

BEAUTIFUL STUFF

by Susan Palwick

Susan Palwick is the author the novels *Flying in Place*, *The Necessary Beggar*, and *Shelter*. Much of her short fiction—which has appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Amazing Stories*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and elsewhere—was recently collected in the volume *The Fate of Mice*. Her work has been a finalist for the World Fantasy, Locus, and Mythopoeic awards, and *Flying in Place* won the Crawford Award for best first fantasy novel. She is Associate Professor of English at the University of Nevada, Reno, and lives in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada with her husband and three cats.

This story came from Palwick's rage at various political figures trying to use the victims of 9/11 as campaign fodder or as a fuel for war. "I found myself wondering, 'If all those dead people could come back, what would they want us to do?'" she says. This story would seem to indicate that she doesn't think the dead would have the same agendas as the living.

Rusty Kerfuffle stood on a plastic tarp in an elegant downtown office. The tarp had been spread over fine woolen carpet, the walls were papered in soothing monochrome linen, and the desk in front of Rusty was gleaming hardwood. There was a paperweight on the desk. The paperweight was a crystal globe with a purple flower inside it. In the sunlight from the window, the crystal sparkled and the flower glowed. Rusty desired that paperweight with a love like starvation, but the man sitting behind the desk wouldn't give it to him.

The man sitting behind the desk wore an expensive suit and a tense expression; next to him, an aide vomited into a bucket. "Sir," the aide said, raising his head from the bucket long enough to gasp out a comment. "Sir, I think this is going to be a public-relations disaster."

"Shut up," said the man behind the desk, and the aide resumed vomiting. "You. Do you understand what I'm asking for?"

"Sure," Rusty said, trying not to stare at the paperweight. He knew how smooth and heavy it would feel in his hands; he yearned to caress it. It contained light and life in a precious sphere: a little world.

Rusty's outfit had been a suit once. Now it was a rotting tangle of fibers. His ear itched, but if he scratched it, it might fall off. He'd been dead for three months.

If his ear fell off in this fancy office, the man behind the desk might not let him touch the paperweight.

The man behind the desk exhaled, a sharp sound like the snort of a horse. “Good. You do what I need you to do, and you get to walk around again for a day. Understand?”

“Sure,” said Rusty. He also understood that the walking part came first. The man behind the desk would have to re-revive Rusty, and all the others, before they could do what had been asked of them. Once they’d been revived, they got their day of walking whether they followed orders or not. “Can I hold the paperweight now?”

The man behind the desk smiled. It wasn’t a friendly smile. “No, not yet. You weren’t a very nice man when you were alive, Rusty.”

“That’s true,” Rusty said, trying to ignore his itching ear. His fingers itched too, yearning for the paperweight. “I wasn’t.”

“I know all about you. I know you were cheating on your wife. I know about the insider trading. You were a morally bankrupt shithead, Rusty. But you’re a hero now, aren’t you? Because you’re dead. Your wife thinks you were a saint.”

This was, Rusty reflected, highly unlikely. Linda was as adept at running scams as he’d ever been, maybe more so. If she was capitalizing on his death, he couldn’t blame her. He’d have done the same thing if she’d been the one who had died. He was glad to be past that. The living were far too complicated.

He stared impassively at the man behind the desk, whose tie was speckled with reflections from the paperweight. The aide was still vomiting. The man behind the desk gave another mean smile and said, “This is your chance to be a hero for real, Rusty. Do you understand that?”

“Sure,” Rusty said, because that was what the man wanted to hear. The sun had gone behind a cloud: the paperweight shone less brightly now. It was just as tantalizing as it had been before, but in a more subdued way.

“Good. Because if you don’t come through, if you say the wrong thing, I’ll tell your wife what you were really doing, Rusty. I’ll tell her what a pathetic slimebag you were. You won’t be a hero anymore.”

