

The Virgin Bride, 1959

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

An angel in her white dress and long veil, the pearls around her alabaster neck. Her voice, almost a whisper,

"I do," she said.

But she didn't look up at him when she said it. He should've known better. This is why he's walking the streets of her hometown in the middle of the night. Too skittish for sex, so he left in frustration, she in tears. He sighs, looks up, and sees that somehow, he's back at the church.

Of course. He's back where he started.

He gets up, crosses the street, stands in front of the carved mahogany doors; it is a scene from the Ascension. The Blessed Mary, rising up into heaven. Already she is transformed. He is a stranger here as well. What does she want from him? His new young wife? He is just a man who fell in love with a girl. Who did the right thing; waited, sought release in the arms of high-heeled women. This is what his father told him. This is what his mother told him. So why is he here, alone, on his wedding night?

He tries the door and is surprised to find it is open. Once inside, he automatically dips his finger into the holy water and blesses himself. It's dark, but attenuated yellow light spills onto the altar from the sacristy. He sees several wedding bouquets still up there. They are his flowers, from his wedding, and he wants one. Defiantly he walks the length of the church, towards the altar. But what is that? Out of the corner of his eye, he sees movement, looks around, slightly panicked.

No, he reassures himself, I am alone. I am the only person awake in this godforsaken town. He continues walking up the aisle, his heels striking the marble floor, echoing. He can smell the wooden benches, the incense, the religion. He stops to pick up a stray bloom on a pew, stands up again, and sees her. Instead of a statue, the Virgin Mary, it is now a beautiful woman. She is smiling at him.



He freezes. He cannot move a muscle. But its not fear that paralyzes him, it is desire. She walks as if she has just stepped out of a cloud, tall and proud. She pulls a blossom from around her waist and affixes it in her hair. She has red lips, she is not human, and she is getting closer. His mouth is dry.

When she finally reaches him, she caresses his mouth with her index finger, "The groom?," she asks, smiling. "Yes," he replies. "Take off your pants," she says.

