# The Death of St. Valentine

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She sat staring at the fluffy white snowflakes feeling miserable and depressed. Good old Mr. Groundhog had seen his shadow two weeks before and any hopes of an early spring had flittered off into six more boring weeks of winter. Turning back to the computer screen she got back to work on the report which her boss wanted by the end of the day. Half an hour later, she sent the report to the printer and rose to get a cup of coffee. On the way back from the break room she could stop and grab the report from the printer. Frustration warred with her sense of duty as she trudged to the printer. Outwardly, she smiled to her coworkers.

At the printer one of her coworkers stood smoking and drinking a cup of coffee waiting for his print job. "Hey, Kristiana. What's new?"

"Just waiting for my report to print so I can get done for the day."

He smiled at her. "I'm almost done. They really should get another printer in here, don't you think?"

She tried to remember his name. "Yeah they should. How's your sister and her new husband doing, Doug?"

He blushed. "Peggy is well. She and Dave are in Fiji for their honeymoon." The printer paused and he collected his papers. "All done. I'll see you around, Kris. Have a great weekend."

She nodded. "You too. Be careful on the roads with all the snow."

He blushed again and hurried away. "You too."

Shaking her head, she waited for the printer to spool up and for her three pages to print. Once she had her document she went back to her desk with her coffee. It wasn't until she was seated that she saw the bouquet of flowers. They were sitting in the middle of her blotter. Setting down her coffee she ran her fingertips over the delicate petals of the roses, camellia, lily, and violets. The fern and baby's breath poking out every which way from the vase made her smile for the first time in days. "How sweet. I wonder who they're from?" Searching for a card or note, she found a small white envelope stuck to a plastic stick between the violets and camellias. Opening it, she read the carefully printed words.

*My Dearest Valentine, I watch you from afar each day, and want to share my affection with you but I'm unsure of how you feel. If you are willing to give me a chance leave this card on your desk with your answer and I will find it when you get coffee again.*

Frowning, she looked over the edge of her cubicle. Seeing no one, she sat back down and tapped her chin thoughtfully. *An office romance. These*

*never go well, and while they are technically not against company policy, they should be. They are dangerous.* Looking back at her frosted window, she sighed. "The flowers are really sweet though, and it's been a really long time since anyone has shown an interest in you. What harm could it do to give this mystery person a chance?" Picking up a pen she wrote on the back of the card. *I'll take a chance, and thank you for the flowers. They are beautiful.* Stapling her report together and putting it with the other papers she had gathered into the portfolio, she rose and straightened her suit. Taking a last sip of her coffee, she left the card on the corner of her desk and went to her boss's office.

Neil crept out of his cubicle as she disappeared from sight. Lifting the card from the corner of her desk, he brought it to his nose. The scent of her perfume still lingered. Opening the envelope he pulled the card out and smiled. Hurrying back to his cubicle he combed his hair and applied a little cologne. Making sure that he was shaved and well put together, he watched for her to come back. When she re-entered her cubicle he could tell that the meeting had gone well. Sliding across the aisle he leaned on the opening to her small office space. "Good evening, Kristiana."

Her head came up and a pair of impossibly piercing blue eyes entranced her. "Neil?"

He produced a single red rose that he'd held back from the bouquet. "For you."

She took the flower, coming out of her chair automatically. "The flowers are from you?"

He nodded. "I'm glad you like them. I wanted to make sure that you would understand the depth of my feelings before I approached you." He trailed his fingertip down her cheek. "Do you…understand?"

Her green eyes rounded and she swallowed. "I think I'm beginning to."

"Good." He stepped closer, sliding his hand down to her neck to trace her collarbone. "Would you have supper with me this evening?"

She shivered and felt the rush of liquid heat his smoky voice caused even as she heard herself answering, "I'd love to." Turning away to shut off her computer she felt bereft of his touch. Grabbing her purse, she was sure that when she turned around he would be gone. She almost sighed in relief when she found him standing right where she'd left him. "Ready."

Proffering his arm, he gave her a smile rife with promise. "I hope so." Pulling her close, he guided her from the darkened office building and into the snowy night. Seating her in a waiting car, he drove through the silent streets. Parking in front of a posh restaurant he helped her from the car and guided her inside. All through the meal he watched her.

She felt him watching her during the meal and had trouble keeping up her end of the conversation. When desert came and the waiter had poured their coffees, she set her napkin on the table and rose. "Would you excuse me for a moment, I'd like to freshen up?"

