



BAALSEBUB'S BRIDE

Beatrice was used to having men look at her because she was young and beautiful. To some extent she appreciated it, but sometimes men went too far; they stare intensely for a long time and occasionally followed her. This could be very unpleasant, especially when it happened late in the evening in deserted streets. As a consequence, she tried to avoid going out alone after dark. But on those evenings, when she worked late and then discovered there was no food at home, she had to go out and buy something from the food shop which was still open or, if it was very late, she had to go to the local restaurant, which was open until one o'clock.

One night in November, Beatrice was sitting in the restaurant at half past midnight, right in the middle of the notorious haunted hour. Her desperate hunger had driven her out of her flat into the darkness, the cold and the danger. Inside the restaurant she was safe as the owner had promised to defend her if necessary, but it would soon be closing time and she was far too shy to ask him to accompany her the short distance to the street where she lived. He would either laugh at her or take it as a sexual invitation, which would be very unpleasant. And what would the neighbors think if she was seen in the street with a

strange man at this hour? A single woman living in a small town had to be careful with her reputation.

She had eaten her dessert and only a glass of water remained. If she stayed too long with just a glass of water, it might seem to the other guests that she was having some kind of affair with the owner and was only waiting for them to leave. It would be best if she could persuade herself to go home at once and enter the genuine safety provided by a locked outer door. But her insecure feelings made her stay alone at her table. She imagined that just now there was something evil moving outside in the cold night. Perhaps it would leave in another five minutes and then she could go home.

"You are not rational, Beatrice," she said to herself in anger.

But the mysterious feeling did not disappear and in fact became stronger and stronger. There was something there, perhaps something, which panted and howled. A supernatural figment of the imagination, which suddenly jumped into reality. Or just a detestable young man uncontrollably oversexed, overexcited and carrying a knife. Or perhaps a ruthless mass murderer or even the vile horror of somebody who preferred making love to dead women. Her mind became a chamber of horrors.

"Pull yourself together, you stupid little idiot! Go home and go at once," the sensible side of Beatrice demanded. But her feelings revolted against common sense and caused her to stay a few more minutes until the danger was over, and whatever it was, had gone.

A few minutes before closing time a man entered the restaurant and sat at a dimly lit table in a corner. Obviously he didn't want to be seen. There were only two other guests in the restaurant and Beatrice knew them both; they belonged to the town's army of alcoholics. The man, who just had arrived, was a stranger for her. He was dressed in black and had demonic, cruel features.

She began to be really afraid and a new unexplainable feeling came over her, which made her think that this man was indeed the cause of the danger she feared.

Beatrice wondered who this curious black clothed figure could be. She didn't like him at all and, to make things worse, he began to stare at her with a scrutinizing look, which aroused her intense loathing. He was absolutely repulsive.

"What on earth was he doing here? And what damn bad luck he should come to just this restaurant," she thought to herself.

His staring became even more intense and she wondered what he wanted with her.

The two drunks left and made their staggering way home. The owner was not to be seen and she was completely alone with this horrible stranger whose face seemed to change color and become even more evil.

At this point Beatrice was so frightened that she overcame her shyness and called for the owner. Despite everything, he would have to accompany her home; it couldn't be helped. She decided she would rather have her name dragged in the dirt by the old scandal mongers than risk being alone in a dark street with this gruesome person.

"Karlsson!" she called.

"Karlsson, will you come her a moment? Are you asleep Karlsson?"

The stranger grinned mockingly and still stared at her with his cruel, inhuman and bloodshot eyes. Then he said something horrible, which made Beatrice scream hysterically.

"Karlsson is dead!"

Beatrice jumped up from her chair and rushed towards the door, but the stranger gripped her arm with a hand which was as cold as the hand of a corpse.

She thought she was doomed, but she didn't intend to die without an immense struggle. She decided to fight the murderer with all her strength, even if this was the last thing she did before her own funeral.

