Despair is in the Eye of the Beholder

I think the happiest day of my life was the day I died.

It sounds strange, doesn't it? But death was the first thing that ever truly made sense to me after…my family. Life had been nothing but noise and loss and waiting – waiting for something to end, or maybe begin again. I don't know. I had grown tired of it all.

Once, I had a family. My beautiful wife, Serina, and our son, Ashton. My whole world fit in the sound of their laughter. Serina would hum in the mornings while she painted. She always loved painting. On our wedding day, she had taken my last name because people used to make fun of her for having a "weird" last name. I never did. I loved everything about her. Ashton, in the mornings, would chase the cat through the hallways, his feet moving with the sound of joy that I thought would never end. Back then, I believed love could shield us from anything.

But love isn't enough – my love wasn't enough. At least not enough to stop sickness.

Serina went first. One day, she was warm beside me, and the next, she was still and cold. I remembered the smell of the medicine, the sound of the clock ticking far too loudly, as if it were mocking me. To see the light dim from her being was like a knife to the heart. Ashton followed her a week later. He was so small. I remembered his hand slipping from mine, how light he felt when I carried him to his bed for the last time.

Everything was taken away from me; I just wanted the hurting to end.

Years passed. I spoke to no one. The neighbors stopped knocking. The light through the windows grew dull, dust turning the air to fog. I got used to the silence. In some way, it became my only companion.

Then he came.

A kind young man – polite, helpful, and maybe a little too eager. He offered to take care of me and said he wanted to keep me company. I didn't protest. I suppose I was grateful. He cleaned, fixed the leaks, and read aloud when my eyes betrayed me. I almost remembered what it felt like to be needed…to be…loved.

But then he started watching me differently. Let me correct myself, not me – my eyes. The one that had clouded after my fever, the same sickness that took my family. I thought it would take me too. But alas, I'm still here, aren't I? I saw the man flinch when the light hit it. The way he'd glance away, quick but not quick enough. I could see what he saw: something unnatural, something wrong. I could see this because I saw it in myself.

And maybe he was right. Maybe there was something evil in me. Not a demon, but the slow kind of rot and taint that ate away at my soul, leaving me with nothing but guilt. The guilt of surviving.

I began hearing him at night. The faint creak of the floorboards, his breath held in the dark. I'd lie awake, eyes open, listening. I never called out. Part of me wanted him to come. Part of me wanted him to do something, I don't know why.

The night he did, I wasn't afraid. The lantern's light cut through the darkness, landing on my eye – that cursed, lifeless thing – and in his trembling hand I saw not hatred, but true, unimaginable horror.

I didn't fight when he came closer. I didn't fight when he put his hands around my throat. I didn't fight back at all…because I wanted it. I just watched the ceiling fade into nothing, and I thought about Serina, about Ashton, about how long I'd been waiting to see them again.

As everything dimmed, I felt something warm for the first time in years – peace.