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Okay, so you've found your perfect match, your soul mate, then you swore a suicide pact and now you're spending all of eternity with the love of your life. Only one little problem... you've changed your mind.

They called me Julia Waters when I was alive. But now I'm just plain Julia. I know, such a middle-class name. Perfect for bland housewives from suburbia Hell who always give their husbands blowjobs first thing in the morning before making them breakfast with freshly squeezed orange juice. But I was different, I swear. I was going to give them all the finger, in a great big painting as tall as the office building I worked in.

I was an artist, you see. A walking cliché. Tortured, stringy hair, an over-sized sweater and jeans that had so many patches you couldn't really call them denim anymore. What happened to me? The most tragic, horrifying thing that could ever happen to an artist.

I got a job.

Nine to five at an advertising company. I was designing logos and corporate identities for used car salesmen and life insurance companies. Unpaid coffee breaks and too much overtime were the only benefits of the job. There was a... dress code. I still cringe at the clothes I had to wear then. Pencil skirts, high heeled pumps and suit jackets all in pastel colors. They were starchy and uncomfortable. I was in Hell, or I thought I was.

A new intern showed up at the office one day. He wore tight jeans and a loose fitting dangerous smile; the kind that said 'I could fuck you royally and make you scream my name but I'm too lazy to



bother.' Awful, I know. I shouldn't have fallen for him, the way all the girls in the office swooned in his presence.

His name is Doug and he died a moment after I did.

At first I was maintaining my 'I don't give a shit' attitude around him. I refused to bow down to him, be yet another girl offering sexual favors only to walk away with bruised knees and feeling like a whore. Nope, not me. I wasn't going to go there.

But he had his eyes on me, I could feel it. For weeks he did nothing but stare at me when he thought I wasn't looking. During a coffee break, when I was the only one outside trying to smoke in a downpour, he joined me. Doug didn't smoke. He just smiled in way that made me feel like he knew all my secrets when I was sure that I didn't have any.

"You're an artist," he said, "I can tell."

I scoffed and retorted, "You mean I'm a sell out."

He laughed and leaned toward me to whisper in my ear. "I'm an artist as well."

"Bullshit," I muttered.

He chuckled quietly on my earlobe and I hated the way his breath sent delicious shivers down my spine. But in the next moment, I went from hating him to falling madly in love.

"I'd like to take you someplace," he whispered, "where I can kiss you for a very long time."

And so he did. And I quit smoking. I had a new oral fixation. During coffee breaks and late at night after everyone had gone home for the day. He'd take me by the side of the building, on my desk, our boss' office at two o'clock in the morning. And you wouldn't believe the action that copy room saw. Sure enough, I screamed his name so many times that I lost count.

I was twenty-four, insanely in love and clinically stupid.

We were artists all right, in the true sense of the word. We believed the only way we could be real artists was to die tragically young and our art would sell for millions. It was our big F you at corporate America. Yeah, it seemed like a good idea at the time. But now we're incorporeal and corporate America doesn't even know we ever existed. Last I checked, my paintings were being given away to a thrift shop. They're probably sold next to pictures of velvet dogs and tacky Hawaiian hula girl lamps for fifty cents a pop.

Think I'm bitter? You betcha.

Doug was the one who taught me that since we were artists selling our souls to the corporate

world, there was only one resolution for our lives. A suicide pact. But it couldn't be just any suicide. Oh no, we had to go for full drama. We were going out with a bang, fireworks and all.

So I married him in a tiny chapel at the end of a dirt road just outside of the city. We dressed in the finest wedding attire we could afford and looked rather out of place in that run down chapel. Funny, I remember so little about being alive but I can recall every detail of my pathetic wedding. I don't mean funny ha-ha, more like funny... uh-oh.

I had my doubts right then, but I was committed. I was dying for a good cause with the love of my life. And Doug had his father's gun. It all seemed too easy. More importantly, it was my wedding night and everything had to be perfect. We made love all night long and this time I didn't scream his name; it was spoken in whispers. Then I closed my eyes and waited for the gunshot.

Think I'm a fatalist? Well, I am now. I'm dead.

They say men change after you've married them. Who 'they' are, I couldn't really say. I only remember bits and pieces of when I was alive. Sometimes things will pop into my head and I'll have no idea where they came from. Like how men are suppose to pick up bad habits and let themselves go after they've married. I knew that and expected it. I may have been artist but I was realistic.

