

Red Wedding by Cappy

"Daniel Wainwright, get out of here!" Becky scolded, only half in play. "It's bad luck to see me in my wedding dress before the ceremony!"

Danny froze, his mouth just open to say something, then a slow smile lit his face.

"But you're such a beautiful sight," he replied, "it's worth any gamble."

Becky stood in the church's lobby, surrounded by her attendants, her father currently holding the bouquet, and glared at her groom. She blushed at his compliment and found herself admiring him in turn, in his fancy black tuxedo.

Then Danny remembered and a darkness crossed his face. "Becky, I've got to tell you: Jack Bergen is here. He's drunk and cursing mad."

Becky's stomach tightened. She didn't even want know why Jack Bergen would show up on her wedding day.

"It doesn't matter where Jack Bergen is," Becky told him, "because you and I are getting married today and that's what matters."

Danny was getting deadly serious like he could and Beck didn't want that. Today she wanted the happy and kind Danny she loved so much. "The guys could go out and make sure he doesn't, well, ruin things," he said.

"Nothing," Becky told him, "not Jack Bergen, not his hussy Sherry Luciano who keeps trying to steal you, not the devil himself is going to ruin our wedding day."

"Yeah... about Sherry," Danny's voice trailed off and he looked away.

So Becky stepped up to him and fierceness sparked her eyes. "Listen to me, Danny," she said, "we've dreamed of this day forever. We planned it out just right, the perfect wedding for you and me. Today is our day, *our* day. So you and your guys go back to the front of the church," and here her voice softened and she reached out to touch his hand, "and I'll meet you there at the end of the aisle."

Danny hesitated, then smiled. "It'll be all right," was all he said, but he squeezed her hand briefly before leaving.

Becky sighed and let the tension slip from her body. She let her bridesmaids fuss about and her father took her stand at the door that led to the sanctuary. Becky waited while the guests settled and the music played. Her bouquet was handed to her and the door propped open as the wedding party began their march down the aisle.

From where she stood, Becky saw little of the sanctuary, but she could see her favorite stained glass window. It featured an angel standing over some shepherds, his wings just stretching out to take him aloft. What Becky had always remembered about that angel were the eyes. Set above high, sharp cheekbones, they were eyes of a bright blue, a clear blue, that glistened with life when the sun shone through them.

So under the eyes of the angel, Becky glowed all in white satin as she stepped just so down the aisle. Danny was there to meet her and the ceremony flowed around her just as she had dreamed it would, because Becky and Danny together was the natural way of things. She wanted to touch Danny, but right now the minister had him doing something. Then, before Danny could start his vows, there was an ugly commotion amongst the guests.

Becky closed her eyes briefly and muttered "No, not on my wedding day," before turning to see Jack Bergen staggering down the aisle and swinging his fist in the air. He looked worn and ruffled, his eyes were seared red with a crazy wildness.

"That's right, you," Jack Bergen was saying, stabbing his finger at Danny, "after what you did to Sherry last night!"

Startled, Becky turned to Danny. He looked her in the eye and shrugged helplessly.

"I didn't do anything to Sherry," Danny told her. "She crashed the bachelor party last night, said I shouldn't marry you, that she wanted me. I told her," Danny glanced at Jack Bergen then reached a hand out to Becky, "I told her not now, not ever, that *you* were my only one."

"And you killed her!" Jack Bergen yelled. "No, you couldn't have just your own love, you had to take mine! You know where I've been all night? Sherry's dying." Into the stunned silence of the sanctuary, Jack Bergen spat at Danny. "Did it herself, they said, but it was you, your words, that killed her!"

Then Jack Bergen was jumping at Danny, fists swinging. Danny was deadly serious again, but the guys were intercepting Jack Bergen who struggled to break free.

"Get out of here, Jack Bergen!" Becky shouted. She swung around, grabbing a golden cross off the altar before her and threw it wildly at him. When the heavy cross thumped into Jack Bergen's arm, that's when he suddenly had a big, heavy gun in his hand.

The gun was so loud. It roared out and pounded her senses and it roared again and again and thudded against her ribs and again and how many bullets did a gun like that even hold? A pulsing ringing deafened her and Becky lay on the carpet, watching the vaulted ceiling spin above her and thinking it didn't hurt as much as it should have.

When she pushed herself up to stand, that's when the pain hit. A sudden and searing pain that lit every nerve with agony and she would have screamed but she had no energy, only a fogging darkness. Then Becky was standing and the pain was gone. The ringing was gone too -- the room, the world, was silent.

Nobody moved. When Becky looked out at her loved ones, everybody was frozen in a soft-focused freeze frame. Her guests were leached of color, their outlines smudged by some film over her vision. They were frozen rising from their seats, their mouths were gaping dark blotches as they screamed in outrage or horror.