The aide had raised his head again. He looked astonished. He opened his mouth, as if he wanted to say something, but then he closed it. Rusty smiled at him. I may have been a pathetic slimebag, he thought, but I never tried to blackmail a corpse. Even your cringing assistant can see how morally bankrupt that is. The sun came out again, and the paperweight resumed its sparkling. “Got it,” Rusty said happily.

The man behind the desk finally relaxed a little. He sat back in his chair. He became indulgent and expansive. “Good, Rusty. That’s excellent. You’re going to do the right thing for once, aren’t you? You’re going to help me convince all those cowards out there to stop sitting on their butts.”

“Yes,” Rusty said. “I’m going to do the right thing. Thank you for the opportunity, sir.” This time, he wasn’t being ironic.

“You’re welcome, Rusty.”

Rusty felt himself about to wiggle, like a puppy. “Now can I hold the paper-weight? Please?”

“Okay, Rusty. Come and get it.”

Rusty stepped forward, careful to stay on the tarp, and picked up the paper-weight. It was as smooth and heavy and wonderful as he had known it would be. He cradled it to his chest, the glass pleasantly cool against his fingers, and began swaying back and forth.

Rusty had never understood the science behind corpse revival, but he supposed it didn't matter. Here he was, revived. He did know that the technique was hideously expensive. When it was first invented, mourning families had forked over life savings, taken out second mortgages, gone into staggering debt simply to have another day with their lost loved ones.

That trend didn't last long. The dead weren't attractive. The technique only worked on those who hadn't been embalmed or cremated, because there had to be a more-or-less intact, more-or-less chemically unaltered body to revive. That meant it got used most often on accident and suicide victims: the sudden dead, the unexpected dead, the dead who had gone without farewells. The unlovely dead, mangled and wounded.

The dead smelled, and they were visibly decayed, depending on the gap between when they had died and when they had been revived. They shed fingers and noses. They left behind pieces of themselves as mementos. And they had very little interest in the machinations of the living. Other things drew them. They loved flowers and animals. They loved to play with food. Running faucets enchanted them. The first dead person to be revived, a Mr. Otis Magruder, who had killed himself running into a tree while skiing, spent his twenty-four hours of second life sitting in his driveway making mud pies while his wife and children told him how much they loved him. Each time one of his relations delivered another impassioned statement of devotion, Otis nodded and said, “Uh-huh.” And then he ran his fingers through more mud, and smiled. At hour eighteen, when his wife, despairing, asked if there was anything she could tell him, anything she could give him, he cocked his head and said, “Do you have a plastic pail?”

Six hours later, when Otis was mercifully dead again, his wife told reporters, “Well, Otis was always kind of spacey. That's why he ran into that tree, I guess.” But it turned out that the other revived dead—tycoons, scientists, gangsters—were spacey too. The dead didn't care about the same things the living did.

These days, the dead were revived only rarely, usually to testify in criminal cases involving their death or civil cases involving the financial details of their estates. They made bad witnesses. They became distracted by brightly colored neckties, by the reflection of the courtroom lights in the polished wood of the witness box, by the gentle clicking of the clerk's recording instrument. It was very difficult to keep them on track, to remind them what they were supposed to be thinking about. On the other hand, they had amazingly accurate memories once they could be cajoled into paying attention to the subject at hand. Bribes of balloons and small,

brightly colored toys worked well; jurors became used to watching the dead weep in frustration while scolding lawyers held matchbox cars and neon-hued stuffed animals just out of reach. But once the dead gave the information the living sought, they always told the truth. No one had ever caught one of the dead lying, no matter how dishonest the corpse might have been while it was still alive.

It had been very difficult for the man behind the desk to break through Rusty's fascination with the paperweight. It had taken a lot to get Rusty's attention. Dirt about Rusty's affairs and insider deals hadn't done it. None of that mattered anymore. It was a set of extraneous details, as distant as the moon and as abstract as ethics, which also had no hold on Rusty.

Rusty's passions and loyalties were much more basic now.