What I didn't expect was for Doug to completely change into an idiot. He's practically a walking cartoon from a badly drawn show. He changed. A lot. I don't mean in that 'I've just died and now I'm a ghost' way. I mean things like always picking plasma out of his nose and don't get me started on the spectral farting. Sometimes he stares off into space with the goofiest smile. When I ask him about it, he just says he's nightmaring because that's what ghosts do. And the biggest pet peeve: he's always running around with zombies who hang out in a nearby cemetery while I'm stuck in the house trying to do proper hauntings.

Oh yeah... the house. The dead real estate agent kept assuring us that it was a good house for newlyweds to start haunting. A big lie. There aren't any people here and the house has been abandoned for a century. Do you have any idea how pathetically boring it is to try to scare tiny spiders, centipedes, rats and roaches? I have no purpose anymore. I've gone from being a sold out artist to a non-scary ghost. Ridiculous. Besides, I think I'm probably more scared of the vermin than they are of me.

Don't mistake me, I'm not depressed. I'm just saying that ever since Doug and I died, our relationship has changed. We don't call each other sweet pet names anymore, we've long since



stopped having sex and we argue all the time over the stupidest things. One time we argued about whose turn it was to haunt the house next door that actually have living people in there. Eventually, we gave up trying to find any kind of solution and let the local ghouls do the job. You'd think our yelling matches would be heard all over Hell. But we're ghosts, remember? Just wafting through the Afterlife on mute.

I'm bored but Doug isn't, especially since he found those zombie friends of his. Hanging out with ghosts is one thing, but zombies aren't good company. Once, I tried having a conversation with one of them, when Doug convinced me to join him for the evening. The damned creature's jaw kept falling off and he noisily slapped it back in place. At one point, his tongue fell out. It was disgusting. He put it back in place, laughed and said, "My tongue is always running away from me." Doug thought it was hilarious. I didn't.

Aw crap, he's coming home. I can feel him floating toward the house. Okay, I need to prepare myself, Doug is about to enter the attic. I run a list through my mind, ticking off all the reasons why we should break up. I've been spending my time planning a break up speech.

You never take being dead seriously. Look, it's over, I want to see other specters. (Not true but useful when you're trying to break up with someone). It's not you, it's me. I've changed, I've changed so much I don't even have a corporeal body anymore. Listen, we need to talk. Too bad we don't have lungs anymore. I think we would be better off as friends, wandering the Afterlife by ourselves. I've been seeing another ghost. Face it, we don't love each other anymore, sex just isn't the same without a beating heart. I like floating around with you, scaring small children, I just don't see you as All of Eternity material. Come on, the Afterlife is too long to make mistakes.

Do you think any of those lines will work? Yeah, neither do I. I've never been very good at break up speeches.

I hear a low moan as a semi-transparent, bluish figure wavers through the wall. Doug waves his arms and tries to look scary. I wish he would stop it already. It was mildly amusing the first time, but that joke just isn't funny anymore. He rushes right up to me, freezes and says, "Boo."

He's falling about now, laughing so hard he's holding his sides. Not because they hurt, mind you, habits of the living are hard to break.

Did I ever find him funny? I can't remember. In fact, I don't remember him ever cracking jokes all the time like he does now. He was always the serious one with a deadly purpose and I was the silly



girl who was trying to live up to his expectations. Oh how the roles have changed.

I remain unmoved, I don't even smile and stay sitting in the rocking chair, my hands clasped in my lap. It took me awhile to get the hang of that trick. The first time I tried, my hands went right through my thighs. It's not easy being insubstantial. The idiot is still laughing and I'm getting impatient.

"Doug," I begin carefully, "we have to talk." Finally, he stops laughing and rises to his feet. "Stop floating, I can't take you seriously when you're levitating."

He pouts and gently floats to the ground. Do you have any idea how annoying it is to watch a dead twenty-four year old man pout like a child? I tell you, makes me wish he were still alive just so I could slap him silly.

He rolls his eyes and mumbles, "Sorry I'm late."

It's official, my dead husband is a complete moron. It's impossible to be late for anything when you have all of Eternity to exist. He treats me like some kind of ball and chain. I don't even want an apology, I just want to put an end to this.

He crosses his arms and idly stares at the peeling wallpaper. I say nothing, silently fuming. He peeks at me out of the corner of his eye then sighs. Bastard. I still haven't learned how to sigh, without working lungs that is. I don't know how he got the hang of being a ghost so fast, he just did. He loves being dead.

"Look, if you'd just go out once in a blue moon and socialize," he exclaims, "you'd have some fun for a change instead of always bitching at me."

"We live in Hell," I say through clenched teeth, "the moon is always blue."

