

FEASTING ON THE DEAD

by

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FADE IN

INT. DERELICT WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A wide, dark hallway opens onto a dim, cavernous warehouse space. The sickly glow of a streetlight filters in through dusty and broken window panes high above, just below the rafters.

Trash, broken pieces of wood, discarded rags, and dirty shreds of canvas litter the floor.

A NOISE clatters and echoes in the gloom.

RISA (O.S.)

Nice one. Now the world knows we're here.

ERIC (O.S.)

Shut up. It's pitch black in here, okay?

SETH (O.S.)

If there really are ghosts in this place, I'm pretty sure they already knew we were here.

RISA, a fragile-looking teenage girl, emerges from the darkened hallway and gracefully picks her way over the detritus as she moves into the warehouse, eyes wide.

ERIC, a gawky teen boy, follows close behind her, stumbling occasionally as he grouches.

ERIC

Pretty sure it's the people still living here that we need to worry about.

Behind Eric, SETH, a reserved teen boy, emerges from the entryway and stops, staying close to the darkened entrance as he takes in the open space of the warehouse.

Risa's gaze darts around, trying to take everything in at once. She walks toward the remains of a shattered easel.

Pausing there, her eyes land on a small, broken PAINTBRUSH nearby. She picks it out of the surrounding dust and trash, lifting it reverently.

RISA

Look! This is it - this really was his studio. He was here. He *slept* here.

ERIC

(snorts)

I'm betting a lot of people have slept here. None of them you'd want to meet. Your fangirl obsession is going to get us killed.

RISA

I'm not obsessed.

ERIC

Riiiiight.

Seth's steady gaze takes in the shadows of the room before shifting to study the darkened corners.

Eric notices Seth's position by the hallway entrance and smirks.

ERIC (CONT'D)

What'sa matter, Seth? You scared of the spooky-wooky ghosties?

RISA

Don't be a dick, Eric. And I'm *not* obsessed.

SETH

Not afraid of ghosts. Doesn't mean this place isn't sad.

Risa turns to give Seth a sharp look.

He meets her gaze evenly and lifts one shoulder in a slight shrug.

Risa considers him thoughtfully, then she gives him a tiny nod before returning to her study of the space.

RISA

We don't have to stay long. I just wanted to see where he worked. Get a feel for how he lived.

ERIC

Because you're not obsessed with him.
And you're not hoping his ghost will
appear and make sweet, spectral love
to you.

RISA

Seriously. Quit being a dick.

SETH

(softly)

Better to be obsessed with a ghost
than jealous of one.

ERIC

Don't go all emo on us, Seth. It's
just a little adventure, okay?

MAN (O.S.)

Adventure in this locale is surely a
wiser choice than sweet lovemaking.

Eric jumps and emits a small, girlish SCREAM. He and Risa
both spin around to find the source of the voice.

A MAN emerges from a shadowed corner of the room. His
clothing is ragged and splotched with unidentifiable stains.
Dim lighting and a thick layer of dirt conspire to make his
long, clumped hair and bedraggled beard look grey, but the
face beneath all that filth and hair does not appear to be
much older than late-thirties.

RISA

Jesus! You scared us!

ERIC

Shouldn't creep up on people, man.

The Man studies them. His voice, rough like a rusty gear at
first, smooths out as he speaks.

MAN

Were you not seeking ghosts? Creepy
and scared would be *de rigueur*, I
should think.

ERIC

The fuck is "*de rigueur*"?

Risa's chin lifts. She approaches the Man; Eric follows
warily, close on her heels.

RISA

Have you ever seen any ghosts here?

The Man shifts his focus to her. A small smile quirks his mouth as he takes in her delicate frame and aggressive pose, shadowed by Eric's position at her flank.

MAN

Frequently. You three are the first living people I've seen in ages.

Eric makes a scoffing sound but Risa's eyes take on an avid gleam.

RISA

Joseph Elliston? The artist? Have you ever seen him?

The Man's smile fades and his gaze wanders past her to stare at the broken easel. His head gives a small tick.

MAN

I've seen many people. None of them artists.

ERIC

How do you know? If you see a lot of ghosts, I mean. How do you know one of them's not Elliston's ghost?

RISA

He used to live here, paint here.
(reverently)
This is where he killed himself.

The Man jerks his eyes back to Risa. His head ticks again, a little harder.

MAN

"Living" is a relative term, children.
By your standards, most who pass through here stopped living long ago. They may not yet be dead, but to you they are already ghosts.

ERIC

A philosophical bum. That's just great.

Eric takes a quick step back when another jerk of the Man's head brings his sharp eyes level with Eric's.

MAN

I wasn't born indigent, boy. I lived a life. I earned my philosophy. What have you earned?

The man leans forward, the frequency of his ticks increasing as he stares at Risa and Eric, unblinking, his voice intent.

MAN (CONT'D)

You come here to feed on the dead yet find the reality wanting. Perhaps this is because you trespass where you do not belong, and dine on what has not been offered.

Eric tugs at Risa's sleeve, his voice a nervous whisper.

ERIC

C'mon, let's get outta here.

Risa ignores him, her small frame squared off against the Man's.

RISA

Trespass, maybe. But feeding?

MAN

Exactly so. You claim admiration for this Elliston, yes? Yet you come to where he suffered most. To where he bled.

ERIC

(singsong between clenched teeth)
Quit pissing off the crazy dude.

The Man takes a step forward and gestures toward the broken paintbrush still clasped in Risa's hand. She stiffens but holds her ground.

MAN

You take a piece of him - claim it for yourself. You gorge yourself on his pain.

He takes another step forward. Risa and Eric step back to maintain their distance.

RISA

We didn't mean any harm!

MAN

Of course you meant no harm. This does
not mean you didn't cause any.

The Man takes another step forward, his head jerking in a steady rhythm, his unblinking glare locked onto Risa's eyes.

She takes another step back, forcing Eric to stumble backward as well.

RISA

Look, we'll leave, okay? We're sorry
we bothered you. Let's go, guys.

Risa takes a step toward the hallway then pauses, glancing down at the paintbrush in her hand. She hesitates, then holds it out to the Man.

The Man's posture straightens. The motions of his head begin to slow, but his gaze, though less intent, remains locked on Risa.

MAN

You may keep your table scraps.

Risa hesitates once more, then lifts her chin, defiant. She turns toward the darkened hallway, paintbrush in hand, and marches out without a backward glance. Eric follows, keeping the Man in his sights as he slips clumsily past Seth and into the hallway.

Motionless but for the decreasing head ticks, the Man's eyes follow them as they disappear into the darkness. He slowly shifts his gaze to meet Seth's.

Seth studies him in return.

Gradually, the Man himself starts to flicker in time to the ticks, his image thinning around the edges.

SETH

Did we take too much from you?

MAN

Too much.

(beat)

Too much, too late. But never enough.

The Man's eyes hold Seth's for a last, lost moment, and then he fades away completely.

Seth gives a final glance around the warehouse, then turns and walks into the darkened hallway. His voice carries softly back over his shoulder as he goes.

SETH (O.S.)
Goodbye, Mr. Elliston.

FADE OUT