"Let me go you swine!"

"Dear Beatrice, calm yourself down. I only want to talk to you a little."

She wondered how he could know her name.

If he is a necrophile I don't want to live any longer, she thought to herself.

In that case of course, she wouldn't be allowed to live any longer.

Beatrice was frozen with an intense fear, which seemed to have lowered her temperature so much that she was ready for the graveyard.

"You don't know my name. We don't know each other," she said.

"You are probably right darling, but from now on we shall really get acquainted."

"Leave me alone and let me go! I am not your darling."

But the man's grip tightened on her wrist and was very painful. It felt like the flame from a blow lamp. She struggled and scratched his face deeply, but in vain. He seemed not only invulnerable but also insensitive to pain. He was really a horrible monster.

He began to talk again. His voice sounded as though it came from some very remote land; it was dull, cold and evil.

"You are afraid of me, aren't you? You think I am going to kill you. You think I am a necrophile and will only like your body when it is lifeless. Are my guesses correct, darling?"

Beatrice was even more shocked. The man was a thought-reader.

Her face was now white with terror.

"I am a necrophile, but you don't need to be afraid of me as I am not going to kill you. I just want to know the way to the nearest mortuary," he roared with laughter.

"In your case it is not your body, which interest me, but your soul." Beatrice was struck with amazement despite her dark despair. She didn't expect this and she wondered whether the man was a priest who had become mentally ill.

“You think I am a mad priest and you wonder whether I want to convert you? Yes, I want to, but on behalf of Hell, not Heaven. Now you probably think you know who I am. You can call me Baal if you wish, but I prefer the name Baalsebub. Baalsebub and Beatrice, doesn't that sound good? I have chosen you to be my bride in Hell.” Beatrice desperately wished he was just a common lunatic, a murderer or a mentally ill person. Otherwise, he was the devil himself.

Suddenly, the man released her wrist and placed a round silver watch in her shaking hand. She stared at him, mainly in surprise, but she was scared.

“I give you this silver watch as a present darling,” he hissed.

“You get it because I like it so much. Next time it shows twelve o'clock you will be dead!”

He laughed with an ominous drawn out jeer and disappeared in a blinding flash of light.

Beatrice was alone with the silver watch in her palm and the time was one o'clock. If the man had told her the truth she had only eleven hours left to live. She tried to collect her thoughts and think logically. Either he was a very confused person and would probably try to murder her at twelve o'clock, or he really was the Devil.

Then she woke up. The whole thing had been a horrible nightmare.

Happy, but still trembling, she jumped out of bed. It was six o'clock on a bright summer morning.

It was in fact six o'clock on the sixth of June which is the sixth month but she had dreamt it was November and she was going to die!

This was the National Day and there would be singing and flag-waving and the Royal Family on all TV channels. Beatrice staggered to the window. She saw that everything was as it should be; there were greening elms and lime trees resplendent in the park below her flat.

She had seen the ghastly Omen films during the previous week. These were about the boy Damien who was born in Rome

on the sixth of June and had grown up to take over the world. Perhaps this was the reason for her nightmare.

Anyway, it was impudent of the producer to use Sweden's National Day for this purpose; it was an affront to all Swedish people. However, the idea for the story came of course from the Bible, so to that extent, he could perhaps be forgiven.

It was good to know there was a clear distinction between fantasy and reality.

If Beatrice had been a believer, she would probably have felt a little downhearted.

She felt cold now, so she went to the bathroom to take a hot bath. It was then she noticed that something wasn't as it should be and she screamed with genuine mortal fear. A small, beautiful silver watch ticked in the basin and, on the bathroom mirror, the Devil had written in red blood: “BEATRICE, MY BELOVED BRIDE, YOUR EARTHLY LIFE WILL SOON BE OVER. THE SILVER WATCH IS TICKING FOR YOU AND ME AND WE SHALL MEET IN THE FIRE OF HELL.”