

## The Flies Followed Her Around

My sister Genevive had always been quite peculiar. The flies followed her around. I watched them as they hovered in her presence, lingering on the things she touched. It wasn't something we spoke about. Mother and Father never seemed to notice them. I always wondered if they were just ignoring them or simply couldn't see them at all. The way no one seemed at all bothered, not even Genevive, made me think I was going crazy sometimes. I would have believed I was going mad had I not seen our uncle swatting at them on the few occasions he visited.

After a while, I just learned to ignore them—until Father brought up finding a potential suitor for her. She stood up very abruptly before he even finished his sentence, causing the flies that had settled on her chair to launch into flight. They immediately became aggravated, tearing around the room and filling it with an uneasy murmur of vibrations.

“Sit down, Genevive. You can't avoid this any longer.” Mother's words were lost in the sound of the swarm, failing to reach my sister as she slunk out of the room. My parents exchanged frustrated looks before turning to me.

“Lucian. She listens to you. Go talk some sense into that girl, would you?” And so, I did. I followed the stream of lingering flies towards her room, pushing the door open. Genevive was sat on the bed, clinging her knees to her chest and staring distantly across the room.

“You know they just want what's best for you. A marriage in the family would be a great thing for us.” I approached her slowly and sat on the edge of the bed, eyeing the black dots that skittered across her bedsheets.

“Marriage,” She scoffed out. “What a useless thing.”

“You used to talk about it all the time! Moving out of here, being with someone who loves you. Don't you still want that?” Her gaze crawled towards me, angry but still somehow soft.

“Love me? No one could love me!” She cried out. Tears welled in her eyes, but she took a moment, inhaled deeply and blinked them away. “I wasn't designed to be loved, you see. No,” She held out her forearm and gently grazed her fingertips over it. “Peel back the skin, and you will see.”

“See what?” I peered over, unsure of what to expect.

“I am rotten inside.” This took me by surprise. What could she have possibly meant by that? A flash of black scurried across her skin.

“The flies, where did they come from?”

“Don’t you understand? I am the sweet-smelling fruit that attracts them, sticky and inviting. They can’t help it, of course.” She gazed sympathetically at the one crawling along the length of her thigh. “Getting stuck in me. I am designed this way, and so are they.”

“Look,” I said hesitantly. “I’m sure we can get rid of them. We just-”

“It’s too late for that. They are inside me now.” She sighed deeply, placing a hand on her stomach. “They fester.” I looked her up and down. She didn’t appear to have any sort of infection. Her face did appear more hollow than usual, but not to an extent that I’d be concerned.

“Gen... I don’t understand what you mean. Are you unwell?” She sniffed at my words as if she found them amusing.

“You’ll see soon enough. You all will. Mother, Father, every suitor in the town will know.” She rested her chin between her knees defeatedly. “No one wants tainted meat.”

“Did something happen? Something you haven’t told me?” I took her hand, trying to search for some sort of truth in her eyes. She was silent for a moment, her jaw moving as if trying to search for words. She took a breath in through her nose, and suddenly, she appeared as if she might puke. She bent forward towards the bed and retched. I watched in horror as a single dead fly came out, pattering onto the white sheets between her thighs. She eyed it for a moment before brushing it away dismissively. “Gen, what was that?”

“What was what?” I could tell she was avoiding it. “It’s nothing, really. I wake up with them in my mouth sometimes. They leave a horrible taste, you know? Bitter.” I wasn’t sure whether she was serious. The way she spoke so nonchalantly, as if it was completely normal, was unsettling.

“Gen, you know I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what’s wrong.”

“Then don’t.” She muttered. “I don’t need help.”

“Does anyone else know? That you’re... Sick?” She didn’t respond, but the flies seemed to become slightly agitated. “Don’t you think we should at least tell-”

“Lucian, just leave me alone. Tell Mother that I’d rather die before meeting any of her suitors.” With that, she turned her back to me, watching the flies on the windowsill. I opened my mouth to speak, but at that moment, one landed on my nose. I quickly swatted it off. Another one landed on my arm. The more I brushed off, the more started to appear. In a panic, I backed out of the room, swatting them away. I took one last look at Genevive before swiftly shutting the door. As soon as I did, the flies abandoned me and desperately scrambled to crawl through the keyhole and under the doorframe.

“Well?” My Mother asked as I reentered the living room.

“She’s just being stubborn. You know how she is.” I sighed, watching disapproval spread across their faces.

“That girl will have to face reality one way or another.” She tutted.

“Mother,” I hesitated for a moment. “I think she’s sick.”

“Sick? How so? She appears to be in good health.”

“I’m not sure, but I worry for her.”

“Well,” She frowned and turned to Father. “My Dear, why don’t you send word to your brother? Get her checked up.” Father simply nodded and got back to the paper he was reading. I only wanted what I thought was best for Genevive, but perhaps that was my mistake.