He stood in the elegant office, rocking the paperweight as if it were a baby, crooning to it, sometimes holding it at arm's length to admire it before bringing it back safely to his chest again. He had another two hours of revival left this time; the man behind the desk would revive him and the others again in a month, for another twenty-four hours. Rusty fully intended to spend every minute of his current two hours in contemplation of the paperweight. When he was revived again in a month, he'd fall in love with something else.

"You *idiot*," said the man who had been sitting behind the desk. He wasn't behind a desk now; he was in a refrigerated warehouse, a month after that meeting with Rusty. He was yelling at his aide. Around him were the revived dead, waiting to climb into refrigerated trucks to be taken to the rally site. It was a lovely, warm spring day, and they'd smell less if they were kept cool for as long as possible. "I don't want *them*." He waved at two of the dead, more mangled than any of the others, charred and lacerated and nearly unrecognizable as human bodies. One was playing with a paperclip that had been lying on the floor; the other opened and closed its hand, trying to catch the dust motes that floated in the shafts of light from the window.

The aide was sweating, despite the chill of the warehouse. "Sir, you said—"

"I know what I said, you moron!"

"Everyone who was there, you said—"

"Idiot." The voice was very quiet now, very dangerous. "Idiot. Do you know why we're doing this? Have you been paying *attention*?"

"Sir," the aide stuttered. "Yes sir."

"Oh, really? Because if you'd been paying *attention*, they wouldn't be here!"

"But—"

"Prove to me that you understand," said the dangerously quiet voice. "Tell me why we're doing this."

The aide gulped. "To remind people where their loyalties lie. Sir."

"Yes. And where *do* their loyalties lie? Or where *should* their loyalties lie?"

"With innocent victims. Sir."

"Yes. Exactly. And are those, those *things* over there"—an impassioned hand waved at the two mangled corpses—"are they innocent victims?"

“No. Sir.”

“No. They aren’t. They’re the monsters who were responsible for all these *other* innocent victims! They’re the *guilty* ones, aren’t they?”

“Yes sir.”

“They *deserve* to be dead, don’t they?”

“Yes sir.” The aide stood miserably twisting his hands.

“The entire point of this rally is to demonstrate that some people *deserve* to be dead, isn’t it?”

“Yes sir!”

“Right. So why in the name of everything that’s holy were those *monsters* revived?”

The aide coughed. “We were using the new technique. Sir. The blanket-revival technique. It works over a given geographical area. They were mixed in with the others. We couldn’t be that precise.”

“Fuck that,” said the quiet voice, succinctly.

“It would have been far too expensive to revive all of them individually,” the aide said. “The new technique saved us—”

“Yes, I know how much it saved us! And I know how much we’re going to lose if this doesn’t work! Get rid of them! I don’t want them on the truck! I don’t want them at the rally!”

“Sir! Yes sir!”

The aide, once his boss had left, set about correcting the situation. He told the two unwanted corpses that they weren’t needed. He tried to be polite about it. It was difficult to get their attention away from the paperclip and the dust motes; he had to distract them with a penlight and a Koosh ball, and that worked well enough, except that some of the other corpses got distracted too and began crowding around the aide, cooing and reaching for the Koosh ball. There were maybe twenty of them, the ones who had been closest; the others, thank God, were still off in their own little worlds. But these twenty all wanted that Koosh ball. The aide felt like he was in a preschool in hell, or possibly in a dovecote of extremely deformed and demented pigeons.

“Listen to me!” he said, raising his voice over the cooing. “Listen! You two! You with the paperclip and you with the dust motes! We don’t want you, okay? We just want everyone else! You two, do *not* get on the trucks! Have you got that? Yes? Is that a nod? Is that a yes?”

“Yesh,” said the corpse with the paperclip, and the one who’d been entranced by the dust motes nodded.