He grins widely. "Yeah, ain't it grand? I freaking love this place."

I stare at him incredulously. Where was the gorgeous man I fell in love with? The one who gave me éclairs in bed and made me come at will. I'm staring at a stranger. I just don't know who Doug is anymore. I don't even know who I am anymore.

I've had enough. It's time to do the deed. "Listen, Doug," I say with deadly seriousness, just like he had done with me so many times when we were alive, "I can't do this anymore. This All of Eternity thing isn't working for me."

He narrows his eyes. "What do you mean?"

"I just feel I'm at a point in my Afterlife," I explain, "where I need to concentrate on my undead



career. I want to do proper hauntings and I think the rats are getting bored of me. It's time to move on."

There's a pause and we stare at each other relentlessly. I'm expecting him to throw a fit, beg me to take him back, demand another chance. He doesn't do any of those things. Instead, he does the most unpredictable thing that I would have never expected from him. He starts laughing hysterically. I perk a brow, wanting to know what's so funny.

"Thank the dead for that," he gasps between laughs. "Here I thought you were going to ask for a more serious commitment."

"A more... serious... commitment?" I repeat, not believing my ears. I died for this man, I gave up everything for him. What more did he think I could ever offer?

"You've been such a bore since we died, Julia," he continues. "You're just no fun."

I'm infuriated, the sheer audacity of this man! No, really, when he's laughing like that he becomes completely sheer.

"What the Hell are you talking about?!" I yell. "I've been enduring this tedium for Hell knows how long and *you* find *me* a bore?!"

"Hey, calm down," he raises his hands, "you're the one breaking up with me here."

I throw my hands up in the air. "I don't have a choice, you've become nothing but a worthless lump of plasma!"

"Baby, I can still live it up," he smiles insincerely. "I know for a fact there's nothing wrong with *me*."

If he wasn't already dead, I'd kill him.

"You think I'm frigid?" I scream, jumping from the rocking chair. "I'm not frigid! I'm dead and ludicrously bored!"

He scoffs. "Well she isn't bored with me," he mutters.

"She...? Is there someone else?" A bad feeling creeps into my chest.

He crosses his arms again. "Well, yeah. I was going to introduce you. Thought we'd all get along. She has a brother, you'd like him."

"What's her name," I demand in a seething tone. The rats vanish into their self-made holes and I think even the roaches are frightened of a woman scorned.

"Zelda," he mumbles, avoiding my gaze. His jaw is tight and I know he's expecting a rebuff.



"What kind of name is Zelda?" Honestly, where do the dead come from anyway, a video game?

"Shes a zombie," he whispers rapidly.

"What?" I shout.

Doug sighs and repeats a little louder. "She's a zombie."

He doesn't dare look at me right now. It's probably just as well, my eyeballs have popped out of their sockets and they're dangling down to my knees. I have a vivid imagination. I can't help it. Doug, with a female zombie. Doug, doing a zombie doggy style. Doug, receiving oral from a zombie. I shake my head, the imagery is too much. My eyes pop back into place.

"Fine. Fine, fine, fine," I ramble. "That is it, I'm leaving!"

His eyes widen and he loses his smile as he watches me run around the attic, grabbing my belongings. Hey, you'd be surprised what comes with you when you die. I stuff the sleeves from my threadbare wedding dress into a suitcase. That dress has been falling apart for years and even Doug's tuxedo is riddled with moths. Mark my words, you don't want that kind of baggage. Die naked.

I storm toward the door but he grabs my arm. I shudder and his hand goes right through me. I turn to him with a smug smile.

"Huh, neat trick. That's a new one," he says in awe. My smile widens.

"I'm leaving you, Doug," I say maliciously.

"Wait," he protests, "think about this first. We can work something out. We can stay friends."

Oh sure, *now* the begging starts. I don't think so. I open the attic door and say, "After what you just said to me? Like Hell this will work."

"Okay, you're right, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that," he says in a rush. "But think about this, Julia," the urgency rises in his voice, "where do you think you can go?"

"I've given this plenty of thought. I'm going to visit my grandmother in the ninth circle of Hell," I say dismissively. "I hear it's nice this time of year."

"You can't go," he says bluntly.

"You can't tell me what to do. I'm going." I yank open the door.

"No, you really can't go." He stretches around me and closes the door.

I look at him out of the corner of my eye and spit, "It's over, Doug." I yank open the door again.

"Come on, you're being irrational. We can stay friends at least," he pleads.



But I'm not listening to him anymore, my head is still too filled with those awful images of Doug with his new play girl. A zombie, for Hell's sake. Another ghost I could understand, but this is going too far.

