," she said quietly. "You're okay. I need to make sure it fits okay. Just one second." She stretched out my earlobes and slid those metal posts—the ones that stuck backwards from the mask right—right through my piercings. It didn't hurt, but it definitely didn't feel great, either. She felt around and pressed these things—they felt kind of like the backs of earrings, only

larger—onto the ends of the posts behind my ears, where they stuck with a loud *click*.

“I don’t like this!” I said again, as if she hadn’t heard me the first time, through the slit between the mask’s lips.

“It’s okay, I’m finished. It’s done,” she assured me as she stepped away from the casket. She clasped her hands to her chest delight. “Oh my. That’s perfection. Oh, honey, you just don’t know how precious you look. Wait ‘til you see. You won’t believe it.”

I couldn’t see myself, but I could imagine it pretty well. “Why am I wearing this?” I asked, on the verge of tears. Why wouldn’t she just let me go? “Oh, god, I don’t care why, just let me up! Ow.” I discovered it hurt to open my mouth at all while wearing the mask. The chin of the thing went under my own, and when I moved my jaw it pulled the entire mask down a just little, which tugged the posts in my piercings painfully. I could only comfortably talk with my mouth closed.

“Why? I’m glad you asked. Well, you know,” she began conversationally, “death masks have gone in and out of favor for centuries.”

“Death masks?” I asked, horrified.

“Some were simply plaster casts made of a person’s face immediately after they died and kept as a keepsake, as a remembrance. Others were sculpted likenesses placed on the faces of the deceased before they were buried, so that others could picture their loved one with a perfect face for all time, rather than think of the inevitable corruption underneath. Isn’t that a nice thought?”

I began to cry again. How could she say such things when she knew how on edge I was? I had never been claustrophobic, but the weight of the mask was getting me there, and fast. “Why are you telling me this?”

She went on as if she hadn’t heard me. “Some have even become collector’s items, as strange as that sounds. For instance, this particular mask was copied after one that came into my hands years ago. It was actually what started my fascination with these morbid scenes. It was made from a casting of a young woman’s face who had died at a tragically young age almost two hundred years ago. I thought her face was so impossibly beautiful; it summed up everything I find lovely about girls such as yourself, darling. I thought it was so tragic that she should die at the peak of her youth and beauty, but I also thought it was so wonderful that her beauty could be preserved forever.”

The revulsion from the thought of wearing a living bodysuit was nothing compared to this. “W-what? *What?* You have me wearing a dead woman’s

face?"

"And that's not all. When she was disinterred years later to relocate the grave, something common in those days, they found claw marks on the inside of the coffin. She had apparently been in an illness induced coma and was mistaken for dead, then she was buried alive. Can you imagine what it was like for her, waking up like that? That beautiful girl? It's so *terrible*," she said, but she didn't sound as if she thought it was that terrible at all. She sounded as if she thought it was hot.

I was speechless. "*Oh my god!*"

"Oh, darling, shhh." She leaned forward and took hold of my bound hands. Squeezing my fingers in her hands, she said, "It'll be okay. I'm sorry. I was just teasing. I just got caught up in the moment, is all. You know how I get. I'm so sorry. Don't get frightened again, okay?"

All I could do was cry. She was forcing me on an emotional roller coaster and I hated it. I couldn't tell if she was teasing or serious, or even which way was up.

"Oh, honey. I'm sorry. It's alright," she said, her voice full of sympathy. "You look so sweet right now. I just want *one* more thing. If you do it then I'll undo all these restraints, I'll take that mask off, and I'll take you inside where you can have another hot bath... I'll give you some of your favorite pistachio ice cream and you can go to sleep. We can put all of this behind us. Just one more thing. Just one thing. I just want to hear you say something. I need to hear you ask me to bury you."

I stared at her, barely able to see through the tears and the mesh over my eyes, slowly shaking my head back and forth. "Nnnooo, no no..." I pleaded. I didn't want to say that. It was the last thing I wanted to say. Mostly, I was afraid of sounding like I really meant it. Or, rather, I was afraid of her thinking that I sounded like I meant it.

