

Stealing From A Corpse

by Sheila Luecht

There are many things so laced together with a death that you might find it hard to imagine the connections of some. For instance, when someone dies, who gets their clothes? I remember one person who was rather odd. He kind of got hammered out of the legislature after several years for his paradoxical votes and his personal scandal. Going over the lurid details might be too much for one to think about even in this modern age. It had something to do with his wealthy wife taking their child and escaping to Europe for a life completely disconnected from him. The rumors were pretty well founded, having to do with molestation and being caught red handed.

Those were the rumors at least. He did marry again and they adopted a child. He did show that child around like an ornament and well, you might imagine what was going through people's heads. But I digress. When his mother passed away, sometime way before his first wife, his duty was to go through his mother's things according to a request made by his father. At the time the father was apparently too grief stricken to handle the task. It was something about how the politician went about it, what people said about how he did it that really struck me. His mother had been a member of a university women's club and this club was actually as powerful as the former pan Hellenic group in the town. Political people find their power where they can, and use it, it seems, as they must. When his mother was alive, she was one of the revered blue haired ladies, who drank her tea with just a bit of sugar and lightly creamed. No over indulgence was necessary and certainly not allowed if you were going to be part of the "cream" of society yourself.

He worshiped his mother and nothing, nothing could account for his reluctance to say his final good byes, even to her clothes, except this strong attachment. He cried, it seems, over each piece of her clothing, according to the maids; he cuddled her soft robes, her silky lingerie, stroked her minks and fondled her party frocks. He kissed each item tenderly that still held her scent, unable to accept their lifelessness without her in them. Why did his father make him in charge of this? Was his father in too much grief over his loss? Why did he not take care of these personal items? Did the son ask for this task? Had he imagined that his father would just stuff them into some boxes and cart them off to the dump? Impossible. Perhaps he would be up to the task. He would take the responsibility presented to him.

In reality his father was long attached to someone else and felt it a kindness to let his son have this ritual of goodbye. His son was unaware of his father's long time affair to someone his own age and how this death would finally allow their relationship to come into the light of day. It seems that his mother had so much time for clubs and society because she was predominately alone. Only the father's best of the best male friends knew of his infidelity and the son, only knew that his father worked hard, and his mother was a pillar of society. She was a philanthropist of a somewhat grander scale than most in the town. She had encouraged him to enter politics and had told him to keep himself above any scandal and that if he did, he would go far. Just a good beginning was never enough, not just the right name, the right status, the money, the right party, part of it was also keeping it all above board, all clean. "Don't say or do anything that can be brought against you", she had once warned.

The clothes still smelled of her perfume. She had more than one. It seems that some went with her evening attire; others went with her country club suits, and another which went with what she had worn to church. It was lighter, less forceful in scent.

Church was a time for family and that ritual was not forsaken, ever. Additionally, the mandatory, once monthly dinner at the club, in evening attire, including black tie and escorted by her beloved husband. Now when it all came out, you just had to wonder how beloved they were to each other, or were appearances just that important?

As the son picked up each shoe, he felt the imprint of her foot. He touched the discolored inside where her foot had heated up and cooled down, perspiring while dancing, or walking the steps of the state capital for her favorite causes.

She would never run for office, it was not appropriate. She had birthed a son, particularly for that purpose. Her husband had been notably proud and had duly put him on such a path, along with her support, for success in business and in politics. She was adequately rewarded with his attentions when appropriate and while wealthy in her own right, he never let her be without anything she wanted; it was all in the power of his wealth to give her. The only thing she may have wanted was his loyalty, but in reality that perhaps had not mattered to her, as much as the appearance of it.

He picked up her hat and held it to his face. He imagined her with it on and she was just short enough that the top of it tickled his nose. He loved his mother, more than you could imagine and in a way that was a bit too much for some. He hung on her every word, he imagined himself, her only love, her only escort, how he got this idea of worship confused with love and ownership, might be found in her treatment of him.

The nanny had done all the work, done all the play. His mother had just shown herself, just appeared in lavish appointments and it was certain that such a beauty who smiled and professed to love him, who hugged and kissed him, was really in love with him. How did he know? As an only child he had been the object of her

affection, in the limited, warped capacity that she could give it and he could understand it.

His father had ignored him, mostly, his son was not right he felt. Something was just a little too odd about this child. His son grew very tall, he had a deformed finger, the same in fact that he was accused of fondling his months old child with, using some kind of baby sock. His son had been seen. The child had been screaming. There was nothing to be explained. His wife left the country immediately with their child and he was prevented from any kind of contact. It was all kind of hushed up; there was power to do that back then. His son's political demise took time, but he did spiral down in the years after that never to regain a seat in the house.

He touched her undergarments. He held them to himself. He wanted desperately to somehow keep these, to try them on, to feel something, something he had been blocking for a very long time. He could not admit it even to himself. He just twisted in the wind with the thoughts, his thoughts.

His father had been no where to be found when his mother died. She had been briefly ill, and one day, she simply was gone. He had been summoned by the nurse who had been charged with her care and arrived promptly before the funeral home came to take the body. He commiserated with the doctor who was there to pronounce her dead, and deteriorated into his tears.

He took all the clothing and put each and every piece in several boxes marked for donation to the local women's shelter. His mother had been a great donor to this battered women's non profit. It was fitting that her clothes would go to them he thought. They would give some to the women, some to the ones looking for work, some would go to the resale shop, some would be recycled into something else. He really did not know. He just thought it would be a good idea.

He kept one scarf. It was the scarf that she would tie around his eyes to play with him, long, until he was in his teens. A silly game that made her happy and he squirmed with delight until he got too old. She did not want him to see her, only to know if she was in his space. It was an odd little game for an odd fellow. That scarf had some power in it he thought. Something was not right with his mother, he finally had come to think, but only in a very small way. He shifted what she aroused in him to other things. It went okay with his wife, until the baby, then he could not stifle what he was thinking anymore. This scarf would remind him, none of it was his fault. It couldn't be.

The clothing was finally dropped off. It was after his first wife left him with their child. He thought it was a good idea, until he began to see some of it walking around town. Yes, walking around on the backs of other women in town, some young, some old, some not as stately as it mother. He began to panic at this desecration. He ran himself ragged trying to buy it back from the re sale shop, he offered money to women in the streets for the clothes on their very backs, the shoes on their feet.

He managed to get some of it back, but her smell was gone, and her perspiration no longer virgin in the shoes, mixed up and shared with other women.

Fortunately he had kept the scarf. He now tied it tightly around his neck and hung himself with it from the rafters in the attic. He stepped on one of the returned boxes, he toppled it, and all the silk stockings and garter belts, the bras and panties, he held so dear, spilled out.

His new wife found him. Secretly she was glad. He had gone a bit more and more mad each day since their adopted son had arrived, She had known all that he wanted her to know of his first child and did not like how things seemed to be turning. She had gambled and

lost, giving in to getting this son he wanted so badly. He wanted him, now she knew for what. She had begun divorce proceedings to protect the child. Quietly, to preserve the peace.

He had those clothes of his mother a good long time. Years after her death in fact. His father's death had come and gone, his remains and his things long disposed of. But not his mother. He had not completed the task. He had in fact, all this time, been stealing from a corpse.

She turned on her heel and closed up the attic. She locked up the house tight. All the while walking down in a pair of red pumps, snow white suit, and a red cloche; that had been his mothers. She picked up her son and headed out; she would make him a politician, too. It was all hers now, all of it.

