

The engine roared like a lion guarding its prey as it tore down the long stretch of quiet road. The pale moonlight glinted off the puddles on the asphalt from a late-night shower. With one hand on the wheel, and the other hand holding a cigarette, Jeffrey cruised down the road. His metallic black Corvette Stingray flew like a missile. Propping his right knee against the steering wheel, Jeffrey flicked a bit of ash off of his black leather jacket.

Off in the distance, something white caught his eye. Letting off the accelerator, he slowed down enough to see it was a woman. She stood in a beam of moonlight which illuminated her pure, white dress. She wore nothing else. He smiled and pulled off to the side of the road. Extending his arm, he opened the passenger door and leaned over to speak with the woman.

"Hey there, lady." He said through his southern drawl. "Need a ride?"

The woman in white smiled a wide grin and climbed in the car. Jeffrey smiled and readjusted his mirror. She was a beautiful woman with a soft, pale face. Her long black hair flowed over her shoulders like a waterfall. Her white dress was impeccable, without a single stain or rip. It was odd for someone who had been hitchhiking all night.

"Where you headed?" He asked, pronouncing where and you as one word.

"To my home." She said, sounding distant and quiet. "It's only a few miles down the road."

Jeffrey smiled and pressed the accelerator harder. He was anxious to deliver her to her destination. The drive was short and silent, save for the growl of the engine. The woman in white pointed to a dirt road up ahead on the right. The path looked overgrown but Jeffrey was able to drive down the bumpy trail. A building materialized from the trees which looked like it had been abandoned ages ago. Shutters swung from rusted hinges. Cracks like spiderwebs covered the windows that were still intact. Rotten wood covered almost every inch of the home.

"This where you live?" Jeffrey asked, not sounding the least bit concerned.

The woman in white turned to him and nodded. Her hair rose and danced around her face like marionette dolls. The hem of her dress fluttered and moved on its own. A soft, white glow enveloped the woman as she leaned closer to Jeffrey. He smiled at her, not moving.

"Would you like to come inside?" She said, her voice sounding airy and resonate.

Jeffrey chuckled and nodded. This seemed to please the woman and she leaned closer, begging for a kiss. A breeze seemed to appear inside of the car, billowing around the two occupants. A thin fog began to rise around the property, making its way towards the car. It rolled over the hood and cascaded across the windshield, blocking their view. Jeffrey looked at the woman reaching for him, her lips parted for a kiss.

In an instant, her soft features turned ugly and vulgar. Her eyes sank into her head. The color drained from her smooth skin and turned a dark gray. It sagged from her bones like bags full of water. Her pupils expanded until they took up the entirety of her eyes, making them seem like pools of darkness. Her fingernails grew long and pointed, digging into the upholstery of her seat. The woman unhinged her jaw like a snake and opened wide, showing several rows of razor-sharp teeth. All this happened in the blink of an eye but Jeffrey remained unphased. The woman in white had never experienced this before. Most

mortal men screamed and ran from their cars. She would play an enticing game of cat and mouse before killing them. Then she would leave their bodies to rot away along with the house. But something about this man was different. Blinking, she tried snarling at him but he only smirked.

Her features snapped back to the beautiful woman in white as she sat there, stunned. Jeffrey laughed and looked her in the eyes. He pulled a knife from his jeans pocket. It had a peculiar shape, curving outward. It looked more like the blade of a miniature scythe. Jeffrey met her gaze and pointed the tip in her direction.

"That's a cute trick. Bet it works on the fellas nicely." He said, pushing the blade towards her. She tried to pull the handle to let herself out of the car but it wouldn't budge. She found it impossible to phase through it, either. Her body had now taken on a near mortal mass. Something about the vehicle had changed her.

"Y'all find it impossible to escape, my dear." He said in his sweet, country accent. "The dead can't escape the dead." He looked at her now and his features began to change. What had once been a chiseled jawline with a hint of five o'clock shadow became a rotting, unhinged jaw. His hair became thin and ragged. Bugs crawled from each strand and into his ear canals. Rotted flesh pulled away from the bones, leaving behind clean white underneath. He no longer looked human. Instead, he resembled an undead creature, unlike anything she had seen before.

"Tell ya what," He said, snapping back to the handsome man. "Since I respect your profession, and really, I do, I'll give ya a chance. I'll let y'all out of this car and give ya a chance to hide from me. If I can't find you by sunup, you go free. But, if I find ya, well, I'll plunge this knife into ya and... well, let's just say you won't be haunting anyone again."