"It's such a small thing. All you have to do is say it and then I'll let you out."

"You're just lying again," I sobbed. "If say it you still won't let me go."

"I promise I will. It'll be alright," she insisted. "Just say it and I'll let you up. Just those few simple words. Let me hear them." She squeezed my hands. "Just say it. Say the words. Say it. Please. Say it." She was almost begging me.

"You'll really let me up?" I sobbed, pitifully hopeful. She nodded. I still hesitated, but there was nothing else I could do. I had no choice but to give her what she wanted in hopes that she would be satisfied and let me go. I had

trouble speaking any louder than whisper. "Please... bury me?"

She closed her eyes. "Oh yes," she sighed. "That's perfect. You're the first one who asked me for it. I love you, precious. I will *always* love you for this." She stroked the surface of the mask again, looked me up and down, and stepped away. She went around the casket, picking up the drapes that covered the bier. As she did this, she began to quietly sing lullabies again.

I almost screamed in frustration. "W-wait, you said-!"

"There, there, my love. This will all be over soon." she replied before returning to her singing. She came around to the front, put something that looked like a small, ornate crank into the bottom end of the casket, and then casually shut the lower part of the lid.

I found my voice. "What are you doing? What are you *doing*?"

She was turning the little crank. "It's going to be alright, darling. Don't fret. I'm just locking it, that's all."

"No, don't! You said you'd let me up! You *promised!*" When were her games going to end? "Oh, god. Red, red, *red!* Oh fuck, I can't take this! I can't take this anymore! Time out, whatever, anything, just *stop it!*"

She frowned at the distress in my voice. "That's another benefit of the mask. I know you're upset, but for all appearances you look like an angel, so utterly serene. So lovely."

I squirmed in the restraints, making the cuffs bite into my wrists despite the padding. "You let me up. You let me up right *now!*"

"I told you that you'd never leave me. You're not going to break my heart. You're going to stay right here where I can always love you, even if I can't touch you. Oh, I'll want to, but I won't be able to. So bittersweet. It's almost masochistic on my part, but love is like that. It hurts, sometimes. But we can still touch... in our dreams." She started to close the upper lid. "Goodbye, my darling."

"No! Please! Nooooo!" My outstretched fingers reached for the narrowing slit of light. Then there was darkness. Complete, total darkness. I froze, not breathing, waiting for her to open the lid again with a *just kidding!* It didn't happen. I strained to hear something. There were some muffled thumps and rustling sounds.

"Let me out. Let me out. Let me out. *Let me out. Let me out!* You *promised to LET ME OUT!*"

Then there was light. But it wasn't the lid opening. It was the monitor that she placed on the inside of the lid, now suspended just inches above my face. I

could see it clearly enough through the mesh over my eyes. It was the view she had shown me before. Now I could see the shiny, smooth lid of closed casket, to which had been affixed the scented bouquet of silk flowers. She was standing in front of the computer, pushing keys. Seeing the casket from the outside, it was hard to imagine there was actually a crying, terrified girl inside of it.

Then I saw what was around me. The decorative sheets and flower arrangements had been removed and I could see that the bier wasn't a bier at all. It was more like a framework of metal bars. Behind the casket, where it had been hidden by the drop cloths and the casket's open lid, was a large heap of dirt piled up on a plastic tarp. Below the casket was... nothing. Nothing but a big, dark hole. The casket was suspended over it on a pair of wide straps.

"*Nooooo!*" I shrieked. She must have heard me, because she turned to face the casket. She kissed her fingertips, touched them to the casket, then pushed a pedal with her foot. The casket began to slowly lower into the grave.

She was going to make me watch my own burial.

"*Wait! Stop! No, no, no! Make it stop! Please!*" My voice sounded loud in the tiny space, which only added to the suffocating claustrophobia. And the casket didn't stop. It just keep going lower. I strained to reach the lid, as if I could somehow slow my descent by pushing against it. I couldn't even reach it with my fingertips. This had to be a nightmare—it was the only explanation—but I couldn't make myself wake up.

