

Midnight Bells

Finn Taylor

Every night, in my dreams, I wander a city of twisted streets and narrow alleys. All buildings are stone and wood, painted white or yellow or red. No maps. No guides. I let my feet take me where they will.

No one lives in this city. Its lifeblood is gone. The streets and shops are empty. Lit windows are vacant. The only sound is the wind, creaking through dead branches and street signs scrawled with arcane symbols.

The city changes every visit. The landmarks stay the same. Sometimes the apothecary is to the right of the pub, sometimes to the left. Sometimes they're streets apart. Only the central square and its great headless statue remain in place, at the heart of everything.

There's a wall around the city. An ancient wall of weathered stone, dotted with towers. There are no gates. That's alright. I don't want to leave. For once I have something that is mine, and mine alone.

I roam my city until the bells ring midnight. Only then do I find the church. That stately ruin, with the tower and the many passages and the iron lattice doors...the doors that are always locked.

And I know I'm no longer alone.

The denizen of the ruin stays in the shadows. I've never seen their face. I sit on the steps outside and they lean against the wall within. When the moon is bright I can make out a shape against the grey stone.

We talk for hours. Sometimes the voice is feminine, and I confide my deepest secrets. Sometimes it's masculine, and we exchange sweet nothings. But it's always the same being regardless.

When we part at dawn, my companion tells me that soon the doors between us will open. This time, they say, we'll succeed in restoring the city. It will be mine, and I will be free.

Last night I visited my city and the doors were open. My companion was waiting. And they led me up, up the twisting stair, and atop the lofty tower we consummated our bond, finally, wildly, and without regret.

When the sun dawned, the city lived. The streets are filled with laughter. The trees are covered in flowers. The statue in the square is complete. Dark liquid seeps down its sides.

You ask me why I did it. How could I refuse? My companion and I, united as one, two worlds drawing lifeblood from one to revive another. Such union is a beautiful thing.

But no, you'll never find my husband's head.