



*Printer's Devil Review*

Annabel Gill. *Frances*.  
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## Frances

**R**EMEMBER WHEN YOU DIED? We found your body in your bed on a Sunday morning in July. You'd been dead since Friday night or early Saturday morning, when you'd gone home early from your neighbor's place across the street, saying you felt tired. We came in and went from your house all weekend before we found you.

I used to be a very anxious person, and I imagined disaster and death as a real possibility every time someone I loved left the house. By the time you died I wasn't like that anymore. So I remained calm, even on Saturday afternoon when the house told me you were gone. Your Jeep was in the gravel drive, but the mail was uncollected on the tile floor in the foyer, and the heavy green curtain covering the main door hadn't been pulled back. That was all, but it was clear to me then.

It was the weekend of the Tube bombings down South. I had the newspapers under my arm when I came home, and I went to my room on the top floor to watch the news and read the papers while I sat on my bed. I watched young people trying to stay collected while they talked about searching for their missing partners. Simon had only died a month or two before. We'd gone to Glasgow for his funeral, Antonio and I, with a carload of people I no longer trusted. I was wearing a bright red raincoat, and I met his mum and his sister for the first time. His mother seemed delighted to meet and grasp the hands of anyone who had ever known Simon. We retired to a pub by the cemetery after the burial. Our wealthy hippie landlady, Claire, bought me a whisky

and remarked on how nobody could cry. I'd been the only one in our pew to do so back at the church. Turning my back on the grave at the cemetery was the worst moment. Simon. So there we were drinking whisky, and "fuck all of you," I thought.

That Saturday afternoon with the papers spread out on my bed, the telly on, your body in your bed two stories down, the clouds scudding across the hills out my window, is still very vivid in my mind. I felt the temporariness of our bodies, like they were nothing but paper-thin membranes. Bubbles bound to burst. I felt death right next to me: not a ghost or a reaper, but an invisible force of inexplicable power; not the bomb, but the blast.

Antonio rang me the next morning, minutes after he'd left my flat. That was when my heart sank. Your neighbor was looking for you. She'd said you were missing. At the word "missing" I had an unexpected sensation: extraordinary relief. You were gone. I was free of you. You had disappeared into nothing just like a bubble, and I was alone with the great house, with the hills, with the Scottish summer light, and no longer subject to you. My first-class honors degree that had meant so much to you would vanish into irrelevance, and my stilted, self-taught propriety along with it. You had left me alone with the beauty that you had spent your life making, but now free of *you* in it.

But only for a few minutes. The doorbell rang downstairs. I went down the two flights and across the foyer, but no one was outside. I turned around to run nearly head-on into our neighbor as she came out of your apartment. She was glassy-eyed and breathless. She had let herself in through the garden and gone into your room. You were not missing. You were dead.

We had cups of tea while we waited for the ambulance to arrive. I had found Moritz upstairs, home from an overnight in his office, and I told him. "Are you sure?" was all he said. When I brought him downstairs, the little girl from across the street was there as well, your young friend who used to hang out in your kitchen and eat the ice cream in your freezer. Moritz went into your rooms and looked at your body. He invited me to come, but I didn't. It was after he returned that he had gone back upstairs to make us all tea.

Remember Moritz? He loved you a great deal. Your precision and propriety made him feel taken care of. He was nothing like your son, with his long hair, off bartending in Australia. Moritz loved the way you did things. He loved your garden, where he held Easter egg hunts for us all. He cherished those green hillside views from our rooms. He worshipped Hume and Voltaire, his subjects of study. He had seen very little of life beyond his own world and was easily shocked. But once he saw your body with his own eyes, he accepted it.

That was the end of those few months when, after Simon, Antonio's PHD supervisor dropped dead of a heart attack in Germany, and our brother-in-law shot himself one morning before breakfast in Mexico City. In Boston, my parents had put my childhood dog to sleep; they called me on my way back to your house one morning, on those beautiful streets in Morningside, and I burst into tears. I went quickly up to my room so that you wouldn't see me. I don't think I ever told you any of that. When they came to take your body away, the little girl started to cry just a little bit, but when I reached out to touch her arm she froze and recoiled.

I went outside to wait for Antonio, and I watched them take the white body bag out on a stretcher with you inside of it. I tried to make out where your face was underneath, which direction your body was facing.

It was such a beautiful day. You had been dead two days, so you missed the weather we got. Mostly, though, I stopped enjoying it after that. I don't remember the rest of the day after they put your body inside the van.

The house was never the same without you, Frances. You would have been pleased to know that. You would have been irritated, but I think very pleased. Thank you for having me there. You gave me two months after Simon and my graduation to just watch the light change on the hills.

It's my perpetual inclination to make a metaphor out of things like this; but really all I know is that your body lay two stories beneath me that bright weekend, until we found you, and that I didn't go in to look at it with Moritz. I think perhaps I should have. Still, I was there, and so were you. Do you remember that? 