"No, please!" I cried hoarsely. "I don't want to be here anymore! Let me out! Oh, *fuck you*, stop it let me *out!*"

On the screen, she took hold of a sheet on the ground and whisked it away with a flourish, revealing a third headstone at the head of the open pit. On its surface was my name. Below my name was my birthday and the current year. My very own tombstone. I think my heart stopped for a few seconds. She turned to the camera and blew me a kiss.

I screamed so hard my voice cracked and I began to cough and choke beneath the mask. By the time I recovered, I was already a couple feet lower. I'm sure I shouted a lot of other things. I was in a panic beyond coherent speech. I begged and pleaded between screams. I know she heard me.

There was a thump as the casket reached the bottom of the grave. I wasn't down a full six feet, but I was down more than deep enough. From the view outside I could only see a little bit of the casket over the edge of the hole. A bundle of tubes and wires that were attached to the casket went up out of the grave and disappeared into one of the flower-topped cabinets. I could almost

picture the walls of the grave going up on all sides of me: rutted dirt, wiry tangles of roots, maybe worms poking their heads out into the open, and I was trapped at the bottom. My head felt like it was stuffed full of wet cotton. I couldn't even think to scream, I could only take in ragged gasps of air.

She had to be joking, I told myself. *Had* to be. I thought maybe she actually wanted me to leave, so she was getting her kicks by scaring the shit out of me for one last time. Maybe when she finally ended this insanity, she expected me to run and never look back. And that is exactly what I would do.

I stared at the screen, eyes glued to her every move. I was sure that any second now she would hit that pedal and the coffin would start to come back on. She had taken off her nice dress and put on her grubby gardening clothes. I begged for her to stop as she reeled up the straps and began to take apart the casket lowering framework. The camera couldn't see straight down into the grave, but I could tell the grave was narrow enough that there was no room for her to get down there and use that crank-like key to unlock the casket. At least, not without some digging.

"Why are you doing this? Stop it! *Stop it!*"

Once the framework was out of the way, I watched her spread out a clear plastic tarp and drop it over the casket. With the end of a shovel she tucked the edges down around it. Then she used the shovel to scoop up a large clump of dirt from the pile and drop it into the grave. I heard it thud against the lid and trickle down the sides. She was doing it. She was really, actually doing it. She was burying me.

"No, no, no, *nooooo!* I didn't mean it! Don't! *Don't!* You're gonna *kill me, stooop!* Please! *PLEASE!*" I howled at the screen. She just kept on shoveling.

For a few minutes I had no control, no thoughts. I was in a mindless panic as my body struggled, writhed, and pulled desperately at the straps that pinned me to the bottom of the coffin. I didn't even feel the pain of them digging into my skin. If I hadn't been wearing the gloves and if the cuffs hadn't been padded, I probably would have worn my wrists bloody against the steel cuffs. I made myself choke from pulling at the restraint around my neck. If I had somehow gotten myself free, I would have clawed the casket's nice, satin lining to shreds in an animalistic attempt to get out. None of my efforts came to anything.

It was terrible to watch my own burial, but I couldn't tear my eyes away. I still couldn't believe it was really happening; it was just too awful to really be happening. Who was the monster standing over the grave and what had she done with the woman I had fallen in love with? Had she lost her mind, or was

this the real her? Was the woman I had loved the fake? Another lie?

It was impossible to ignore the increasingly muffled sounds of each and every shovel full of earth hitting the casket. I came to anticipate the rhythmic sound with dread. From time to time I begged for help, but I had already lost my voice due to the screaming. The inside of the casket had become stuffy and I was growing very warm under all those layers of satin. I began to worry about air. The plan was to have air pumped in while the lid was closed, but what if it wasn't working? Or what if that was just another lie? If so, how much time did I have left? "I don't wanna die down here! I don't wanna die!" I croaked. Even if there was anything I could have said that would have stopped her, it was already too late. There was no way she could hear me by that point. Not with all that dirt between us.