He smiled and rose. "Of course. I believe the powder room was right off the entrance." He took her hand and brushed his lips across the back in a courtly gesture. "I shall be waiting"

She flushed deep red and whispered breathlessly, "I won't be long." Once released, she hurried away. Her breathing did not return to normal until she was in the ladies room and the door was closed. Completing her business she washed her hands and stared at herself in the mirror. "Slow down girl. You need to analyze the situation and make sure of what you're doing before you make any decisions."

"That sounds like a rational course of action my dear, but speaking from experience you look like a girl in the first bloom of love."

Startled, Kristiana turned to face the little old lady who stood behind her. "I beg your pardon?"

The woman waived off her shock. "I don't mean to be rude, honey, but if you'll take a little free advice? Grab onto that man of yours with both hands and don't let him go. This kind of love doesn't come around but once in a lifetime, and you don't want to miss it. Trust me."

The slim brunette looked at the gray-haired woman and smiled. "Thank you. I've played it safe for too long. I think it **is** time to live a little." Freshening up her makeup, she returned to the table only to find it empty. Confused, she looked around for her date. Snagging the sleeve of a passing waiter she asked, "Did you see where the young man sitting at this table went?"

The waiter shrugged.

She was reaching for her coat when his smoky voice stopped her. "I hope you're not leaving?"

Turning with a gasp, she revealed eyes that glittered. "Where were you? I thought..."

"You thought I had gone?" He smiled gently. "No… well yes… he looked at the table and brought his hand from behind him. "I had hoped to be back before you returned." In his hand he held a single red rose. "I wanted to get this for you."

A single teardrop slid down her cheek as she reached for the rose he held. "I'm sorry."

He pulled her into his arms. "You have nothing to be sorry for, darling, I am entirely to blame. I made you worry." Brushing the rose over her lips, he felt her tremble. "Shall we finish our desert and coffee?"

She nodded absently, unable to look away from him.

Lowering his lips to her, he brushed his mouth against hers in a delicate kiss. "I would like to do that better later, but for now let us finish desert."

"Okay." She let him settle her back in the chair and they resumed their meal. When their deserts were gone, she couldn't remember what she'd eaten, her eyes had been glued to his.

He smiled and helped her into her coat. "Would you like to walk in the park with me before I take you home?" He hesitated. "I'm not ready for the evening to be over yet."

She curled her arm around his and pressed close to his side, brushing the rose across her lips. "I think that would be lovely." When he led her into the snowy night, she laughed as the snow covered his blonde hair. "Oh, you forgot your hat."

"It's okay. I will go back for it another time." Taking her hand, he guided her across the street. "Come on." Walking into the deserted park, he kept up a stream of chatter.

She stopped suddenly. "Shh!"

"What is it?"

"I thought I heard something. I don't think we're alone." She pressed closer to his side as adrenaline pumped into her system.

His ears tried to pick up any sounds. Turning his head he caught a glimpse of their shadow. "I think you're right, my dear. Come on, let's get out of here."

She nodded. "Okay."

Turning them back towards the front of the park, he slid his arm around her waist. "This has been such a perfect evening, I don't want it to end."

Glancing up at him as fear replaced the joy of the evening, she sighed. "Yes, it has been a beautiful evening. It doesn't have to end. You could come back to my place for a night cap?"

He smiled and pulled her in front of him suddenly. "I should like that. Make me a promise?"

She frowned. "It depends."

He took her lips in a tender kiss. "Promise me something, please?"

Breathless, she looked at him in surprise. "Anything."

"Promise me, that no matter what you see in the next few minutes, you will not close yourself off to the possibilities of what could be between us, okay? Promise?"

Confused, she didn't immediately respond. Seeing the plea in his eyes however, she acquiesced. "I promise."

He smiled and took her lips in a restrained kiss. "Thank you." When he raised his head, his eyes were darker and his smile was feral. "Stay over by that tree, my angel. I do not wish harm to befall you." He gave her a gentle shove.

Kristiana stumbled towards the tree at the edge of the path as a small group of rough looking men stepped into view carrying chains and boards and other paraphernalia of a junkyard crew. She watched in horror as Neil dropped his overcoat on the ground at his feet and stood waiting for the group to encircle him.

"Cold night to be out, gentlemen."

His voice sounded different. It chilled her and made her skin crawl.

"You and your little tart are gonna play with us tonight fella? Look at those fancy clothes boys. He must be loaded."

"You must be the leader of this band of misfits." Neil singled out the one who had spoken. "Come here and find out just how loaded I am, my boy. Then, if you are still standing, your boys can have a crack at me. Deal?"

"You're gonna regret your cockiness chum. Deal. Mano y mano, fellas. You stay on the sidelines until I'm done with this bozo, then we'll talk to his tart."

