

# By My Side

Written by TwistedSnakes

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A shame, is it not, for a rose to be cut from its stalk before it can reach full bloom. I am a newlywed at the young age of twenty-five, yet my life is to be taken from me. My existence has been nothing but tragedy. When I was six, we met with a car accident. My parents were killed on the spot. I was left permanently handicapped from my waist down.

I was in the care of my grandmother for seven years when her house burned down in a fire. I was left with scars across my face and body, but I survived. My grandmother wasn't as lucky. If I still believed in a god, I'd be cursing his name to the deepest depths of Hades.

For years, I've been unwanted. Unloved. It wasn't that I didn't have suitors, for I had many of those. They'd come to my manor bearing gifts. But the ones who could get past my ghastly appearance would give up after the first date. The Powell inheritance was just not worth it. Oh, mother and father, how I would give up all this wealth just to be with you again, if only for a day.

But just a year ago, my life changed for the better. It was as if the gods of this world have finally turned their gaze to my plight and repaid me for the years of suffering. I met the love of my life. Only he could see my beautiful heart where everyone else saw burn scars and broken legs. Only he could see a badge of honour where everyone else saw the burden of a wheelchair.

If only I could tell you how happy you made me, but the joy within escapes mere words. My life of darkness was turned into a field of flowers in the warm afternoon. I was in the pit; you pulled me out. For once, I felt like I deserved love.

My love, if not for the devastating news which befell us a month ago, I'd be with you for the rest of eternity. Alas, the forces that command this universe have taken it all once again. The doctors have diagnosed me with a disease far too abhorrent for me to repeat. They gave me a year left to live.

When I told you the news, I expected you to hate me. That after all that I've put you through, I've dealt you the last straw that broke the camel's back. You left the room in silence and I feared you left for good. That after the brief respite of happiness, my past existence of misery was bound to catch up. How I cried that day. My tears fell until there was no more. Dejected and dehydrated, I fell asleep.

The next day you told me your biggest secret: that you too were afflicted with another disease. One that would cause you to suffer and die an agonising death within the next six months. How I felt for you. How I shared in your pain. Part of me feels like my misfortune had—like an infectious disease—spread to you too, the only one who've ever loved me like this.

Then you proposed the most audacious of plans: that if we were to both through the doors of death, we would go on our terms. With the help of euthanasia, we would go into the afterlife together with dignity.

And so we made plans. My family mansion was sold. Our fortune was donated to charities to help the poor in poverty-stricken countries. The charities sent us photos of our beneficiaries, and I felt hope. I felt fulfilled. That in the last stretch of my life, I can still make a difference in this world. Death will take me, but it will not break me.

And so a month later, we found ourselves taking a one-way trip to Switzerland where a hospice in the countryside would close the curtains for the final act. To call the hospice small would be an understatement: it's a four-room building with one doctor and two nurses. With not a lot of people in the countryside to care for, we found ourselves the only patients there.

With the little money we have set aside for our funeral, we bought a double coffin so we could both be together. That was my lover's idea. We would lie in there, side by side, as we inject each other with the drug. Then, our bodies would fall asleep for the last time. Our minds would stay awake for a while more, listening to the comforting silence of each other before our candles go out.

So here we are now, in the chapel of the hospice. Even without friends or family to accompany us in our final moments, we're not bothered. We have come this far with just us two. So, with just us two, we shall proceed.

I expected the process to be more sterile and surgical. That I'd be lying on a white bed while the doctor, in a lab coat, injected me with drugs. Instead, flowers of all colours and shapes were placed on the empty pews, turning the grey chapel into a colourful paradise.

The large coffin is set up in front of the altar at knee-height. Blankets and pillows are neatly arranged within it, and the bouquet of flowers surrounding it hides the coffin's wooden walls. I feel like I'm in a fancy hotel, ready to go to bed.

My lover pushes my wheelchair to the coffin. Picking me up the way he did on our wedding day, he lowers me onto the right side of the coffin. He makes sure I'm comfortable before he takes his place on the left.

The doctor is there, but the nurses are resting. He inserts a needle into the biggest vein on the back of my hand. A tube connects to a syringe with a clear liquid. He does the same for my lover.

He offers to leave us alone for our final moments. We accept and he leaves the room. We hold each other's syringes and put our thumbs on the plungers. On the count of three. One, two, three. We push the plungers and I feel a cold sensation spread throughout my arm.

"Good night, dear," I say to my lover. "I love you."

"Good night, honey," he responds. "I love you too."

We lay in silence. Everything that needed to be said had been said. Every last confession of love, every last sincere apology had been spoken. So now, we wait for sleep.

My body feels heavier and heavier as if I'm being pulled into the thick fluff of the blankets. My eyes close and I can feel myself sinking deeper and deeper. My eyes close and I find myself unable to open them again. There is peaceful silence.

Then, to my horror, he gets up.

"Did you really think I'd off myself with you," he chuckles, "after you've just left me such a huge fortune?"

You monster!

"I lied. I'm not sick at all. I'm going to live a long and comfortable life way after you're gone, thanks to the money. Yes, it's all a sham. The charity, the realtor, all of them faked. But the biggest lie is that I've ever loved you."

Why, if I were still in control of my body, I'd strangle him.

"I really wanted to love you. Trust me, I did. After all, I thought I'd have to be with you till we're old and dying. But you made it so goddamn hard. Every other conversation is all about you. How you've lived such a tragic life, how you're deserving of all this pity. It's no surprise that despite your wealth, nobody wants you. You're just as ugly on the inside as you are on the outside."

I'm helpless to do anything as he continues his arrogant monologue.

"Your disease is my saving grace. I was so happy when you told me the news. In fact, this whole euthanasia thing is just a ploy to get this done and over with. Once I fly back home, I'll settle down with a beautiful girl, one I can actually love. Thanks for the riches, dear." His voice drips with sarcasm as he says the last word.

I hear the door open.

"Doctor, I changed my mind at the last moment, but she decided to go ahead with—"

He lets out a scream, and I feel a splash of warm liquid across my face. His blood.

"What are you doing?!"

The doctor doesn't respond. There's another scream. Somehow, I've expected the sound of stabbing to be louder than that. More grisly and squelchy. Instead, I get no warning as another scream pierces the air.

I hear grunting. Then something heavy is dropped beside me. I hear the laboured breaths of my lover. He's trying to get up but the agony of his wounds keep him paralysed. His blood soaks the cotton blankets around me.

"Please, don't do this. I can pay! I can pay much more than she offered you!"

There's the sound of wood scraping against wood. The air goes still as the lid of the coffin goes on. Then the sound of an electric screwdriver as the lid is screwed on. He's banging on the lid, making a ruckus out of what supposed to have been a quiet funeral.

My life is fading, but I'm filled with a sense of gleeful satisfaction. In a few hours' time, men will come to bury us. The cash I paid the doctor will be used to buy their silence. If there's one thing that life has taught me, it's that you always plan for contingencies.

As he suffocates from the lack of air in the coffin, my lover is going to wish he took the drug.

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