I was out of my mind with terror the entire time she filled in the grave. It took a while. Eventually, the grave was topped off. When that was done, she dragged the tarp with the remaining loose soil on it outside. She returned to place lengths of sod, one at a time, over the bare dirt that was my grave. By the time she was finished, the grassy floor of the greenhouse—or was it a tomb?—appeared almost normal. The only things out of place were the three headstones side by side, the lumpy sections of fresh sod, and a patch of sickly looking grass to the side where the tarp full of dirt had sat. Just like that, it was as if all traces I had existed had been erased, except for the name on my headstone. Certainly there was no evidence that there was a living woman buried under the ground.

She went around and placed fresh flowers on each of the headstones. Sitting next to the edge of mine, she did nothing but stare at the ground for a long time. Then she stretched out on the grass above my grave and went to sleep.

I was shocked and enraged. How dare she just fall asleep after what she did to me? How *could* she sleep? What if I ran out of air and died while she was asleep? I was frozen with fear as the minutes passed slowly, alternating between crying in pure misery and screaming hoarsely, wondering which breath would be my last. That afternoon I had been kissing her and feeling about the happiest I had ever felt in my whole life. Now I was in hell.

I was still alive, it turns out, when she finally roused herself. She rubbed her eyes and looked around, then picked up the laptop and sat by my headstone. She put a hands-free cell phone device on her ear and clicked some buttons.

"How are you doing, my love?"

I almost shrieked in surprise. Her voice must have come from speakers hidden beneath the satin lining. “*H-hello? Can you hear me?*” I rasped, hoarse from screaming.

“Of course I can. Remember, I told you a microphone is in there. I can hear you quite clearly. I’ve been listening to you this entire time.”

I couldn’t think of what to say. What did she expect to hear from me right now? She sounded so calm. She had no right to sound calm after all this! Not while we were carrying on a conversation with a metal coffin and three feet of dirt between us.

“You lied to me! Everything was lies!” I cried. It was the harshest accusation I could think of at the moment.

“Ah. I am sorry about that. I really am. I didn’t want to deceive you or betray your trust. It hurts that you think that of me, though I can’t deny it. I know you’ve been hurt before, love, and I didn’t want to add to that. It was simply the best way to get what I wanted. There was no other way. But I wasn’t lying when I said I loved you with all my heart.”

“Yes you were! You were planning this all along!” That was the first time it occurred to me that she had this ending in mind during the whole time we were together. The entire time I was sleeping in her bed, eating her food, playing those coffin games with her... all that time she was imagining burying me alive and plotting how to do it. How long had she been digging this hole and setting everything up in the greenhouse while I had sat, blissfully unaware, watching TV shows on her sofa? I heaved against the straps and let out an impotent scream of rage. I saw her wince at the volume of it. “*Why? Why did you do this to me?*” I wailed.

“I told you. It’s because I love you.”

“This is not *love!*”

“You can think what you want, but I assure you that I love you,” she said. “I love you so much I could never bear to see you go. I love you so much I’m willing to do this to you. Now you’ll never leave me, you can never hurt me or anyone else, and no one can ever hurt you. You’re safe from everything now. And nothing, *nothing*, can ever interrupt the perfect beauty of your eternal rest.”

“Noooo,” I sobbed in despair. “Why me? I never did anything to you! All I did was love you. I didn’t do anything to deserve this!”

“This isn’t a punishment. This is just the way things are.”

It seemed pointless to try and reason with her. “Please. I’m begging you, please, please, please. Let me out of this. I’ll do anything you want, I swear to

god, I'll do anything, just please let me out."

She let me go on begging like that for a while. I begged and pleaded, promising anything and everything I could think of if she would just let me go. She never said a word until I finally trailed off into whimpering silence. "And why would I want to let you go?" she asked. "There's nothing you could give me, nothing you could do that would make me happier than this. But don't be upset by that! Think of how wonderful it is that you could make someone so happy by simply... doing what you're doing. You're exactly where I want you."

"But I'm going to die in here! *Why do you want me dead?*"

"Die? You're not going to die. The whole system I devised is designed to keep you very much alive. You wouldn't be able to enjoy the sublimity of this experience otherwise. By the way, you do have plenty of air, so you can stop breathing shallow."

