

BY WILLOWY WHISPER



I  
WENT  
TO HELL

A SHORT STORY

## I Went to Hell

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# I WENT TO HELL

ELEVEN 'O CLOCK WAS HARDLY THE TIME to broach such a subject. I did it anyways.  
“Flora?”

She stirred under the thick comforter and made a low grunt. Finally, in a groggy voice, she whispered back, “What?”

“We need to talk.” I laid still, perfect, with one elbow propped up on a pillow and my heart going mad in my chest. I forced strength into my voice, “Now.”

My wife finally flopped towards me, the street lamp light filtering in through the half-open blinds and illuminating her sleep-fogged features. She blinked, lowering her brows. “This better be good.”

*Good?* Inwardly, I laughed. Outwardly, I scowled. “Flora, you're something else, you know that?”

“Get on with this,” she snapped. “What do you need to say?”

“I'm sick of it.” I let the words roll smoothly off my tongue, much as I had planned them. “I'm sick of you.”

She stared at him dryly. “What are you saying?”

“I know what you do.”

She made no effort to deny it. With a nonchalant sigh, she propped her pillow against the headboard and leaned against it. “If you're not happy, file the papers.”

“That's it?” I choked back the shock and stared at her. “You're not even sorry.”

“Did you really think I would be?” She let those words sting before she went on, “Did you really think I ever loved you? Take a look at yourself, Shane. Take a look in the mirror.”

Bald. Over-weight. And wire-rimmed glasses. I'd seen it all a thousand times—but hearing her say it, acknowledging the fact that I was less than handsome, hurt far more than I could have known. I lowered my eyes. “I want to make this work.” I hated myself for saying that, for feeling it. I'd ignored the nights out for months, ignored the bare wedding finger, the other signs. Finally, I had the nerve to confront her—and now I wanted to make it work? Where was my pride?

“Oh, yeah, Shane. Sure.” She rolled her eyes. “We've been over a long time—it was just a matter of when.” As if suddenly angry, she jerked the covers away from her and slipped out of bed. She reached under the lampshade and twisted the light. Then she looked at me. Long. Hard. Ruthlessly. “You better get out.”

I ran those words through my brain, trying to make sense of them. “Get out?”

“Yeah.” She moved across the carpet in bare feet and jerked open the closet door. She slung his duffel bag at his feet. “Now.”

“Why?” I stepped over the duffel bag and went towards her. “I'm not saying I won't forgive you.” I slipped my arms around her. She stiffened, but I was used to that. “I love you, babe. You know that.” My head dipped down to her neck, lips lingering against her soft skin.

She pushed at my chest. “Get off of me!”

“No—”

“Shane, stop it!” Finally, she pulled away, slightly out of breath. Composing herself, she narrowed her eyes and looked menacing. Almost evil, for the first time in her life. “Shane, you listen to me and you listen good. I've never had anything in this life. Nothing, you hear me? Greg Nilkon is the first good luck I've had, and don't you dare stand in my way.”

“Good luck?” I took a step towards her, but her look kept me from going farther. “What would you call our marriage? What would you call me? Bad luck? Is that what you're saying?” I waited, searching her expression, waiting for her to deny it.

She didn't move. Didn't twitch. Finally, she said evenly, “You said it.”

“Fine.” Now the pride was stepping in. I went for the duffel bag and threw some T-shirts, shorts, and toiletries into it. I paused on the threshold of our bedroom door, and stared back at my disheveled, barefoot wife. I raised a finger and seethed the words, “I hope you go to Hell,” just before I slammed the door.



I WAS TREMBLING BY THE TIME I got in my car. I couldn't grip the wheel. I couldn't see straight. Think straight. Nothing. Nothing made sense, and I didn't want it to. *Just like that?* My marriage was down the tube. *You shouldn't have confronted her. It wasn't the time. You should have waited.* But how many nights was I suppose to wait at home, not knowing where she was? How long did she expect me to hold it in?

“I hate you, Flora.” The words came out soft, agonized. My head was pounding. How could I have known she was so selfish? Her words came back to me—her voice, prodding me to examine my own

appearance. *I could get contacts. Lose weight. Anything.* I could be what she wanted me to be, if she'd only give me a chance...

Why had she not let me know how she felt? There was a time she loved me. Wasn't there?

