



The clock ticked in the embalmer's office. It sounded loud in the silence, along with the soft sighs coming from her.

An office so quiet, yet so full of what she was into. Her little corner of heaven.

Jars full of organs or dead creatures, sinking in formalin, all on display on her shelves. The flickering light on the ceiling occasionally made the liquid shine.

The room was old, like the whole building, she didn't expect something modern, but at least Madeline managed to make it look comfy, for her that is.

Like with the framed butterflies on the walls, or the heart contained in the jar on her desk along with the paperwork.

Maybe the only normal thing she used as a decoration were her certifications and her degree, hanging on golden frames behind her, just next to a photo of her and her best friend.

It was the thing she loved most in there: the two of them, in their formal uniforms and robes, posing together. A faint smile could be seen on their lips. A rare thing to see on him in photos.

She continued to fill in the papers with words she has written countless times before. Name of the deceased, date of birth, time of death, where he passed away, cause, the procedures done if the embalming was needed at all or just burial, in that case how the body would be disposed of.

The indications for the burial, the people involved in the work, if the patient had any problems prior to death; the same thing over and over she's been doing for a decade or so. Since Papa Emeritus I had been appointed as head of the church probably, the same man who appointed her as head of the Sanitary Department.

But she wasn't really doing her work to please her superiors, or all the Papas she's been working under so far. Maybe for herself, but only to a certain point. She loved her job, and loved the paycheck too, as repetitive and monotonous it was after so much time. Her dedication to make people look alive even after passing or studying human existence was at an impasse now.

No, she was doing it for someone specific, her boss. But not just any boss, Secondo. Oh him, her heart beat faster each time she thinks of him, a rush of adrenaline and anxiety always runs through her veins at the sight of his face. A man so wonderful never existed before in her life. So compassionate, so grand and handsome as him. And so merciful.

Even now that she was writing mindlessly on the form, her gaze softened at the thought of his qualities.

Of course she did all of her incredible work for him. He was the reason she was still alive at this point. He had been at her side since they were little, as they played and grew up together.

Her hand halted mid word, pondering about the past. Those were simpler times, when they had nothing to worry about, they had all they needed back then.

But they grew up, mistakes - horrible ones - were made, she still blames herself for that. No matter how many times she told herself it wasn't her fault, or if her therapist told her she wasn't really responsible for what happened; she could only believe she didn't commit no sin if he was the one saying it.

Every time he did it, he had the habit of caressing the back of her head, messing her curls.

She blamed both herself and that rotten man whom her father used to see as a friend; but she didn't care to look atoned in his eyes, it only mattered what Secondo thought of her. She betrayed him all those years ago, and he forgave her somehow. Something even she didn't think she deserved after what she attempted. To her he was like Jesus on the cross, and she was the weeping Mary Magdalene.

That's why she worked hard, to prove to him, to anyone, that she deserved to be forgiven by him so long ago. She spent countless hours awake to tend to bodies, to study, to perfect her craft - all for him. For his praises, his smiles and the squint of his eyes, all enough to crack that perfect paint on his face. For everything that made her heart flutter.

She needed to prove herself worthy in his eyes, to be most perfect woman who has

ever spoken to him, served him, the most devoted follower he will ever have, that no other man or woman could be loved by him like he should love her.

And deep enough she thought she deserved him. They were as close as a man and a woman could've ever been, she had seen every little detail of him: the lines of the old age on his body, how charming he looked deep in thought, how the cogs of his brains turned during hard situations. She knew him deeply and personally, she was his confidant after all. His closest friend, the woman he shared his all life with. And he was the man she was so deeply infatuated with, she had always been a good source of comfort for him, so caring and patient. She did deserve a little reward. She was willing to wait for it, and she was truly a patient woman. She has been patient for a long time: when he still had to forgive her back then when she barely took care of herself, or when she got her life together and even in their occasional, 'fun', intimate nights she hoped he'd say something more rather than give her a sweet look with hesitance. Or whenever he told her about his parties.

*Oh the parties.*

Madeline hated those, that's why her office was much better. It wasn't cramped or didn't stink like a stable like those rooms full of people and noises were. She didn't really have the right to bother him about those, he was an adult after all. Even if it always bothered and worried her whenever he was drunk and sick after a long night. She was always there for him.

And he would always chuckle at his retellings of his wild adventures with alcohol and other women.

