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### The Unquiet Grave - Norman A. Rubin

The grave in the daytime had at one time an innocent appearance; it was wreathed yearly with a small bouquet of fresh flowers placed near the simple tombstone by caring kin. But the plain pine coffin beneath the earth held a gruesome and grim memorial. It contained the whitened bones of a woman who thought she played God's angel of mercy.

But the innocence of the burial site was no more as the cemetery had been entered forcefully and the grave violated by those who knew of the evil remains. The coffin had been uncovered and a rough stake driven through the corrupt remains that lay within. The grave was recovered hurriedly and its stone broken in pieces. Revenge was the word, which pointed in rumour to the perpetrators as being members of a family of one of her victims.

At the quiet of night hours the dreadful mystery was whispered in the flow of time when the flowers withered and turned to brown: when the spiders and the beetle resumed their accustomed residence. Those passing the cemetery saw a strange corpse-like figure staring at them from inside the gates.

"My lamp lit up in unnerving revelation the sleeping form of something that long had been dead.

From around its twisted neck was a cut noose. The glazed eyes stared horribly - almost  
mocking and daring me to confront its presence."

The etched words on the time-discoloured pieces of tombstone, greenish in mold, revealed the final resting place of Myra Linz born in 12th of May in the year of our Lord 1884 and laid to rest on the fifth of April 1930. But the words 'Rest in Peace' hid the note of her execution by the hangman's rope for the murder of thirty-four or more innocent victims.

Myra Linz, auxiliary nurse was employed for fifteen odd years the night duty attendant at the Lainz hospital at the town of Chuvash within the borders of the Republika Hravatska. The building was an ornated eighty-two year old mansion that had long been converted into a medical center for the care of the terminally ill and elderly.

Few of the regular nurses wanted to work the grueling night hours and that they were happy to hand their control of the wards to the auxiliaries - mainly those who wanted to be nurses but failed their exams. No one really seemed to care.

Nurse Linz was a tense, highly-strung woman who had seen much suffering in her duties at the hospital. Myra had witnessed the repeated harvest of miserable souls by the scythe of the Grim Reaper. Only at rare times a miracle occurred and a patient was considered cured and discharged. Yet the number of her charges always remained the same; the beds were continually filled with another piece of human misery when empty of the previous sufferer.

Myra Linz was sighted as a small, lumpy woman with watery eyes that bulged from a gaunt face; her mouth was tight and hard with lips set in grimness, a demeanor, which did little to endear her

to others. Her speech was gruff and demanding, which caused immediate acquiescence by her charges.

Myra Linz always referred to her patients as if they were dumb beasts instead of frail sickly creatures. The hospital, where she nursed, was a place of suffering and misery. Poor souls waiting out their last days in morbid, hopeless circumstances. They might as well not exist. An aura of the presence of King Death was constantly around the surroundings.

Auxiliary nurse Linz was more than grateful to take on the additional responsibilities of the night shifts. For her the absence of bossy nurses was a welcomed relief. It was also better not to be under the thumb of her dictatorial husband who demanded constantly food and sex.

At the beginning of their marriage his demands were a lark to comply. Upon the sound of his footsteps at the end of his nine-hour day she was ready with a good meal. After all, she was his wife and they once enjoyed a good sex life, as her naked body was always ready.

But in the latter years she didn't feel in the mood for any sexual encounters in the early evening. It became a constant battle with heated arguments to force him to desist; yet at times she had the humiliation of his forceful hand. Fortunately no children were blessed to them and she thankfully avoided the shame of little eyes.

The night shift, with all the power and influence that was afforded her, was a blessed relief from the demanding husband. The nurses she relieved were quite happy when she signed in early for her shift not knowing or caring for the reason.

So, over a period of time, the grind of a night-shift life became ingrained in her system. Auxiliary nurse Myra Linz found other ways of satisfying herself.

The age-old hospital building exerted a strange pull on anyone who happened to pass by in the evening hours. The sheer enormity of the structure with its large Gothic windows that appeared darkened. The four-storey building looked far taller than seen. The greyish granite stonework was encrusted with the dirt of the years; vines clinging to the stone waved their tendrils eerily to the wisp of the winds.

Within, the atmosphere was of a different mode. The high-ceilinged rooms held the light of daylight and it poured into every corner. Cleanliness was all about, but the paintwork had seen better days. The walls were whitewashed, but here and there were damp stains and streaked black marks; the doors and woodwork bore the heavy mark of usage through the years. It was similar like the record of the non-caring attitude afforded the patients over the years.

The silence of the place was the worst, albeit the noise of humming elevators and the swish of pushed trolleys. But there was no hum of people, no friendly voices. It was rather like there were no people about. Yet, there were doctors, nurses, and attendants scurrying about in their duties. No one stopped and smiled, and only hushed whispers were heard between the personnel. An eerie stillness that enveloped the patients in their closed wards.

It happened on a cold wintry night in the recent past when auxiliary nurse Myra Linz decided to play the merciful angel of God. A cold bleakness was felt throughout the hospital. By midnight the daytime silence was replaced by a more sinister atmosphere of the sound of the sick in the depth of their misery. Every now and then a cough or a soft moan broke the stillness of the wards. But the doors to each ward were of thick oaken wood that smothered the very sound. No one, except the four other attendants and an overworked intern on duty, could possibly know what was going on.