Kristiana heard Neil's voice float over the crisp air to her. "Don't worry, my beauty. They won't lay a finger on you." What she saw next, she would swear she did not see for weeks to come.

One minute the leader of the pack was standing toe to toe with the well-dressed man, the next he was running back the way he'd come screaming. In turn each of his five buddies joined him.

When they were gone, she stepped away from the tree and crossed to him. She reached down to lift his coat from the snow at the same time as he did and found herself staring into the fathomless depth of the darkness he had shown her when the group of ruffians had shown up. "What h…ha…?"

"Happened?" He put his overcoat around her shaking shoulders and wrapped his arm around her. "Come on. I'll tell you in the car. You need to be out of this cold." Once he had her settled in the sleek car, he turned to face her, his eyes quite normal again. "Do you trust me, Kristiana?"

Searching his face, she sighed. "I honestly don't know why I should, but I do. I mean, I only know a very little about you from work, and yet, it seems like I've known you for so much longer. Weird, huh? Why?"

"Because," he started the car moving, "What I am about to tell you is shocking and difficult to believe, but it is the absolute truth."

She shook her head and leaned back into the seat. "I suppose you are going tot ell me that you aren't human. That you are some sort of immortal monster." Caught up in her own reaction to the situation, she didn't catch his frown. "Let me guess, you're a werewolf, or a vampire, or something equally as," she made air quotes, "horrifying." Turning to face him, she shook her head. "I am not frightened, if that is what you were hoping for. I am intrigued. I want to know more… the truth, but more. I will admit that you frighten me a little in how much of a reaction I have to you, but I'm not in fear of my life."

He felt the irritation that had begun at the outset of her recitation melting away. "You have nothing to fear with me, Kris. I will not harm you, nor will I let you come to harm." Pulling into the underground parking structure for his penthouse apartment, he parked the car and got out. Assisting her from the car, he guided her to an elevator and slid his keycard into the slot. "I will tell you everything and let you decided what you want." Taking the both overcoats he hung them in the hall closet and took her elbow. "Would you care for a glass of sherry?"

"Brandy if you have it."

He smiled. "I do. Make yourself comfortable." Going to the built in bar he poured them both a snifter of brandy and settled on the sofa near her.

"Now, I am not some monster from a fairytale. I am immortal. I long ago ceased being a killer of men. In fact I have several foundations that help mankind."

She sipped her brandy and listened to him as calmly as if he were reading a business report.

"Even tonight, I could have done much more than simply scare those hoodlums, but I did not. However, I believe I put the fear of God in them."

"Indeed."

He watched her carefully as she set down her glass and rose to prowl the room. When she stopped by the window to stare out at the city, he set his glass on the table and clasped his hands together.

She stared at the snow drifting from the sky and thought about how her life had changed so much in just the span of a few hours. Refocusing on the room in the reflection she was surprised to see him sitting there looking nervous. "I'm going to ask you an impertinent question, and you are well within your rights not to answer me." She turned to face him. "You say you are immortal, okay, I'll go with that. What exactly are you then?"

He rose and crossed to her. "You aren't impertinent. You have a right to know." His eyes darkened until they resembled black pools and he felt his teeth descend. Taking her hands in his he pulled her closer. "You have nothing to fear, my darling, I would never harm a hair on your beautiful head."

Looking deep into the fathomless eyes, she felt like she was seeing into his very soul. "Show me."

Startled, he squeezed her hands and started to release her.

She stepped in closed and loosened the collar of her conservative blouse. "Show me."

He slipped his hands up her back. "Do you know what you are asking? What if I can't stop?"

She feathered her fingers through his hair. "I trust you."

He swallowed his nerves and threaded his fingers into her hair dragging her impossibly close. "You're sure? You must be absolutely certain?"

She smiled and kissed the corner of his mouth. "I am. I trust you, and if anything goes wrong, I know you will do what you must. I put my life into your hands, my heart belongs to you."

He took her lips tenderly. Trailing his fingers across her collarbones, he undid the buttons at the top of her blouse, and let it fall open exposing her

creamy camisole. Sliding his fingertips over the exposed flesh he felt it pucker in anticipation. His lips followed his fingers and he heard her sigh. Pushing the honeyed brown hair from her shoulder he tilted her head to the side and exposed her neck. Caressing the flesh with his fingertips he found a sensitive spot he then exploited with his lips. When she sighed his name, he bit down gently and tightened his hold on her. The warmth and richness of her life flowing over his lips was almost too much for him.

