

Father Dearest

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I awoke from my sleep disturbed, the raging noises of pounding and siege had continued during my slumber, and had only gotten worse since. The room, dimly lit, was as I remembered it; apparently the growing mob outside hadn't broken past the front gates. My father sat in the shadowed corner of the mammoth chamber, quiet in his seemingly catatonic state as usual.

"Father? They come for us now; you knew this would happen, didn't you?" There was no response. He just sat there, glaring coldly at me, and I knew what he was thinking. '*And whose fault is that, my daughter? Not mine, certainly...*'

"What do you want? You know, you've behaved strangely ever since that day, ever since I came back!"

'*Came back from where?*' came the reply, but his lips never moved. He was playing a trick on me, trying to scare me, but I wouldn't let him. I recognized his attempts at avoiding what I had to say; he always did that.

"Oh well, you know they can't hurt us, right? Not anymore, they can't. I was just thinking about how we ended up where we are today, about my childhood, about what happened way back then..."

I hoped that this would prompt him to pick up the conversation, but he just sat there, staring. I thought I saw his eye twitch in the direction of the door, but it could have just been a trick of the light, the hearth tossing shadows about. When he still didn't respond, I decided to take the initiative.

"All of this could've been avoided if you had never met the count, if nothing had happened. If I could go back... what's that you say? If what didn't happen? You can't even remember that! Well, it happened nearly twenty years ago..."

I can remember it well, as though it was yesterday. So much happened back then, yet amongst everything I can't remember, I will never forget the first day you brought the Count home. Forgive me for simply calling him the Count, but it seems a fitting name, and I never did learn his. After all, whenever the two of you came around, you ignored me the way a noble ignores a lowly peasant. Anyway, his skin was very pale, in stark contrast with his shifting black cape with red lining. The air with which he walked was enough to scare me, but his eyes chilled my blood, being dark as that cursed cape, and piercing like daggers.

He took you away from me. He slept during the day and wandered about at night, taking you with him. I guess that's why I started to think... well, you can understand, can't you? I mean, I was just a little girl; I still believed in fairy tales and magic and such. Anyway, when you started to behave oddly, mother got so very depressed. She was lonely, unappreciated. Whenever you and the Count came around, I ran and hid, so she never really saw either of us. I never got to tell her

how much I loved her; in a few short weeks she was killed in that accident.

Back then, I knew it wasn't an accident. The count must have had something to do with it. I had built him up in my mind as some sort of monster. A month or so after mother was killed, I figured out a way to remove the monster from our lives, permanently.

Then we could try to be a family again, or a grim mockery of one. On the longest day of the year, the summer solstice, he would be forced to isolate himself in a room and rest, even through the night, to regain his strength. On this night, this horrible, dark night, I decided to kill him.

The Count did exactly as expected. The day passed and night fell as I slowly stalked across the cold damp stone of the floor in his wretched chamber. With each step I drew nearer to his resting place. I brought forth a spike, raised it above my head. My pace increased, and my breath quickened until I found myself running towards him. In a matter of moments I had thrust the stake deep into his chest. Too late, I realized my mistake; in my haste I hadn't considered whose chest I thrust upon. He found out; he found out that I planned his death. I couldn't have known that he switched places with you. Oh, father, I'm sorry! Oh, so sorry! I vowed revenge that very instant...

"Oh, father, I'm sorry for what I did! I hunted him down though. I followed him to the Four Corners of the Earth for you, and when I found him... Well, you must remember that at least... right?"

The tired corpse nodded grimly. '*Yes, yes, I know what happened when you caught up to him, you've told me that too many times for me to forget. What's done is done, my daughter. You cannot undo... where was I?*'

I could almost bring myself to bitter laughter, but the relentless assault on our home crushed the prospect. By the sounds of it, the mob penetrated the front gates, and was fast approaching. Before long, they would enter the very door that my gaze was now fixed upon. I turned sullenly back to my father, who sat silent beside me.

"They're here, father. They've come for us at last. Pity they couldn't leave us be. The poor fools should realize that we can't be harmed anymore. A shame--"

The door flew open and several dozen men poured into the chamber. I rose from my position at my father's armchair. The men shouted of my creeping insanity, they raved that I spoke to a rotting corpse, to which I'm sure my father took offense. Slowly, the accusations gave way to confusion at my apparent lack of fear. I looked back to my father, receiving only an empty stare in return. It was as if no life sparked within his body. Suddenly, one of the men grabbed my arm, pulling me towards him. I glared at him for a few seconds; he quickly released my arm, retreating into the mass of the mob like a frightened child to his mother. There was a moment of deadlock, filled only by the confused whisperings of the poor stupid townsmen. The air seemed to quiver in anticipation and dread. Suddenly, in a violent hiss, the fire was doused, and the doors slammed closed, sending echoes of the thundering crash coursing through my home.