

Dwelling-
Thomas W Jobling

The tapestry of scars shone pink on his bone white knuckles as he gripped the wooden handle of his tankard so tightly that, in the stoic silence he seemed to exude, you could almost hear it creak. The veins in his neck looked fit to burst and the muscles in his jaw began to tremor in protest. What was most unnerving, however, were his eyes. They shone a sharp blue, so pale they were almost white, pupils mere pin pricks in crackling pools of intensity.

His gaze was fixated on an innocuous shelf behind the bar. The shelf held a myriad of bottles. One was brown and ugly, almost opaque in the poor light, with only a scrawled label which betrayed the nature of its viscous contents. Another was tall and elegant with a narrowly fluted neck and supine ripples across its bodice, a clear liquid shimmered within. To its right was a well-used and unpretentious bottle, its contents glowed a warm copper colour in the candlelight. A bedraggled looking cork, a touch tattered around its edges, had been stuffed unkindly into the neck of the neighbouring bottle; it sat askew like the ragged cap of a street urchin. The final bottle on the shelf looked plain enough, but its label betrayed its value. Written in tall erudite letters of complex calligraphy, the opulent black ink and blood red border were lapped up by velvet parchment.

His eyes did not focus on any one bottle, but rather drank in the sight of them all, yearning to fathom their unknowable origins. The rocks that fell from the immeasurable mountains to be worn and weathered into silt and sand. The silt and sand that was forced into the fires of the furnaces, melted and moulded then blown and blasted to sit and sparkle on the shelf today.

Neither the figure's broadly built back nor the vast expanse of his chest gave the slightest indication that he might be breathing. It seemed he might sit there forever. Eyes ablaze, jaw clenched, knuckles growing ever whiter.

The longer he stared however, the easier it was to notice. Notice that the eyes, despite their brilliance, were set in sunken sockets. Notice the powerfully clenched jaw was haphazardly bristled with hair. Notice that the stone-like strength of his grip on the tankard had grown brittle like ice.

Eventually, with a dejected exhalation of breath his gaze dropped. Defeated. An acquiescent paw slid the tankard down the end of the bar and he stood to leave. His feet fell heavy on the floorboards as he finally found the door. When he clasped the handle however, something in his posture changed. Before he had been racked with tension, taut like elastic stretched beyond its means. Now that tension had evaporated, and he relaxed into pugilistic grace.

He became alive with movement and whipped around ferociously. The sharp blue eyes now crackled with the intensity of collapsing stars, that fierce fixation of deep thought had dissolved into something else entirely. Something unnatural. As that gaze fell on the bottles once more a fearsome shriek of rage pierced his silence. Every bottle behind the bar erupted in a shower of glass. The shimmering shards caught the weak candlelight and fell like pearls of pure flame. The deadly confetti rained down on unsuspecting patrons. No bottle was spared his wrath, even those set on shelves that had seemed to escape his initial inspection were shattered indiscriminately.

Fiction

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