

Cold Yet Another Night, In Death's Embrace

Stepan Suma

Abstract

A short creative scary story, inspired by one of the Pittsburgh's most notabel graveyard structures. Telling a fictional tale of Lucille and her destructive marriage with an aging delusional man.

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"My Meritites, stay close to me, please," the man whispered while reaching for the woman. Her hands immediately locked together, denying the dying man the privilege of her soft hands. She tried to get out of his reach, but he grabbed her forearm. The woman clinched a little bit upon his cold touch. It was an October night, in the middle of New England's autumn. The air in the room was heavy and hot. A drop of sweat rolled over the woman's face dripping on the dusted carpets. It felt like the house was dying with the man, slowly drifting away.

The man was named William H. Brown, or as he called himself, Khufu of the West, after the great pharaoh that constructed the first pyramid of Egypt. William was lying in his bedchamber, in Silverlane, the family's manor in Squirrel Hill. Its windows overlooked the subtle waters of Monongahela, a fierce piece of local nature. It was a reminder that some things cannot be tamed. The room was otherwise empty, except for the couple, married out of reason. Meritites, or Lady Lucille, as she was known outside of her husband's chambers, was a daughter of low English nobility who had moved to America decades ago seeking prosperity in the New World. Those days, however, were far behind; now, with her family's financial struggle, Lucille had become a barter to save her relatives. A marriage born of reason, not love. The old continent's blood in her veins, she became a pawn in a man's game.

At his command, Lucille hesitantly approached the gold and blue lamé sheets. She had to force her teeth not to click. Just as a precaution, Lucille grabbed the linens, so she could create a distraction at any second if the situation were to become dangerous. One could never know with the delirious man. "*Yanad harak*, my consort. Tell me, what haunts your mind?"

The lady felt like time had stopped at the mansion, especially for these last few months. Slowly, as William's mind got sicker, he embraced his mythical Egyptian alter ego more and more. The doctors called it Parkinson's, after some Englishman. Sometimes it felt like Lucille's husband had been dead for weeks, and there was only Khufu. A king who was preparing for the inevitable. Hoarding earthly possessions for his tomb. The east and north wings were now overflowing with golden scarabs, piles of mummification manuals, masks of pure gold, and weapons. A piece of a foregone burial site in Pennsylvania.

"It is nothing, my jade." That was how Meritites, Khufu's concubine, called him in their private correspondence. The lady knew that it would please the old man. She continued, "merely a train of thought that is nothing of importance to burden your mind with." Lucille often wondered how her life would be different if only she had never been married off. In her dreams, she wandered the boulevards of New York City, sipping champagne and laughing without a care in the world. It was a dream of a different life, one categorically different from the one she had now. Here, she was just a shadow, a reflection of someone's delusions.

"You know, my Meritites, our predecessors were wise. They understood the need for companionship, even in the afterlife. What pharaoh would want to cross into eternity alone?" he mused; eyes gleaming in the weak candlelight. "We too shall continue our reign together. Beyond this life." Lucille could not help but smirk at his declarations; such moments felt far off, for she was still young and vibrant. Her life was just at its beginning. "There, my Meritites. Please, my tea," she obediently reached for the porcelain cup. A subtle reminder that they were not in the ancient times. Her hand trembled a bit when hovering over the hot liquid. It burned her skin. Taking a deep breath,

Lucille tasted it, just a precaution that it would not burn the tongue as well. She found it delicious and passed the cup to Mr. Brown. He used the designs of his new tomb as a makeshift coaster.

The first pyramid of Pittsburgh stood there at the Homewood cemetery, about 10 minutes by carriage from the manor. Large stone blocks decorated with intricate engraved details, the first pyramid of Pittsburgh. Just as Khufu brought the architectural wonders into Egypt, it was now William that enlightened the minds of Americans. Originally, pyramids were meant as a place for low folk to pay their respects to their departed rulers. Now, this one served as a tomb for Brown, a man who ruled only over his wife.

Suddenly, like a bee sting, Lucille sensed a sharp ache in her abdomen. It was a familiar sensation, perhaps from stress again. Not now, she thought, brushing a hand over her brow, slick with sweat from the still damp air of the room. Panic welled up in her chest as she struggled to catch her breath. Something was wrong. Terribly wrong. "I am deeply sorry. Could you please dismiss me," she stammered. Yet his response sent another chill down her spine: "Is it working already? Ah, the books never lie." "What do you mean?" she asked. But she knew.

"Be wary of your words, woman. No salutations, it does not suit you. As you know, I am quickly departing; I hear the cry of the gods, calling me to accompany them in the afterlife. Now you are left without certainty. Well, as my wife, you shall do as those before have done, and join me on my journey." Suddenly, Brown's face twisted into a grim smile. It became crystal clear; she recalled the old traditions she had read about. Meritites had escorted her late husband to the afterlife so she could serve him forever. Now Lucille, too, would become a love for eternity.

Starting to feel the burn over her whole body, she grabbed the sheets and created a distraction to escape the hold of her husband. The hallways of the manor stretched on forever, as though the house itself had conspired to trap her. The walls, once bright with ornate portraits, were now bare and crumbling, like the tomb Brown built. Her footsteps echoed loudly in the silence, the only sound in a house that had long ago fallen into a deep, deathly stillness. Lucille opened one of the windows. Outside the wind howled a sharp wail. Trying to catch her breath, she saw the leaves dancing in the current. But there was no time. She continued running to her room. A place where she kept all her medicine, even some antidotes. When she finally reached the cabinet, she fell on her knees. Cyanide. The whole bottle was gone. Now, it was slowly overtaking every inch of her body; time was slipping away.

Lucille grasped the cabinet, trying to pull herself up. But what was the point of standing when her body was already slipping into the abyss? Lying down, she suddenly felt an indescribable sensation of lightness; her mind, once consumed by the effort to keep breathing, was now free of worry. Was this how freedom felt? She had felt like this before the day William acquired her, then never again. A prison was what this marriage was. The time for sugarcoating was over. No more pretending. Lately, she had been living in someone else's dream, but now she wanted to wake up. A bitter laugh bubbled up inside her chest, though she had no strength left to release it. Here she was, a pharaoh's sacrifice in a place where ancient history bled into madness.

The candle beside her flickered once, then went out, leaving the room bathed in the cold, silent night. Lucille's body lay still, her hand resting on the carpet.