

BLOODY FREESIA

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She quickly finished pinning her bun in place and hurried out of the shabby apartment, grabbing her keys and a few five dollar bills on the way. Tony, her 8-year-old son waddled along with her. His school had not yet started, a few more days of spring break were still left. The sky was getting darker every second and she was already late for her first day at work after the break.

The young woman hastily opened her faded black umbrella which had fraying edges and a broken spoke, and then crossed the road. Dark chalky clouds stretched across the late spring skies, promising a heavy shower soon after. A chilly wind blew, whipping her face with its cold icy touch. She gripped her son's hand tightly and kept walking, increasing her pace with each glance at her worn-out leather watch.

Her head throbbed, even though she went to bed early the night before it felt like she had got zero shut-eye. Breathless, she finally reached the posh side of the city and pushed through the ornate glass doors of the expensive hotel she worked at. Some of the hotel staff along with manager was standing together on the side. She took a few uneasy steps towards them. The manager glared at her.

"Marisa, have you forgotten? The Foreign Minister of Nigeria is arriving today. Now make that useless boy of yours vanish from my sight and stand in the line for the meet and greet," said the manager through gritted teeth. Then he took a quick breath, straightened up, fixed his bow tie and plastered a smile across his face. Marisa ushered Tony away, the boy knew where he was to be to keep out of the manager's sight. She smoothed her hair and took her place on the line. The sound of trumpets filled the air and a tall black man emerged from a shiny limousine and stepped inside the hotel. No hair sat atop his head, but his twinkling brown eyes were enough to capture anyone's attention. He was clean shaved and his skin glowed radiantly. Marisa suddenly felt nauseous. This man resembled her dead husband more than she wanted to believe.

The memory of that night dawned on her. Years ago, she had woken up to smell of flowers in the middle of the night to find her husband splattered with blood on the bed beside her. His throat was slit and freesia petals were showered upon him. The flowers he had brought the day before in honor of their marriage anniversary. The news coverage had dubbed the killer as

"The Florist." The memory of the sickly sweet floral scent haunted her.

The Minister turned towards her as his warm eyes bore into hers. She saw her husband in that man.

"Good mor – " began Marisa, but dizziness took over her and she lost her footing. The thud on the ground never came, for the minister had grabbed her just in time.

"It's okay, sir. I'll deal with this. The Presidential Suite has been readied for you. You will be escorted there now," said the hotel manager hurriedly, his face glowed a bright shade of crimson. Such humiliation in his hotel! The Minister took one last disbelieving glance at Marisa and went off towards the elevator.

Fast forward a few hours, and Marisa was walking to the Presidential Suite with a tray of strongly brewed tea and tiny little delicacies that she did not recognise. She knocked on the door and entered. The Minister was lounging on the couch in his bathrobe.

"Your room service has arrived, sir," announced Marisa. "I'm extremely sorry for what happened earlier. I didn't mean to cause any disruption, sir," she added.

The man waved his hand swiftly, "No big deal, missy. How are you now?"

"Yes, sir, I'm fine," she replied and proceeded to place the cup and plate on the coffee table. She moved aside an intricate vase of scarlet freesias. She left the room carrying the tray, without looking back once. *I can't stay there anymore*, she thought. She was getting lost in her thoughts when the crashing sound of china brought her back to senses. She was staring straight at the fuming manager as the shattered pieces of the tray pricked her feet.

"First you're late, then you humiliate me in front of an international guest and now you damage the hotel's property. YOU ARE FIRED. YOU HEAR ME?" bellowed the man.

Marisa covered her face and ran off to the nearest store room. She slammed the door shut and slid down to the floor. Hot tears trickled down her face. She lost her only source of

income, she had little to no savings and her son's education was at stake. She sat there for hours, silently crying until she drifted off to sleep.

Back at the hotel lobby, Tony desperately wanted to see his mother. He asked around until he got a location. He rushed towards the elevators but a crowd had gathered and there was a lot of commotion. A black man came running in his bathrobe, "My shaving kit has been stolen! Even the flowers in my suite disappeared!" he shouted. When no one paid any heed, he pushed past the crowd.

"Oh." That was all he could manage.

There on the elevator was the manager, lying on his back, his eyes open with a petrified stare. There were razor marks on his face. Tucked in his lapel was a freesia.

Tony sprinted to the store room where Marisa sat. Marisa wrapped her hands around her son and he buried his face in her chest. Together they sat there in silence. She turned on the small TV that was wedged between some shelves. The headline on the news read "The Florist Strikes: Hotel Manager Murdered." Then the video went on to show the crime scene. The camera zoomed in on the manager's face. The striking red freesias on his lapel caught Marisa's attention.

The little boy lifted his head from his mother's body and asked, "Mum, why do you smell like freesias?"

