

Curtain Call

—Grace Be

Prompt: Theatre

"I am one who loved not wisely but too well," Seth often thought, before he fell asleep at night. During all the years he had known Jessica Fletcher, he had been feeling like an actor. Like a man who wore a mask, playing a role solely written for him. He didn't mind. After all Jessica loved the theatre and he loved Jessica. To please her, he acted, as he didn't want to be nothing more than her best friend. He was her confidant and, if needed, her partner in crime, the loyal sidekick, when she stumbled over a corpse and chased down the killer. He repaired her antique toaster and he told her off when she needed to hear it. Even in those rare moments of unmasked, mostly unrehearsed honesty, he was pulling off an act, not just for her, but for all the audience that was called Cabot Cove or Boston or even New York City. So far every time such a scene had taken place between them, the curtain had saved him. He always got away, because after all this time he was enough of a professional to know when to leave the stage.

On more frequent, more joyful occasions he left her house after dinner and said 'Thank you', but meant 'I want to stay'. When she thanked him for saving her furniture from deathwatch he said 'welcome, Jess', which was his paraphrase for 'Love you'. When he called her 'woman' after she announced a risky plan to catch a killer, he truly wanted to say 'I need you'. His mother had always said, there were many ways to say 'I love you' and over the years he had found the words to express his feelings, without spoiling the script of their friendship.

He often wished he wouldn't have to hide the true meaning of his words, but like many actors he felt comfortable in his disguise. The mask offered him the pleasure of being close to her. He was much more alive and aware of himself when he was in her company. Unlike many other people whose love was unrequited, he had learned to make the best of it. He enjoyed to be in the same room with her. It helped that she accepted what he had to offer her. Jessica never questioned his performance, so either he was good at it or she, the most observant person he knew, didn't want to see it. Whatever the truth was, she needed the friend and not just the man who helped her to put murderers behind bars.

She was fiercely independent, strong, and unwilling to marry anyone, but she loathed the loneliness, the void Frank's death had caused her in life. She filled it with work, adventures, and murder. Seth knew she had been attracted to other men after Frank's death. Knew she had had her heart broken badly by one of them. Since then she used to hide in her shell when a man came too close to her, and he, to his shame, was grateful for it.

He didn't know if he would be able to keep up his act, if she presented him a man she was in love with. He wanted her to be happy, but he feared the day, she didn't ask him to repair her toaster or to unmask a killer, because another man was doing it.... He feared the day the curtain would fall forever.