

# Soft Focus

from the short story collection: "[Bloody Gullets](#)"

by

[Michael Golvach](#)

Every evening, as I lay down to bed, I look over at my pictures of Kiera. I say good night to her, even though she isn't really there. And, as I drift off, I look at her, from time to time, and smile. It feels like peace. And then, the next morning, I wake up, and the world's a blur. In that time when I'm not quite yet me, I can see the outline of her face on the nightstand by my bed. And I can feel her. Touching me softly. Kissing me. Telling me everything is going to be all right.

Then I wake up, and she's no longer there at my bedside. Only in pictures. No soft voice telling me everything's going to be all right. And the world comes into focus.

I can feel the spiders and the worms, crawling and slithering around in my veins. I scratch at the skin, but they just move around. They're faster than I've ever been, and I'm getting slower every single day. Every day that I waste delaying what I know to be unavoidable.

Because, as I touch her pictures, running my trembling fingers across them, her eyes don't close like I want them to. Peaceful in death. They remain open. Staring at me. Looking at me like they still love me and they don't understand. Like they did when she was still here. In body and in spirit. With me. All day and all night.

And, near the end, this is where we stayed. On this mattress, soaked wet with fluids, bodily and otherwise. Except for the occasional errand, this is where we lay. Unless our supply was low, we never moved an inch.

Near the end, the love making was more spiritual than physical. When we'd tap in, it was just us, looking into each other's eyes and feeling our souls being lifted into a dulled and soothing ether. It wasn't the same thing as sex. It was better. By far. We both agreed. There was nothing we could do, separate or together, that could equal the bliss we felt in those invisible arms. As we drifted and our eyes went hazy and we reached that pinnacle of peace that sometimes turned into a nap.

At first, when we met, I would stay out long hours during the day, dressed in a monkey suit, while she waited patiently for me and did whatever needed doing around our small apartment.

And every evening, we'd relax and enjoy each other's company. Back when we still touched each other physically. When the feeling of her tongue on my body or the taste of her dripping down my throat was still pleasurable. When we made love like animals and passed out from exhaustion.

Over time, we fell prone to routine and, even though things were still good and we still loved each other very deeply, we began to take more risks. Changing things. Going deeper into one another. Exploring options. Trading pleasure for pain and then enjoying ourselves again as we made the pain go away.

And, pretty soon, I stopped spending my days outside the apartment. I no longer dressed up like a corporate stooge. I stayed home, in bed, with her, unless I needed to go out and run errands for us. And she would wait there. Only leaving the bedroom to bathe or use the toilet. We barely ever ate. It wasn't what we craved anymore. And we were eating into our savings enough as it was.

Then, as was inevitable, the money ran out, and she began to go out to do the errands. It wasn't anything either of us wanted. And when I look back now, I think I can see a little girl begging in her eyes as she tells me she'll be back soon. Begging me to tell her she doesn't have to go out and that things could go back to normal. Even if the shells we'd become didn't want that at all.

Some nights, she would come home with bruises on her face and inner thighs. Sometimes her makeup would be runny, smeared across her face, and I would tell her that I loved her and she would echo the phrase and kiss me softly, quickly, before we relaxed for the evening.

And all those evenings had become routine, again. Except, by that point, there was nothing but the relieving of the pain. We had no reason to inflict it upon each other any more. The length of the days took care of that part for us.

We would lay together in perfect ecstasy, looking into each other's eyes. Letting ourselves drift and just feel the numbing warmth. We almost never took baths anymore. We never showered. But, I could still see her, laying across from me, and she looked so very beautiful. Like an angel. And, even though our mattress had begun to reek of urine and spoiled food, I could still smell her. Her fresh clean body. The one hidden underneath the dirt and the clogged pores and the scars and the bloodied and bruised tracks.

And then, one day, she was gone. Taken from me in an instant. Like that. She left and never came home. The girl I'd loved for so long, for whom I'd do anything in this world, never returned to our apartment. She had died. She had been, in a very real sense, destroyed. By the world. By the monsters that inhabited it.

And as I touch her pictures, running my trembling fingers across them, her eyes still won't close like I want them to. They remain open. Staring back at me. Looking at me like they still love me

and they just can't understand. Like they did when she was still here. In body and in spirit. In bed with me. All day and all night.

And, near the end, this is where we stayed. On this mattress, soaked warm and wet with bodily fluids. Unless our supply was low, we never moved an inch.

And now that she's gone, the only thing I have to remind me of her love for me, and to drive me harder and harder toward avenging her death, are her pictures and the smell from her side of the bed. The smell gets worse every day, and I feel the fear when I look over to where she used to rest.

And I remember, again, the day she left, never to return. She had gone out that morning, looking tired and weak. Itching herself and shaking, just as I was. Promising me everything was going to be all right and that she'd be home soon. But, the hours passed and I began to panic. Where was she? What was taking so long?

It wasn't unusual. It's what we did. Both of us. Every day then.

And it hadn't taken me long after that evening to determine who was culpable for her death. For killing the once beautiful, sweet, caring, compassionate woman who had crawled into bed with me that night. For stealing her soul and leaving a wasted husk to act in her stead, as her body slowly died right beside me. Staring into my eyes with disbelief. Looking at me like she still loved me and would never understand.

And, tonight, I'm shooting our poison into the femoral vein in my groin. Hoping against hope that my shaking hands will take pity on me and let the needle miss, or over-shoot, and puncture the artery at last. The gutter's been muddy for days now. It's only a matter of time. I console myself with these few cogent thoughts I have left.

And, as I release my bite from the belt and feel the junk rush my system, I roll over, away from her pictures. I look over at her. I stroke and kiss the yellowing flesh that no longer resembles her photographs and I pray that tonight I will finally deliver, for her, the justice that she deserves.

As my eyes drift closed in that horrifying ecstasy, I whisper that I love her. I need to believe that she can hear me. I know that, soon, she will understand. And I hope that she will have forgiven me.