"What if it breaks? What if something breaks? If something breaks I'll die, you *have* to dig me out." I was grasping at straws.

"Nothing has broken yet. Best equipment money can buy. The other girls are still here, still alive."

"Others?"

I had been so focused on my own situation that I had pushed aside the thought that there could actually be other girls buried beside me. The idea was hard to grasp, since I had seen no evidence of them. They were just names engraved in stone to me. But there really were two other girls who had fallen for her tricks and had suffered the horrors of a live burial just like me. I felt a strong pang of empathy. Except... I had only been down here a few hours. One of them had been in a casket for over two years. That was the worst thing. In the ground next to me was proof that she was going to do—that she was *able* to do—exactly what she claimed and keep me like this forever. It was impossible to imagine, but it was also impossible to deny. Could I really be trapped in this coffin two years from now?

"No. No, I'll go mad," I thought aloud.

"It could be. I'll still love you. Madness won't change your beauty one whit. You look so precious. Do you want to see?"

I blinked as the image on the screen changed for the first time. It was in the greenish hues of a night vision camera, and what it showed was me. There must have been a hidden camera in the lid, because it was showing me myself. I could see my mask-covered face, framed at the bottom by the curve of my chest and at the top by my hair flowing over the satin pillow. The face wasn't my own,

nor did it even look alive. It was too still, too perfect, too pale to look alive. The mask gave the illusion of utter tranquility, completely hiding all of my pain, fear, and tears. I couldn't even see my eyes through the mesh. When I wasn't moving, there was no sign at all that there was an actual, live girl beneath the mask of a dead woman.

The view switched to a camera positioned near the foot of the casket. I could see almost all of my body, and I could also see that all of my desperate struggling had done nothing. Everything had remained unchanged, even the gown she had taken such care in arranging. Not even a fold out of place. I appeared alive enough when I squirmed, but when I was still I might as well have been a corpse laid out for a viewing.

With sickly fascination, I realized that unless she released me, I would forever be in the same position of peaceful repose. I was forced to stay in the position I would remain in even if I died in there. I also realized that if I was never let out, I would never even get to see my own face again. All I would see was the passive, beautiful features of the death mask staring back at me; the face of a woman who had been buried alive centuries before I was even born. Even if my hands were free, and even if I could have broken the straps that held it on, I wouldn't be able to take that mask off without tearing apart my ears, thanks to the posts that went through my piercings. I was trapped inside it. "Oh... god... no."

"Squeeze that thing in your palm. It lets you switch views. When I let you," she added.

I tried it. The squeeze bulb sewn into the glove made the cameras change. I could see the bird's-eye view from out in the greenhouse, three views of me inside the coffin (the third was at the head of casket, looking down at my body from over my shoulder), and one from inside her bedroom. This last one revealed her currently empty bed.

"Ah, that one is just for you," she said, apparently able to see which view I was watching at any given time. "Well, and for the others, as well. That's so you can watch me sleeping, just as I watch you. Isn't that romantic? You can long for me from afar."

She thought I would still love her, desire her, or even like her after this? I squeezed the clicker so that I could see her in the greenhouse. "*Long for you?* Never. You're... you're wicked... the worst person ever. You're evil! I hate you! *I'll always hate you!*"

"Never say never, darling one. Part of you still loves me. I know, because

I've seen it all before. I'm all you've got left, so--"

"Hate you! *Hate! Haaate!*"

"So don't go burning your bridges," she finished, too harshly. She cleared her throat. "It's quite natural for you to say such things under the circumstances, but you should keep one very important thing in mind. I'm in control of your very life. You should try to overcome your anger, and instead nurture the positive feelings you once held for me."

"Why?" I growled.

"Because if I don't like what you have to say, my love, I can make you regret it," she said as she pushed a button. The screen went blank. I was plunged into total darkness.

