

## Porphyria's Lover

retold by Jessica Seawright

There was something about the steady pounding of rainwater against the bricks that always soothed me. I found myself wondering how I had gotten myself caught up in this arrangement. Beau was a nice fellow; he always held the doors open for me when we escaped on our romantic getaways in the country. Recently, I had noticed a slight shift in his behavior, but I chalked it up to stress from his job. Beau and I didn't talk much when we met up, he always had other things on his mind, and I'd honestly rather he didn't begin to look at me as his confidant. There were certain things I wanted in this life and to be at a man's beck and call wasn't one of them.

The few friends I had confided in about Beau and I's tryst had advised me to take grasp of this good thing. They proclaimed Beau a worthy suitor who would make me an honorable wife someday.

This had all begun with a simple look. I noticed him ravishing me with his eyes from across the room and I couldn't help the blush that crept upon my pale cheeks. Just like that I was putty in his strong hands and he was a fool eager to satisfy my whims.

Tonight, we had agreed to meet in his tiny cobblestone home, just off the edge of clearwater river. There wasn't a neighbor for miles around these parts and I had almost changed my mind about coming. The trip out was tumultuous, thanks to the steady downpour of rain, but I yearned to see Beau, and nothing would stop me tonight.

I entered the cottage, relieved to find that Beau had beaten me here. I don't know what I'd have done if I had to sit and wait in the woods for him to join me.

The party I'd left was filled with men of notable stature, yet I risked it all for another night with the man that captivated my heart. The dress I wore, which once wrapped around my body like fine silk, now clung to me like a second skin I desperately wished to shed. I peeled the straining bodice filled with ornate trinkets from my body, laying it on the lone chair that sat next to the inglenook.

"Hi, lover." I spoke into the dimly lit cabin.

Beau laid sprawled out underneath the sheets, seemingly bare. His eyes glinted with that devilish charm that had drawn me to him in the first place. He watched me in complete silence as I walked over to the fireplace and bent down to light it.

“It’s raining cats and dogs out there.” I continued, unfazed by Beau’s reticence.

Beau always liked to watch me. He was peculiar like that.

“I’ve been thinking,” I slowly made my way over to him, now free of the fabric that once bound me.

His eyes piqued with interest. No good conversation has ever begun with a woman uttering those words.

I sat down beside him, finally able to admire him in the backlight of the fire. His light brown hair fell over his eyes. He resembled a young lass, though his eyes bore the stories of men who have lived a thousand lives. “I don’t see why we can’t do this every night. There are no duties binding me to solitude and neither you. We can join the outside world as one, together forever.”

His fingers came up to my jaw, tracing a slow line down towards my ear. The hairs on the back of my neck went crazy.

“I love you.” I muttered.

His head cocked to the side, mouth falling as if the words disappointed him.

Wordlessly, he began to twirl my hair around his fingers. I thought nothing of it, since my long golden locks were always fascinating to him. Sometimes he’d spend hours playing in my hair before the sun rose and we had to resume our places in the world. Within seconds he had the lot of my hair in the palm of his hands, bringing it up to his face and taking a long, deep drawl.

Quicker than I could respond, his arm pressed me down into the bed as his other hand, full of my hair, began to weave the locks around my neck.

The tiny spark of darkness I had noticed in his eyes was now a full-blown flame, the sweltering fire of a dragon’s tongue.

I fought against him, my weak arms no match for his broad, strong shoulders. My nails dug deep into his flesh, scratching and clawing for release.

Beside his bed sat week-old roses, dying and wilted, in a glass vase. He had brought those to me only the week before, saying the bright red reminded him of my cheeks after we'd made love.

My dainty fingers were now reaching and stretching towards the one thing that would bring me salvation. They slowly clasped around the vase, bringing it towards his head in one hard, swift motion. His grip around my neck loosened, his eyes dying like the last petal falling from the withering flowers. His once welcoming pressure suddenly felt like a sack of potatoes, crushing me, and restricting my air flow.

I pushed his heavy body off me and fell to the floor, crawling on my hands and knees to the other side of the cabin.

I sat there, staring at his body, slowly decaying only feet away from me and the dying fire. Weeping, every single thought vanished from my head.

What would I tell people? That he'd fell? Would they believe that he'd attacked me? Or would they write it off as the actions of a spurned lover? Should I hide his body? Would they lock me away in some dungeon? Rip away my title and proprieties?

Those questions weren't the ones that kept me sitting there long after the fire had died out and the sounds of thundering rain faded away.

Instead, I wondered, how could I ever trust a man not to do this to me again.