Myra Linz had been assigned that night to the upper fourth floor where the elderly frail patients, mostly over seventy years, were attended in their remaining years. The auxiliary nurse treaded quietly on the white of her rubber soles as she entered one of the wards.

One elderly patient was sitting up on the white of his sheets as it was difficult for him breathe after a coughing spell. The angel of the Lord had a beatific smile on her face when she approached him; a small plastic glass was in her hand.

"Time for your throat wash! It will clear your throat. Now hold your head back and..."

No elderly patient had ever had the energy to refuse when Myra Linz issued a command in her dominant and strong willed manner. Myra put the stained plastic glass with some ill-tasting concoction to the lips of the frail man. The only sound that was heard was gurgling when she forced too much of the liquid down her patient's throat. When the contents were emptied she wiped the fluid from his face. Then she placed the elder on the comfort of his bed with the blanket tucked under his chin.

"There, that wasn't so bad!" she uttered as she made the holy sign.

Through the continuing years those frail elderly patients witnessed what they feared in receiving themselves - the dreaded throatwash treatment. None of them knew its ingredients of why it was administered. But they all knew it always brought the finality of life as they had watched enough beds emptied. To Myra Linz it meant a quick end to the suffering of patients cursed with the pain of their illness. Nurse Linz in her senseless mind had the imagined thought of being the angel of mercy called in His Name in terminating the afflicted misery of the patients under her care.

"The Good Lord had given me the word!" was the reasoning she told herself.

Within time the urge to kill increased. Her husband became one of the victims of her hand. A goodly portion of arsenic mixed in his beer saw him groveling on the floor in desperate agony. She stood with a sneer on her face as she watched when he pleaded for help. When Myra Linz felt no pulse on his neck she notified the ambulance service; and her word as a nurse saw his burial as a victim of a heart attack.

At the hospital she took notice of the most likely patients, Mainly those who annoyed her with their constant complaints. They were pathetic in her eyes and when the treatment was given they curled up and died slowly. Myra was even proud of her devoted task to put the elderly sick patients out of their misery. The trained nurses were not around and there was no questioning the right of an

under-trained auxiliary to administer drugs and hand out other treatment. Everytime she snuffed the life of yet another patient it gave her a surge of satisfaction.

The afterglow of her sacrificial killing in the name would stay with her for hours. She would return to her home at the end of her nightly shift elated by the horrendous act she had committed...

But fate intervened. A young doctor, newly employed on the hospital staff, was on daytime duty at one of the wards administered at night by Myra Linz. He was well liked by the elder patients as his treatment was with compassion. His favourite patient was a frail white haired lady who gave him a ready smile when he entered her ward. The good doctor then had a few cheerful words with her as he examined her, "you are looking bright and chipper this morning Frau Martha. Soon you shall be well and return home!" But the medic knew of her terminal disease and the quiet grave will be her only home.

Yet when one morning he was notified of her death he shed a few tears at the sight of her still frail body. When suddenly a frightened elderly woman burst out in a feared cry, "That ugly nurse gave her the throatwash treatment the night before! She said I could get the throatwash tonight! Please don't let her give me the throatwash!"

"Throatwash, throatwash," the word was repeated as it rumbled in his mind. The medic's interest was aroused by the alarm of the frail patient of such a treatment. He quietly put her in ease and found out that her accusation pointed to auxiliary nurse Myra Linz who was on duty the previous night.

His investigation was carried out on the same day. He was shocked when he discovered the truth of the so-called administered throatwash. When he was satisfied with his cursory findings he notified the higher authorities of his suspicion.

"I have checked the records and have noted the high rate of deaths of patients under the care of Myra Linz. We cannot allow this to continue. We must put a stop to this outrage at once!" It was a scandalous situation he was determined to end immediately and the hospital officials were in agreement.

Myra Linz was summoned the following morning and questioned about the so-called throatwash treatment. Her answers were vague and evasive. Then, upon the insistence of the young doctor, Myra was suspended from duty until the end of an intensive investigation.

An autopsy of an elderly woman patient was ordered. Blood and tissue sampling revealed toxic poisoning, namely an overdose of insulin to be the cause of her demise. The police were called in and Myra Linz was taken in custody.

The records of other patients who died under her care were checked meticulously by competent investigators. The authorities were shocked at the number of those who had passed away as notified on the medical charts. They were equally stunned when they learned of the excessive amount of insulin issued from the pharmaceutical store: Finger pointing was the only answer given when questions were raised

The register only stated that said patients were only given a glass of liquid placebo mixture to quiet them, which was administered by her. After all Myra Linz was correct in keeping the records in order.

Myra Linz had claimed during her trial that she was 'relieving the suffering of her patients'. Her words shocked the spectators and they gave a hue and cry, some with clenched fists raised. Only after the beating of the judge's gavel repeatedly and his harsh words, order was restored.

The judge in his rebuttal told her, "Those patients were gasping for breath throughout half the night before they succumbed to your treatment of so-called mercy. You cannot call this an act to relieve them of pain, but simply an act of murder. Your attitude was no different than an evil underling of the devil."

Myra Linz did not reply....