I fully turn to him, stare right into his worried eyes and firmly say, "No."

I refuse to let him have the final word in this. So I stomp through the door and slam it hard behind me. I know, I could have floated through the wall or something. But slamming is louder and much more effective. More importantly, it's so final. I've always known drama better than he does.

Doug is right, I hate to admit it. I really haven't gone out since I died and now I have no idea where I'm going. There's no sense of direction in Hell and everything looks the same. Dead. Dead trees, dead houses, dead people. Dead, dead, dead. No wonder the zombies like to live it up. Hell is definitely one boring place.

Somehow I've gotten as far as the border to Limbo, where the dead and living no longer co-exist. I stop and drop my suitcase to the ground. I know I'm in the wrong place, I'm nowhere near the ninth circle of Hell. I half contemplate turning around but I feel so sluggish that I don't care anymore about going anywhere.

How could I feel tired when I'm a ghost? But it's true, I suddenly feel exhausted. There's an irresistible urge to go back to the house, lay down and take a nap. That's stupid, I'm a ghost, I'm not even capable of sleeping. I don't even miss it. People want to sleep because they want to dream. My existence has become one endless bad dream. Obviously sleep would do me no good whatsoever.

Something isn't right here. This is wrong. I'm confused, alone and I don't know what I'm doing anymore.

I sit down next to my suitcase. Beyond the border I can see the living just going about their business. Eating, earning money, making love, yelling at the kids, kicking the dog and taking out the trash. Is that what I gave up? It doesn't seem like living a full life was a better choice. Dead or alive, I'm still a tortured artist who sold my soul to corporate America. That's right, that's why I'm in Hell.

But I loved Doug once and I thought that was enough. It wasn't. I almost turn around right then and go back to the house. The urge is so strong. But then I set my jaw. I refused to go back and grovel to him. He owes me and I have nothing left to give him. I'm the one that got the crappy end of the stick. I got stuck with a dead man and our overly dramatic love affair has long since died.

With a chin raised high, I stand up, grab my suitcase and take a step forward. Then I freeze. I



can't figure it out but I can't move forward. Not even an inch. I'm completely frozen, stuck in some kind vortex that's neither here nor there. I'm nowhere. I grit my teeth and manage to move one toe ahead with great effort. I unfreeze but only for the briefest moment. What happens next, I'll never understand for as long as I exist in the Afterlife.

I'm being yanked back at high speed by some kind of invisible force. I can't fight or even struggle, it's all pointless. The best I can manage is to hang on tight to my suitcase and pray whatever this is will be over soon. All the dead things rush past my eyes in a grayish blur. Trees, houses, people, they're all the same.

It was a mighty fast trip through Hell; worse vacation I have ever experienced. I didn't get the time to catch all the sights. People moaning by the river, adulterers fornicating, fat people gorging on a gluttonous feast and all that. I start to feel dizzy so I close my eyes. I can hear the sound of flesh decaying, houses falling apart and specters wailing under the moon. I squeeze my eyes shut. I knew there was a reason I never went out. Then all noise stops and it's dead silent, if you'll pardon the pun. When I open my eyes, I'm in the attic, facing the door I had just slammed not a moment ago.

Dazed and slack jawed, I turn around. I see Doug sitting quietly in my rocking chair. For a ghost, he's looking unbelievably grim. He stares at his hands and leans his slender fingers against each other. He looks like he had been waiting for me to come back, like he knew somehow that I was never going to leave. I feel more confused than I have ever felt in my entire existence and I think I'm still dizzy. At least ghosts can't throw up and I'm grateful for that.

"What happened?" I say in a shaky voice.

"The real estate agent told me about this," he says softly. "We died together, Julia. We're bound to each other for all of Eternity."

"Well, this sucks," I exclaim, dropping my suitcase heavily on the floor. A few moths come back to life then fall to the hardwood, dead upon impact.

I look around at the attic. Could I really be stuck here forever? I desperately want to cry but that's impossible since I don't have tear ducts anymore. The rats peek out of their holes and regard me with inky eyes full of pity. Now I've really sunk to an all time low. Even the rats feel sorry for me.

"Why didn't you tell me?" I ask resentfully.

He cringes. "I figured you didn't ever need to know. I didn't think you'd stop caring about me. We loved each other when we were alive. It seemed like an everlasting deal."



I feel a moment of disorientation, or maybe that's just leftover dizziness. There, sitting in my rocking chair, is the man I fell in love with. And he still cares for me.