A single bullet hung in the air just over Becky's right shoulder. It was moving, but oh-so-slowly and even then held a deadly inertia that made Becky shy away.

One dark shape lay crumpled at Danny's feet -- was it William, Danny's best man? No, the groomsmen were all there, wrestling with Jack Bergen, but frozen just like the audience. Then something moved and Becky saw Danny turning his head to catch her gaze. He still faced Jack Bergen, but his hands were down, palms turned outward in a gesture of surrender. *Like a man of peace*, Becky thought, *in a black tuxedo. He's always been a wonder to me.* Part of his face was missing, ripped right away, taking pieces of bone and brain with it. But Danny's eyes were whole and for a moment she sank into that beautiful gaze, just as she had planned to spend her life doing. He started to reach for her --

And Death wore black motorcycle leathers. Becky knew this because he was walking down the aisle towards them. Not the shiny, sleek leathers you would see in a spy movie, but the kind a dirt bike racer wore, with the padding and the shin guards. Mud caked his boots and spattered up his front, clinging in dark red globs, like Death had just come from a race. Like he had powered through corners and sailed over jumps on a course covered in viscous, dark gore. Beneath the battered helmet with its face guard and smoked goggles, red flames burned in Death's eye sockets.

"Oh, not my Danny," Becky wailed, "not my lovely man."

But now Death was looking at *her* and offering out a dark glove.

Becky struggled to not look down, but she did and her stomach clenched in pain. White satin was soaked a sickly red that poured in great runnels to stain the dress entirely. *How much blood*, Becky wondered, *would it take to dye an entire dress? Did a body even have that much in it?*

"Wait," said a voice behind her and Becky whirled to see a tall man in neutral grey moving and speaking even while everyone else was still frozen. He stepped into a ray of sunlight and his eyes shone a brilliant blue, a blue Becky well remembered.

Incredibly, Death stopped at his command and the grey man paced forward, one hand to his chin, a long forefinger thoughtfully tapping his high cheekbone.

"I think... yes," the man said, his voice all smooth and slippery, "Daniel Wainwright: the ceremony stands incomplete, the vows do not bind. Do you wish to remain with Rebecca?"

"Always," Danny answered instantly and Becky glowed.

The blue-eyed man gestured across the sanctuary and told Death, "Go, then."

Death flexed his fists once then turned, always silent, away and back up the aisle.

The man in the grey suit quirked an eyebrow at Becky then studied the frozen jumble of groomsmen. "And Jack Bergen," he continued, "shall spend his torment in a man-made purgatory." He brushed something imagined off his grey suit and turned his angel eyes on Becky.

"Rebecca Jacobs," he began and she opened her mouth but the man put a cool finger to her lips. "Not now. Listen first, then speak, because you do have some issues to work out." The man tilted his head back towards Jack Bergen and the cross Becky had thrown, which glimmered on the floor. "A crucifix as a weapon? In His house? Really, Becky?" Suddenly he swept his arm out in a gesture that encompassed all the friends and family in their stillness and even the world beyond.

"People out there need your help, Becky. Share the love and bring the balance back," he demanded, his blue eyes flared a brightness that hurt. "But first you have to learn the game."

Before she could speak, he moved to stand before that one bullet which still pushed down its deadly course. He let it press against his throat and when it did so he shattered into a hundred bits of color that spun and whirled in the sunshine. The bullet screeched out an empty window casement and time returned with a shriek and a roar. People jumped and yelled around her, but their voices were muddied, their color still gone and their antics become trivial.

Becky looked at Danny, in his gore-spattered tuxedo. "Learn the game? What did he mean, do you think?" Her breath came fast and finally she was scared. "When can we go? How will we leave, Danny?"

"I will call Death," he said, watching their guests rush to his crumpled body, to her fallen corpse. "Death will take some one and we will learn the path." His voice was now dark and broken, but it calmed Becky.

"Yes," she agreed, "but not now. Not yet. Before we can go, I must bring the balance back." Becky shuddered as her father passed through her and the bloody dress that once was white. "First, we don't need these anymore," she said and peeled the dress, her visible form, away from the essence that was Becky. She rose gently into the air, completely free at last, her shape indistinct but glowing white. She had become, Becky supposed, a phantom of light.

Across from her, Danny had done the same, but he was all darkness. He looked at her and said, his voice now whole, "If this is our forever, at least I'm with you." Becky blushed radiant and reached a hand out to him and he reached for her.

It was then, when their hands phased through each other, when they could no longer touch each other in their forever, then the red torment rose in Becky's eyes and she wailed in such anguish that the living amongst them shivered in their grief.