She felt the sharp pinprick of his bite then a heat rush through her as he suckled tenderly at her throat. Her arms came around him of their own accord and she pressed closer to him needing to feel his body against hers. When she felt him pull his teeth from her neck, she felt bereft. The heat dwindled, and then she felt him lick her neck and the heat burst into flame again. Suddenly she was in his arms and he was striding through the apartment. Her heart was beating a mad tattoo and her breath was coming in ragged puffs when he deposited her in the middle of a large bed.

He stepped away and pressed a button on the wall next to the fireplace. Flames shot out of the grate beneath the logs. The light it lent the room was romantic and enough that it silhouetted him. He shed clothing as he came back towards the bed. Leaning over her he slid his hands down her body, and wherever he touched clothing seemed to melt away. She arched against him as he cupped her breast and took her mouth in a possessive kiss. "If you do not want this, tell me now."

In response, she slid her fingers into his hair and dragged his head down to her breast. "More."

His fingers did a scintillating dance as they wandered over her rounded stomach to toy with her thigh. When her thighs trembled apart his fingers dipped lower into the soft curls of her womanhood.

She gasped as his broad finger slid over her skin like velvet. When his finger slid inside her, she arched against his hand. "Oh God!"

Lifting his head he chuckled. "That's right my beauty, feel the pleasure. Let me treasure your gorgeous body. Let yourself go." He continued to slide his fingers into her and over her sensitive flesh until he felt her quivering. Watching her in the flickering firelight he pushed her over the edge into the earth shattering orgasm. Not waiting for her to float all the way down, he rolled a condom over his already rigid penis, and positioned himself between her legs. Slipping his fingers inside her he brought her back up to the heights of pleasure before he plunged into her warmth.

As he entered her to the hilt in one swift move she gasped and her eyes flew open. Gripping his shoulders, she groaned, "Oh!"

"Slowly, love, slowly." Holding her down he made sure that he was ready before he began moving. He wanted to make sure that she felt as much pleasure as possible before they both reached the pinnacle of pleasure this time. Time seemed to slow as he controlled their pace. He felt her writhing beneath him and listened to her mewling and begging for release a slightly feral grin on his lips as he continued to drive her higher.

Seeing the masterful look on his face, she got control of her rampant body. The pleasure was still there, wildly running beneath the surface, but now, she rose to meet him and her hand slid over his body from his chest, down his back. Gripping his hips she heard him gasp and grinned. Her eyes slitted like a cat's, she slid her hands around and grabbed his ass and pulled him against her, changing their pace. When he realized that he was no longer in control of their lovemaking she gave him an innocent look and rolled him over. "My turn." Rolling her hips forward with infinite care she watched his face contort into a desperate mask of pleasure. Dipping forward as she continued to assault him with the tender motions, she took his nipple in her mouth circling it with her tongue.

"Kristiana!"

She felt his hands in her hair, cupping her head gently. Leaning up she placed a tender kiss on his lips. Moving swiftly, she had lifted herself from him and removed the condom replacing it with her lips.

He felt her mouth overtake him and groaned loudly. "The Gods! What are you doing to me?"

"Showing you as much pleasure as you have shown me, my love." Going back to her tender ministrations, she brought him close to his climax three times.

When he thought he could take no more and he was about to fly over the edge she would stop and do something different. After she had changed for the third time, he whimpered, "Please, my love, I beg of you, torment me no longer."

She smiled. "Your wish is my command." Sliding him back inside of her hot and aching body, she rocked her hips forward. As he gripped her hips to set the pace, she coquettishly fondled her breasts for him. When she felt his thumb rubbing at her clitoris she gasped and quickened her pace.

"Two can play at this game, my beauty."

"I know." Pulling him upward, she pulled her hair off her neck and offered herself up to him. "I am yours."

"You're sure?"

She looked at him squarely. "I trust you."

He bit down and sent them both over the edge. She went rigid in his arms as he continued to pound against her. When they were both breathless, he pulled away, licked the wounds and laid her gently on the bed. Gathering her into his arms, he held her gently. "That was… indescribable."

"I love you too."

"Are you all right?" He heard the breathless quality of her voice and sat up.

"I think so. I just need to catch my breath."

He put his hand on her chest and felt her heart racing. "Have you ever had any trouble with your heart, my love?"

She shook her head. "No."

He swore colorfully. Rising up over her, he looked into her eyes. "Listen to me very closely, Kristiana. I suspect you're having a heart attack. Your heart is beating too hard and too fast. I am going to call the paramedics, and I am going to do everything I can to calm you before they get here, okay?"

She nodded. "I trust you."

He helped her to dress and called 911 at the same time. "I have a young woman, age 25, I suspect she is having a heart attack. She is having trouble breathing, and her lips are turning blue. I live on Boylston in Back Bay. 10389 Boylston. In the Penthouse." He hit the speakerphone and dropped the phone on the bed. Breathing into her mouth he began providing CPR. "You need to hurry, she has lost consciousness now."