I float over and sit by his feet. He reaches down and strokes my hair. I guess he was more right than I realized. I really can't leave. And even if I could, I don't think I'd want to anymore. We made promises. We made commitments and there's no going back now. This is the Afterlife.

"Am I that bad to be with?" he asks.

"I guess you're not *that* bad." I sigh. Hey, I've learned to sigh! "I miss you," I finally confess to him and to myself.

"I miss you, too," he whispers.

"We can't go back, you know."

"Yeah," he sighs, "I know."

I hesitate. "What's this brother like?"

"He's cool, good sense of humor and smart. He's in much better shape than the others."

I lean against his legs. "I guess I can give it a shot, then."

After all, I had nothing to lose. I look up at Doug, the love of my Afterlife. He smiles.

Okay, so you're a ghost, you've just broken up with your dead lover and now you've agreed to go to a zombie party as just friends. Only one little problem... what the Hell do you wear? I'll tell you what, the same thing you've been wearing since you died. Do not return to sender, do not trade it in. You're stuck with the same outfit for a very long time.

"What are you doing?" Doug asks as I get ready for the party.

"Putting on earrings," I reply.

"With dead spiders?" He wrinkles his nose.

I shrug. "Anything else I try to put in just slides right out." I give him a sly look. "Good thing you can't procreate anymore. A condom would just keep sliding off.

He snorts and shakes his head. I smile benignly.

Yeah, I'm still a little bit bitter. Wouldn't you be? Imagine having to spend the Afterlife existing with regrets. No, I don't regret how we died. We had passion and it was the only way to go. I regret dying in my god-awful wedding dress that wasn't even meant to last the night, never mind an Eternity. Oh, there goes another piece of lace. I kick it into the corner of the room.



"Okay, I'm ready," I announce. Well, as ready as I'll ever be.

Doug smiles and takes my hand. We float to the cemetery like that, hand in hand. I know once we arrive he has to let me go and another dead woman is taking my place. I don't mind. I'm accepting things now. I don't even care that he introduces me to his new girlfriend and all the zombies as his best friend. You'd think a woman scorned would resent such a title, but I honestly don't care anymore. I smile and nod at everyone. I'm the ideal ex-lover.

But there's a reason I'm not bothered by Zelda or any of the zombies at all. I'm prettier than she is, I'm prettier than all of them. One point for my ego and zero points for her and the zombies.

I've never really been much of a socialite. At parties, I've always been the weird chick you see standing in the corner, nursing a beer. I guess I was a snob and I really haven't changed much. No beer at this zombie party because alcohol has no effect on the dead. So I lean against a cobweb filled mausoleum and just watch everyone.

I spot that zombie with the ever-running jaw and I remember that Doug said his name is Mike. The guys have figured out a way to take off Mike's head, remove his limbs and presto, instant bowling alley. Mike's snorting laughter vanishes instantly the moment someone smashes his head into his limbs that are being used as bowling pins. Sure, I understand now that the dead do these ridiculous antics because Hell's one boring place and there's nothing else to do but have a big party. Still, the whole scene is just absurd.

I look over and spot Doug sitting on a tombstone next to Zelda. He's whispering something in her ear and I can well imagine the things he's saying to her. I don't care. She can have him and all his spectral farting. I never regretted loving Doug when we were alive. I'm proud of the way I loved him. And if my love wasn't good enough for him, his loss.

I survey all the party goers in the cemetery, dancing and laughing under a midnight sky. They suddenly look so ordinary to me, there really isn't anything special about any of them. They probably cleaned toilets and pumped gas when they were alive, working for minimum wage and drifting through life with a goal no bigger than waiting for knock off time and happy hour.

I decide right then and there that I'm going to be more than just another pretty ghost. I'm going to be the scariest and most haunting ghost in all of Hell. The vermin won't be annoyed by my presence anymore, they'll treat me like a goddess. Someday the dead will come to me, asking how they could be as terrifying as I am. I smile to myself. I sold out while I was alive, but I've found my purpose in



death.

"You're bored," a male voice suddenly says in my ear. "You must know you're better than this."

"Who are you?" I ask without looking at him.

"I'm Jed, Zelda's brother."

I roll my eyes and turn to face him, fully expecting to see one of those stereotypical redneck zombies. You know the ones, wearing torn overalls and always drooling. But what I find is a pair of pale gray eyes and a dangerous smile. He hooks his thumbs into the belt loops of his tight jeans and winks. If my heart was still beating, it would be thumping double time. Great... here I go again...

All I can say is you'd better break up with them before you die. The Afterlife really is too long to make mistakes. And don't forget, die naked.