It wasn't hard to spot a bra in his room once in a while.

That was the real thing that made her mad. The idea of someone else, some other unworthy body of meat, buzzing around him like flies. Touching him, or *daring* to have sex with him.

Not only those women at parties, even the ones in this damned abbey. They had the nerve to look at him so shamelessly, but she couldn't blame them for desiring him so much, he was the most incredible man in this rotten place.

Her therapist once said she seemed to love him in such a religious way. And maybe he was right. She wasn't a really religious person; funny enough for the place she was working in and with who. But Secondo, he truly was like her personal Jesus.

Still, it made her hands itch and her blood boil every time those unworthy rats would touch him, or want him, or even kiss him. They had no right to touch the flesh she coveted so jealously. No woman deserved him like she did, and the mere idea of any of those other hideous creatures having a chance to lay with him, it made her so furious, so full of madness, enough to barely keep herself from taking her pristine tool, to punish them as God intended for her to do and **-CRACK-** them open on her examination table.

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Madeline clenched her fists so hard it was enough to break the pen in her hand. Her glove was now stained with the black ink, but miraculously the papers were intact.

She didn't register the sensation of the plastic poking into the fabric and scratching her skin. Yet she heard the thumping of her heart, the rage etched into her beautiful face. The adrenaline in her boiling blood. The need to put them in their places. The burning jealousy.

He plagued her thoughts so sweetly. It made her mad with passion, an intense ache in her heart as she recounted all the wonderful times they've had.

She loved him so much more than anyone could, in a way that only the two of them could understand. No man or woman deserved that spot next to him. No one loved him enough to want to consume him or to die for him like she had for decades.

But he still participated in his escapades, he recounted them with that grin of his, bragging on how good and fascinating he was, on the depravities of his desires or what he did.

And she wanted to cry when he did it. She wanted to scream at him, to shake him, for him to please say something about her, for her sake, to avoid going crazy and feeling her guts turning in knots .

But she never did. She just brushed it off and replied with little nods to avoid looking suspicious.

Maybe she deserved to feel bad. For everything wrong she did to Secondo, to others too maybe. Maybe such a delicious pain was deserved.

And no matter how much it wounded her to see him surrounded by those wriggling maggots who could never understand him like she did. She loved him more than she hated those offences. It was humiliating in a way.

But how could she ever stay mad at him? Secondo was truly the only man who could understand her, who knew each of her secrets like her with his. He didn't reject her studies or call them 'impossible'. He loved her in a way no one ever did, he appreciated her work, praised her so much, she was the only one who saw the man he hid behind his facade of his role. Just like a flower being tended by the most caring hands that would never let it wilt.

Secondo meant so much for her, she could only want to serve him like a devoted acolyte. She could only desire to feast on his grandness, a deep need to taste his heart, his immense love, a chance to have him forever with her so sweetly.

She would do anything for him, no matter if it was dying or taking a life. Anything for the man whose voice captured her heart since they were little.

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Madeline took off her stained glove, using a cloth to clean the mess she made before tossing the pieces in the trash can.

Her eyes focused on the vase she kept on the desk. The flowers, a bouquet of red roses, lavenders and little purple lilacs, was a gift from him. She cherished those flowers immensely, and anyone who entered her office never saw them even shed a petal so far. She made sure her magic kept that gift alive just like her love for him.

Yet sometimes, in moments like these, alone in her quiet and solitary office, she wondered what would ever happen if he.. just left her.

What if he ever settled down with another woman, or man - or whoever! Then it was over. Would she even have a purpose anymore? What would be her life without his light shining like a guiding star?

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She knew the answer perfectly.

She knew what the tragic first thought and solution would be at the idea of losing him ; that maybe it was a sign she failed, that she wasn't as worthy of his love.

Because she knew she could never handle being one of the many ones, her spot was at number one, the first in his heart.

*Tick, tick, tick.*

*The clock's ticks echoed still.*

She let out a loud, exhausted sigh, hiding her face in her hands. It would've never happened of course. He wouldn't just get with the first girl he set his eyes on. She was the only one that would have that honor. To grow old with him. She was already good with comforting him, to always be at his side.

She hoped she could. To have the honor of holding his hand forever, to be loved so sincerely and tenderly. To be his dear Mary Magdalene.

She leaned back in her chair. She took a good look at her office.. it felt so empty. It looked like a good reflection of her.

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