"Wha-? Hello?" I called out a few more times, then I shouted. She was either ignoring me or she had turned off my microphone altogether. All communication with the outside world had been completely cut off. I had no light. No sound except for my own breath and the blood pounding in my ears. No sensation other than the feel of the mattress beneath me and the death mask pressing on my face. I had been closed up in a casket before, briefly, but this was different. This time I could almost feel the crushing weight of the dirt above me, pressing on me, smothering me. After the dim, electric illumination of the monitor, the darkness of my grave was even worse than before. It was absolute and inescapable. It was like being dead. I cracked almost immediately. "Wait, come back! I-I'm sorry! I don't hate you! I'll say anything you want, just turn the light on! Please? Are you there? Please? Please!"

I cried to myself for a long time, though I had long since run out of tears. At least it seemed like a long time. I couldn't tell. The depth of her betrayal and the horror of my situation were just too much to think about. Whenever my mind touched on those things, the horror of it felt like a knife twisting in my belly. My body ached from all the useless struggling and my throat hurt from all the screaming. I prayed for a rescue, even though I knew the chances of that were almost non-existent. She had gotten away with this for two years, she could probably keep getting away with it. Nobody knew where I was and nobody cared. No one would come looking for me. That made me cry even harder.

It must have been hours later when the screen came back on. It was like seeing the light of day again, except what it showed was her in her bedroom. She had showered and changed into her nightgown, and was sitting on her bed with laptop. She looked as lovely and serene as ever, as if she couldn't possibly have just buried someone alive in her backyard. Could I have really been sleeping in

that bed that very morning? It seemed like a lifetime ago.

"How are we doing?" she asked, brushing out her hair. "Ready to take back your words?"

"Please don't do that again," I begged. I was still furious, but that wasn't enough to overcome my fear of being left in a darkened coffin all alone.

"Didn't like being separated from me, did you? Didn't want me leaving you? Doesn't feel too good, does it? Now you begin to understand, I think. That's a tiny taste of what it means to reject my love for you. Carrie was being particularly stubborn once, so I left her like that for weeks," she said, reminiscing. "You know, she never completely recovered. She doesn't talk much at all nowadays, and when she does, she always speaks in rhymes. Isn't that funny? It's okay, I still love her, just as much as I love you. Don't get jealous, now. I have love enough to share with you all."

"Please don't do that to me."

"I'm afraid I'll have to, sometimes. I don't want to run those monitors *all* the time, then something really might break, and I know you don't want that. Besides, a certain amount of solitude is unavoidable when you've been buried. Comes with the territory. But don't worry. I'll work you up to it slowly. Just try to think of it as bedtime."

"I just... I just want out."

She smiled sympathetically at the laptop. "*Tch*. I know you do, precious. I know. But this is where you belong... with me. Oh, you make me so happy like this, you have no idea. If you loved me like I love you, you would understand. We're going to have lots and lots of time together, so maybe someday you will. Who knows? Maybe someday you'll forget you were anywhere else except where you are. Maybe you'll forget you were anything but a shrine to perfect beauty and eternal love. It might happen. It's almost midnight, so I'm going to sleep now, my dear, but I'll leave the camera on for you. I do love you so much."

"No, don't leave me!" I cried, but she couldn't hear me. She had already turned my voice off. I could still hear her, though. She quietly hummed a lullaby while she settled down under the sheets. I had nothing to do but lie in my coffin and watch her chest slowly rise and fall.

"Don't leave me alone," I begged.

That was my last day 'alive.' Winter has come and started to go, and I'm still down here. Still here. I still haven't gone mad, which is something I wouldn't have believed possible. Well, not completely mad, anyway. Nothing

ever changes down here. For all of my screaming, crying, and hopeless battles against the restraints over the months, I'm still in the same position she put me in, still in the mask and wedding gown with not a fold out of place. I look as lovely as the day I willingly climbed into the casket and let her tie me down.

