

A Dubious Deed  
by S.E. Gordon

A tiny wood stove was the only thing warming the chapel that night, yet the room scorched as if the sun knelt in one of its pews. Footprints melted off the stone floor as the minister and his wife stripped off their heavy coats.

"Sorry to trouble you," said the groom.

"Not at all," replied Theodore, pulling the door firmly shut. "True love is always welcome here," he smiled.

The bride smirked and cast her head aside.

"What a gem she is," said Helga.

"Indeed," the minister nodded, marking one of the few times they'd actually agreed. For a moment Theodore wondered if his wife had ever been as stunning as the maiden before him. Probably not.

"May I take your coat?" he shook the wicked thought from his head.

"I'm afraid we can't stay long...with the terrible snow storm and all," the groom winked.

"Of course," Theodore winked back. "Let's get started."

Helga frowned.

"Dearly beloved," said the minister, unfolding his speech.

The bride whispered into the groom's ear.

"Would you mind if we skipped the formalities?" he said.

"I do, actually. This is a moment you'll cherish for the rest of your lives. Surely it deserves full treatment."

So the minister continued.

The dim light played upon the faces in the chapel, shadows dancing in the firelight. The groom looked about the room as the minister droned on. "I apologize," he cut in. "But could we scale back some of the lines?"

The minister pitched his notes aside. "And if anyone can show just cause why these two may not be lawfully married, speak now; or forever hold your peace."

Outside the wind howled, racing round and round until finally bursting in. The minister and his wife dove behind the pews as the arctic wind gushed inside.

"Well, for starters, she's not even human," came a voice.

The bride adjusted her coat, revealing an exposed wing.

"Don't you see, Vincent?" the figure crept forward. "You cannot marry Mariel."

"What the devil?" Theodore gasped.

The stranger stepped into the light, a mirror image of the groom.

"But I love her," replied Vincent. "Besides, who are you to tell me that I can't marry her?"

"Because I am you, one year from now. You've got no idea what you've stumbled into," he put his hand on Vincent's shoulder. "And there's another problem. This man isn't a real minister. His real name is Nemmus, lord of shadow."

"What?!" said Theodore.

Arcs of black and green light shot out from the far corner of the room, incinerating the elder version of Vincent. "It's Nekkus, you fool," his voice boomed. From the shadows he materialized, a dark soul with the minister's countenance, save the ominous grin. "Guess it would help if I were on time for these things."

Helga fainted.

"Dad!" said Mariel.

"Can't you see this man has no future? He couldn't even listen to his own advice and it got him killed," he stepped forward. "What you need is another succubus like yourself."

"Succubus? But I thought you were an angel," Vincent turned to the bride.

"Any woman will tell you she's an angel if you ask her," Nekkus chuckled.

"What's a succubus?" said the minister.

"You should know, you married her mother," Nekkus grinned.

"What?" the minister looked at his feet.

"Don't listen to him. It's all lies," Helga grabbed his leg. For the first time he noticed her fangs.

"Ahhh!" he shook her off. "Now wait, so you're telling me that I'm her father?"

"You're not my father," said Mariel.

"Stepfather, actually," said Nekkus.

A rail-thin beauty with crimson hair and pearl fangs stepped out from behind the beam.

"Let me guess. I'm her stepfather too?" said Theodore.

"Marilda, what are you doing here?" said Nekkus.

"Your father's right. What you need is another succubus," she pawed at the groom. "I'll take care of him."

"Don't touch him," Mariel slapped Marilda.

"Don't hit your stepmother!" Nekkus stepped in between.

On the far side of the chapel, the wood stove inched towards the door.

"And where do you think you're going?" said Nekkus.

The stove churned its stubby legs, tripping over a recess in the floor and slamming into a beam. Daggers of wild fire clawed their way to the chapel ceiling.

"Vagrant hell spawn," Nekkus shook his head.

"Quick," Mariel jumped forward. "All of this will be undone if you marry us," said Mariel.

"Do that and I will smite you right where you stand," said Nekkus.

"What's stopping you?" Marilda crossed her arms.

"Ask me, ask me if I do," she grabbed the minister's hand.

Fiery debris crashed down from the ceiling.

"Get out of the way, Mariel," Nekkus screamed.

"It's a trick," Helga clawed at Theodore's leg. "Don't do it."

"Quick, there isn't much time," Mariel pleaded. "Tell me that you want to spend the rest of my life with me. Do you understand?"

"I do, I do!" the minister finally uttered as Helga bit into his leg.

Theodore's screams echoed through the hall. No longer did he find himself in the tiny smoldering chapel, but a giant cathedral surrounded by family and friends.

Mariel tapped her foot on the marble floor.

Theodore looked himself over. No longer was he an old bag like the minister before him. He was young and impeccably so, not unlike Vincent. "I do?" he said aloud.

Applause thundered through the chamber.

"You may kiss the bride," the priest nodded.

Mariel smiled as their lips came together, revealing her long tapered fangs. "Thanks for inviting us to church," she whispered. "For all times."