I easily pumped the breaks to a stop, glaring at the red light. *Come on. Come on.* Why did they take so long? I needed the bar. I need to slip into the smoky building and get lost in the pound of heavy-metal and beer. *Come on. Come on...*

No one was coming. I ignored the light and hit the gas. *Flora, what—*

A truck. I saw it in the corner of my eye. Headlights. I swerved, spinning the tires, then the impact of metal against metal filled my ears...

*No—!* Breaks squealing. Glass shattering. *No.* I flew forward, more glass, cutting me—then I was tumbling across the hood. My head bashed against the pavement, caving inward, even as my last ounce of consciousness fell away.



DIMLY, FAINTLY, A WOMAN'S VOICE was in my ear. "...not looking good...ambulance coming..." There was pauses, hands touching me. *Flora.* My head screamed her name, even as I fought the blackness, processing what was happening.

The woman's voice again. "...he's dying...he's dying..." I heard hysteria in the tone.

*Dying?* I was dying. I was dying. I was dying. I felt it, knew it, couldn't stop it...

The pain shuttered through me, so sharp. Blackness appeared and disappeared across my vision. *No, I can't die.* I couldn't move. My head. The blood. *No, I can't die...*

But I couldn't stop it, couldn't keep my eyes open, couldn't keep on breathing. My lids slid shut, even though I screamed at them, only I didn't see darkness. I saw myself. I saw that bald-headed, over-weight man with broken glasses, sprawled out across the pavement with part of his head caved in, with his eyes closed in the puddle of his own blood. Then there was light, even as the horrifying image fell away. *I'm dying...no...*

Then the pain was different. It was dark again. I was somewhere else, only I didn't know where, only the pain...

Then I recognized it. *Burning. I'm burning.* Panic shot through me, even as I flung my arms, pushing away the flames. Only I couldn't see them. It was dark. Black. Too dark to see anything, and I

kept on burning...

My skin. My flesh. It curled on my bones, even as I wretched out a scream. *I'm trapped in the car. It's on fire. I'm burning.* The pain. I couldn't breathe, couldn't stand it. "*Help—!*" Someone outside would come for me, help me. Only even as I thought it, groped for it, I knew it wasn't true. I wasn't trapped in the car. I was lying on the pavement.

And I was dead.

*No.* I didn't understand this. I didn't deserve this. From within the blackness, from within this horror, I heard hoarse, gut-wrenching screams. I moved my legs, my arms, everything. I couldn't get away from the flames. The heat. Eating my flesh, licking over my eyeballs, peeling away my skin...

*It will stop.* I couldn't breathe, but it didn't matter. It would be over soon. It would stop. I would die again, and leave where ever I was...

There were worms, crawling over me, slipping into my eye sockets and into my ears. I clawed at them with my hands, scratching them away, screaming...

Then they were in my mouth, slipping down my throat. I couldn't swallow them down. I couldn't. I couldn't. I couldn't swallow those worms away...

I gnashed my teeth, even as flames melted at my gums. *Get me out. Get me out.* There were demons, screeching from beside me. I couldn't see them—but I knew they were there. I knew cause I felt. I knew cause I felt...

*Damned.* That's what I was. It was life after death, wasn't it? I was in that place. Hell. I was in Hell. *Forever.* I'd heard it before, all of it. *No. God, no!* I needed to die. It had to stop. This anguish, this horror, this pain—why wouldn't it stop? I couldn't go on like this. I couldn't take it. I couldn't do it. "*God, get me out of here!*" My raw throat bellowed the words, but the other screams devoured it, and no one heard. *I should have listened.*

If I could just get out, just go come...

*Flora.* I gritted my teeth, throwing my head backwards, heaving. My words fell over me, my own wretched words, "*I hope you go to Hell...*"

*No.* The worms crawled, always crawling, under my burning skin. *Flora, you can't. You can't come here.* I had to get out. I had to tell her. I had to warn her. I had to make her understand...

Relief. Just a second of no pain—that's all I needed. Just a second. Just a touch of moisture. Just a silence from those hellish screams.

*I'm damned.* My own voice ripped from my throat, even as worms sputtered out of my mouth. *Don't come, Flora.* I hated her. For everything she'd done to me, for all the betrayal, only still my burning soul begged the words, *Flora, don't come here. Please don't come to Hell.*