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Untitled Illustration 4

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"I didn’t."

"Not long. Just long enough to ask yourself if you were truly happy with me as your wife. I saw it in your eyes as I begged my heart to keep beating and begged you for help. You hesitated. My husband!"

"No!" I shoved my fisted hand hard into my stomach to stop the thing with rat teeth from gnawing its way out.

"We were making love when I died, and you weren’t even sure you wanted me?" She stroked my hair with goblin fingers. "Would you like me to tell you a secret, husband?" A wet gurgle. "When you make love with someone, your souls are joined."

"Huh?" What the heck was this about?

Somehow I had stood and was now shouting a final defense against the reality of Nightmare. "How could you know what we were doing? I was alone with her! I was making love to my wife, not to...not..." My teeth and fists were clenched. "No one but the doctor knew what we were doing! No one!" Well, no one, my cowardly mind responded, but the doctor, and the coroner, and maybe the coroner’s bowling buddies.

"It is me, Pauly."

"You, huh?" I was enraged. "Alright, so what the hell did ‘we’ have for breakfast that last morning?" Now that was smart—I couldn’t remember, myself. I searched in the dark for something to slam into her face. The monster face. A dresser was closest and on it the outline of an antique kerosene lantern.

"Cold pizza."

The breath froze in my throat. What had she said? We had gone to the cinema the night before. And then out to...

"Cold pizza, Pauly. You remember."

I did. It was she. And now I badly wanted a case of terminal amnesia. Now I shut my mouth and eyes and asked God to wake me up from the worst nightmare anyone could ever have. My face and hands met in resignation.

"Why?" I asked, knowing full well why. This horror was mine, and she was right: I had earned it.