Now, the woman in white laughed.

"You can't kill a ghost. I don't care how undead you are."

"Y'all see this knife? It's a special knife. Given to me by Death herself. With it, I can reap all the souls I want. I was a killer in life and now I'm a killer in death." He smirked. Before she could react, he sliced off her pinky finger and it dissolved into a fine mist. She screamed. It was the first time she had felt fear since before she could remember. She had been preying on hitchhikers for an eternity, it seemed.

"Three..." He started. "Two...One." With that, the doors unlocked and the woman in white fumbled with the release. When she was able to firmly grasp it, she yanked as hard as she could and toppled out of the car. She ran towards the only home she could remember knowing. Glancing back, she saw the man strumming his fingers on the steering wheel. He stared straight ahead, not even bothering to watch her. After several minutes, Jeffrey called out, "Ready or not, here I come." He floated free of the car and stood on his feet. Making a show of cracking his neck, though nothing cracked, he started for the abandoned house. Had he been a physical man with any sort of mass, his foot would have sunk through the rotting planks of the wraparound porch. Instead, he strolled across the deck and knocked on the door with a stern fist.

"Ms. woman in white, y'all home?" He bellowed with laughter, amusing himself. Jeffrey phased through the door and advanced into the living room. The place was ghastly and disgusting. It was in desperate need of torching. Bug infested furniture rested in the living room amidst the warped walls and

peeling wallpaper. Rats nested in corners, bats clung to the ceiling, and mold covered almost every inch of the home. A fitting place for a ghost such as herself to haunt.

Jeffrey checked the kitchen first. He noticed a broken refrigerator with its door hung open like a gaping maw. A raccoon's nest rested inside. But he didn't much care for animals and nature. He had a blood lust that needed satiating, even in death. Stepping into the dining room, he grabbed a chair from under the rotting table and flung it hard against the wall. The soft wood splintered into wet, moldy chunks. A hole formed in the wall, letting in a small amount of moonlight. It shone where the chair used to sit.

"Are y'all under that table? I sincerely hope not. How cliché." Jeffrey said as he bent down to look. He smiled ear to ear when he saw the dark emptiness. "I am relieved to know y'all aren't that stupid." He moved on into the next room. The walls, floor, and furniture were so rotted, he couldn't tell what it was once used for. The woman in white couldn't be hiding here so he moved on.

The house had a cellar but Jeffrey decided to check upstairs first. He had a feeling about the cellar and knew she wouldn't hide down there. He guessed it was where her bones lay and ghosts tended to avoid their final place of rest. After all, that was the woman in white's story. Picked up by a hitchhiker and murdered in her own home. At least, that was *her* story. There were too many women in white for Jeffrey to count and he had slain several before her.

"I suppose y'all wonderin' why I'm doin' this?" Jeffrey said as he climbed the stairs. "I'd be lying if I was to say it weren't personal. But it is more than that. Death, well, she can't kill. Bound by some cosmic rule or somethin'. But lost souls, like y'all, upset the balance." He arrived at the top of the stairs and stood for a moment. "And Death loves her balance." With that, he continued down the hall.

A few rooms away from where Jeffrey now searched, the woman in white hid in a closet. She trembled uncontrollably. She didn't know ghosts could even tremble, let alone feel fear. But this man, this being, was worse than death. And if he got a hold of her, there was no telling what would happen. Was there another great beyond she would ascend to? Somehow, she knew the truth. There would be nothing after. There had been a chance to move on but she had ignored it. Her soul had nowhere left to go.

Her hands shook as she clasped them around her mouth. The man was in the room with her now, kicking bits of debris away. She begged and pleaded with whatever entity controlled the universe to spare her, to let her move on. She was sorry for the men she had killed after death. If there was a hell, her soul would go there. She could accept that. Hell was better than eternal darkness.

The man walked out of the room without checking the closet and her shaking subsided. If she had a heart, it would have been throbbing in her chest. Before she could relax, a pair of ghostly hands stretched through the wall from behind. They yanked her from the closet and into the next room. Standing over her was the man with the knife. She let out a wail that shook the foundation of the building. The man smiled and plunged the knife into her chest. She saw her body start to dissolve into mist and watched in horror as the man inhaled it all in.

"Keeps me in the astral plane." He said with a smile and the woman in white's world went eternally black.