"I understand that sir, does she still have a pulse?"

"Trust me lady, if she dies you'll know it." His eyes darkened and he felt his teeth descend. "Damn!" Biting his own tongue he put his lips to hers, allowed some of his blood to drip on her tongue, and blew into her lungs. "Come on honey, don't give up on me now."

She coughed.

"Good girl." Keep breathing until the paramedics get here, honey. Won't be long now."

"Neil, I'm scared. My chest hurts and it's really hard to breathe."

He ran a shaking hand through her hair. "I know it is, honey, just hang in there." There was pounding on the front door a moment later. "I'm going to let them in honey, I'll be right back."

Her eyes filled with tears as he hurried away to let the paramedics in. When he came back, her arm was curled into her chest and she was groaning with the pain that tore through her. "Neil? I…" She gasped.

His blood ran cold as the paramedics went to work. "How long has she been like this?"

"About fifteen minutes. I called as soon as she started having chest pains."

"What was she doing just prior to the attack?"

"We were making love."

"With your clothes on?"

Neil frowned at the sarcasm. "I have had time to put her clothing back on, gentlemen. I wasn't about to let you leer at my fiancée while you worked on her. Just fix this and make her better."

"Just calm down sir, we'll take good care of her."

"Bob, we've got to get her rolling. She's in pretty bad shape."

Neil felt what blood remained in his head drain away. As the world tilted he heard the paramedics scrambling to catch him. When he woke up he was in a hospital room lying on a bed with the staccato sound of beeping nearby. Sitting up, he found a blood pressure cuff on his arm and his shirt open. "Hello?"

"Mr. Buchannan? Don't worry sir, you're going to be just fine. Let me help you up."

He frowned at the little nurse that bustled into view. "I'm not worried about me, nurse. Where is Kristiana?" At her perplexed look, he sighed. "The woman I was brought in with. Her name is Kristiana Dubois. She is my fiancée. I'd like to know where she is?"

"She is being taken care of."

His eyes darkened as he stood. "You should take me to her." Buttoning his shirt, he turned the full force of his gaze on her. "Take me to her room, nurse, it is imperative that I see her."

"Y…yes sir." She pulled the curtain aside. "Come with me."

His palms began to get clammy the closer he got to her. At the door, he hesitated. "How is she, and do not lie to me."

"I will get her doctor for you, sir. Right now, she is unconscious." She opened the door and gestured him inside. "You can wait with her."

"Thank you." Going in, he crossed the room silently. Stopping beside the bed, he looked down at her pale face. The oxygen mask she wore barely hid the blue tinged lips. "My beloved angel. Kristiana? What is wrong, my dulcet angel?" He touched her face and felt a lump form in his throat. *She's so cold.* "Kristiana, can you hear me?" Her eyelids fluttered and opened. "My darling, please let me help you?"

"I trust you."

Her voice was so faint he could barely hear her. Nodding reluctantly, he lowered the rail on the bed and sat on the bed beside her. "This will hurt a great deal, my love."

Grasping his hand weakly, she nodded. "I trust you."

"Very well." Sighing, he leaned down and bit into her throat as gently as he could. Pulling her lifeblood into himself he drained her near to the point of death. Dragging a sharp fingernail across his wrist, he pressed it to her lips and bid her, "Drink. It is all that I can do to save you, my beloved. May God forgive me," he whispered as tears fell from his eyes. The entire process took mere minutes and when the doctor came in, color was beginning to return to the woman in the bed's cheeks. His eyes were sad as he held her hand. "Tell me, doctor. What is wrong with her?"

"I believe she had a mild heart attack. The ultimate cause is still a mystery to me. We're currently waiting on the toxicology screens, though I can safely say she likely ingested whatever it was that caused her heart arrhythmia. Her color is looking much better than it was even an hour ago, however."

"Is that a good thing?"

"That is a very good thing. If she keeps improving, I should be able to release her tonight. She should still be on bed rest and no activity for a few days. I assume she will be going home with you?"

Neil nodded. "Yes. I will take good care of her. Can I have some time with her doctor while you decide whether she will be released or not?"

"I will be back in about twenty minutes. I want to give her a thorough examination before I make my decision. Don't tire her out, okay?"

"Sure, doc. Thank you." When they were alone, he ran his fingertips over her forehead. "Open your eyes, Beloved. I know you are feeling differences in your body now. You will notice a great deal is different.

Please try to stay calm. I will take you back to my apartment once they release you and explain everything to you.

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