Well, some things change. I eventually got over the initial shock of being buried like I was. Now I have to cope with boredom and not knowing if this will ever end. My hair is getting longer, I can see that. It grows over the pillow in thick swirls. I used to itch a whole lot at first, all those places I can't scratch anymore, and, god, the *cramps*. The muscle cramps sucked. But I don't really feel my body anymore. I only feel it when I try to move, and I don't move much anymore. The bodysuit really does keep me clean, so she was telling the truth about that. The weirdness of wearing living clothes is the least of my worries now, though. I don't have to worry about my nails growing, at least; they're dead. I found that out later. She injected something in them to kill them while I was unconscious that time. That was the real reason they hurt and then went numb. It wasn't because of too tight ropes. It was just another lie. I guess I should be thankful she didn't do it while I was awake, right before she buried me. I bet that would have hurt a lot.

Sometimes I think it would be better go crazy and let my mind disappear into some coma dream. Then I wouldn't care that I was buried alive. But I just can't. She won't allow it. She talks to me all the time. She plays music I like or books on CD through the speakers so I have something to listen to. I swear, I never really paid attention to music like I did after I was buried. It's a whole new experience. I can almost see it. Touch it. Sometimes she even plays DVD's for me. I like it when she does that. When I'm watching a movie I can forget where I am. For a little while.

Also, I have to try to stay sane because if I ever *am* rescued, I wouldn't know it if I wasn't really here. Or... maybe I'm not really here. Maybe I already have gone totally crazy and I was rescued a long time ago, and I'm lying in some bed right now, like a hospital bed, but I don't know it because I think I'm still here like in a hallucination that won't end. Maybe I'm even dead, like maybe I died a while back, only I think I'm still alive and I'm trapped here because I don't know I free to go somewhere else. It might be better if I was dead, because that would mean somehow, someday I could be free, and wouldn't have to face the thought that I could be down here in a coffin for the rest of my life and someday die in here and *oh god oh god OH GOD...*

Sorry. I almost lost it there. I have to keep a lid on that sort of thinking.

When I start indulging in those thoughts, I go all freaky and torture myself for days with the horrible thoughts going around in circles, and nothing she can say helps me until it passes. I can't yet deal with thought I might be here forever, so I just try to cope with living one day at a time. I'm starting to think that maybe I should stop hoping for rescue at all, because I'm only disappointed with every day that passes and it doesn't happen. If I didn't keep hoping for it, then I wouldn't get disappointed.

I do a lot of thinking. There's not much else to do. Especially when she shuts everything off, leaving me in darkness and silence for eight or nine hours a day, like while she's at work. If I've already slept, I have nothing to do but think. I do sleep a whole lot, though. I go through periods of helpless anger and self-pity. I think about all the things I'm missing out on, things I'll never get to do if I never get out of here. She's taken all that away from me. But then again, lots of girls like me with their whole lives ahead of them die at a young age. They never get a chance to do those things, either. They get buried, same as me, only they aren't still around to experience it. I'm just like them, sort of. I think about things like that a lot.

I think about things like my last day, how she told me to pay attention to things because I'd never see them again. But my memory of what it was like out there gets fuzzier all the time. I'm scared I'm forgetting what I even look like. Like, I know my eyes are blue, but when I try to think about it, I can't really remember exactly what shade of blue they are. When I picture myself, more often than not these days, it's the porcelain features of the dead woman whose face I'm trapped inside that I see. I'm even wearing this satin gown in my dreams. It's practically become a part of me. I'm worried that maybe she was right and that before long I'll forget I was anything else than what I am right now. I almost hope I do, because then maybe I'd be happy like this. I don't know.

And then there's her. *Her*. I hate her so much for what she's done to me. All of this is so unfair! It's like I'm down here for the wrong reason! I don't deserve to be here. If there was anyone who wouldn't have left her, it would have been me. I guess that just wasn't enough for her, and now I'm suffering for what other people have done. But, and I know it's pathetic, there's a part of me that still desires her. It's just that she's all I have left in the world! She's my only link to being alive. I have to watch her all the time, live through her, and constantly listen to her say much she loves me. I didn't want to hear it at first, but hey, when you're told something long enough, you can't help but start to

believe it. And if it's true and she really does love me, then being loved is the single good thing I have left. At least it means there's one person in the world who cares about me. All I ever wanted was to be loved. That's what got me in to this whole mess to begin with.

There's the intimate times. She comes out, sometimes late at night, and stretches out on my grave. She kisses my headstone and writhes on the grass while she plays with herself. She says it's the most intense sex she's ever had. I have no choice but to her watch her from above. There's only a few feet of dirt between us, and if I could see through it, she'd be *right there*. I imagine I can almost feel her on top of me, and, god damn it, I still want her. I can get turned on just by thinking about it now. Afterwards, she lies on the grave and sings lullabies into the soil. She spends as much time on the other graves, and I can't help but to feel jealous.

I strain to reach her, sometimes, when she's above my grave. As much as I'd love to wrap my gloved hands around her neck and *squeeze* for all she's done, right now what I want more than anything is just to be touched and held again. It's been so long since I've even felt a touch! It's getting so I'd trade all revenge just to be in bed with her again. It doesn't help that, when she's getting off on my grave, she turns on the vibrator she put in my panties. It's never enough to get me over the edge—vibrators never were—but *almost*. It's a horrible torture to be kept so close to the edge and never be satisfied. I can't even reach myself to finish myself off. I've tried many times. But even though it's a torture, I'd rather endure it than be without it. I guess that's how I feel about her loving me, too... under the circumstances.

But the worst thing of all is that she's given me hope. She says she *might* let me out someday, but only if I always tell her how much I love her. I don't know, that's probably another lie to manipulate me into saying what she wants. But if she *is* telling the truth for once, and I refuse to do it, then I'll be condemning myself here. So I say it, even when I'm furious with her. I tell her I love her. I simper. I *swear* to her that I love her, over and over. Am I lying when I tell her I love her? I don't know. I know it was a lie at first, but I just don't know anymore. My head gets so confused sometimes, about what I really feel and what I'm pretending to feel. Maybe if you say something enough, it becomes true, whether you want it to be true or not. I certainly don't tell her I hate her, anymore. I never do that. She cuts me off when I do that. A few days in total darkness is more than enough to make me learn my lesson.

Then there's the new girl. I've been told her name is Cindy. I don't know

who she is, but I have to watch them together in bed, like some ghostly voyeur. I have admit it: it turns me on. Cindy sleeps right where I used to sleep. I get so fucking envious of her can hardly believe it. She gives Cindy gifts; some of them the same clothes and jewelry she gave to me! How dare she? That's just not right. The new girl is pretty, though. Easy to fall in love with, I guess. Already there's a hole starting to be dug next to mine. It's only a foot deep so far, but she works on it every day. In due time, Cindy will be a pretty dead girl just like me. Poor thing has no idea what she's in for.

Of *course* I wish I could warn her. If she somehow escapes or if someone comes looking for her, then we'll all be rescued! I wouldn't want anyone to have to go through this. Except... part of me *does* want that. I have two hearts now: the heart that cries out in pure anguish and yearns to be alive and free and feel the sun again, and the heart that gets me wet with overwhelming, unquenchable desire and screams vows of eternal love when she's above me and making herself come onto my grave. It's that part of me can't wait to watch Cindy be tucked away into her own coffin and see the dirt cover her up, and she'll suffer everything that I've suffered. I want to watch her beg, just like I did. I want to hear her muffled screams of disbelieving horror in the ground next to me. I'm not proud of it, but I can't help it. At least, it would make me feel less alone if there were more like me. But whatever happens, all I can do for now is just watch their love with gnawing jealousy.

I don't even know what I'd do if I was dug up. It seems so impossible now that I can hardly imagine it. Until the time comes that I'm rescued and let free, or I die, I have no choice but to play the role of this unchanging Sleeping Beauty, this lovely and tragically lost bride frozen in time. I guess it is kind of romantic... at least until I start screaming.

There are still surprises, though. Like how she just hooked us all up so that we could talk to each other for the first time. She said she didn't do it before because she wanted all of my attention to herself, but now she's got that new girl to keep her occupied during the day. I don't feel so isolated now, at least, even if all Carrie ever does is giggle and sing in rhymes. Creepy.

So, Jessica... what was your last day alive like?