“All right then,” said the aide, and tossed the Koosh ball over their heads into a corner of the warehouse. There was a chorus of happy shrieks and a stampede of corpses. The aide took the opportunity to get out of there, into fresh air. His Dramamine was wearing off. He didn’t know if the message had really gotten through or not, but fuck it: this whole thing was going to be a public-relations disaster, no matter who got on the trucks. He no longer cared if he kept his job. In fact, he hoped he got fired, because that way he could collect unemployment. As soon as

the rally was over, he'd go home and start working on his resumé.

Back in the warehouse, Rusty had a firm grip on the Koosh ball. He had purposefully stayed at the back of the crowd. He knew what he had to do, and he had been concentrating very hard on staying focused, although it was difficult not to be distracted by all the wonderful things around him: the aide's tie, a piece of torn newspaper on the floor, the gleaming hubcaps of the trucks. His mind wasn't working as well as it had been during his first revival, and it took all his energy to concentrate. He stayed at the back of the crowd and kept his eyes on the Koosh ball, and when the aide tossed it into the corner, Rusty was the first one there. He had it. He picked it up, thrilling at its texture, and did the hardest thing he had ever done: he sacrificed the pleasure of the Koosh ball. He forced himself to let go of it for the greater good. He tossed it into the back of the nearest truck and watched his twenty fellows rush in joy up the loading ramp. Were the two unwanted corpses there? Yes, they were. In the excitement, they had forgotten their promise to the aide.

Rusty ran to the truck. He climbed inside with the others, fighting his longing to join the exuberant scramble for the Koosh ball. But instead, Rusty Kerfuffle, who was not a hero and had not been a very nice man, pulled something from his pocket. He had a pocket because the man with the quiet voice had given him a new blue blazer to wear, so he'd be more presentable, and inside the pocket was a glass paperweight with a purple flower inside. Rusty had been allowed to keep the paperweight last time, because no one else wanted to touch it now. "It has fucking corpse germs all over it," the man with the quiet voice had told him, and Rusty had trembled with joy. He wouldn't have to fall in love with something else after all; he could stay in love with this.

Rusty used the paperweight now to distract the two unwanted corpses, and several of the others closest to him, from the Koosh ball. And then he started talking to them—although it was very, very hard for him to stay on track, because all he wanted to do was fondle the paperweight—and waited for the truck doors to be closed.

Outside the warehouse, it was spring: a balmy, fragrant season. The refrigerated trucks rolled past medians filled with cheerful flowers, past sidewalks where pedestrians strolled, their faces lifted to the sun, past parks where children on swings pumped themselves into the air in ecstasies of flight. At last the convoy of trucks pulled into a larger park, the park at the center of the city, and along tree-lined roads to a bandstand in the very center of that park. The man with the quiet voice stood at the bandstand podium, his aide beside him. One side of the audience consisted of people waving signs in support of the man with the quiet voice. The other side consisted of people waving signs denouncing him. Both sides were peppered with reporters, with cameras and microphones. The man with the quiet voice stared stonily down the center aisle and read the speech prepared by his aide.

"Four months ago," he said, "this city suffered a devastating attack. Hundreds of innocent people were killed. Those people were your husbands and wives,

your children, your brothers and sisters, your friends. They were cut down in the prime of their lives by enemies to whom they had done no harm, who wanted nothing more than to destroy them, to destroy all of us. They were cut down by pure evil.”

The man with the quiet voice paused, waiting for the crowd to stir. It didn't. The crowd waited, watching him. The only thing that stirred was the balmy spring wind, moving the leaves. The man at the podium cleared his throat. “As a result of that outrageous act of destruction, the brave leaders of our great nation determined that we had to strike back. We could not let this horror go unanswered. And so we sent our courageous troops to address the evil, to destroy the evil, to stamp out the powers that had cut down our loved ones in their prime.”

Again he paused. The audience stirred now, a little bit. Someone on one side waved a sign that said, “We Will Never Forget!” Someone on the other side waved a sign that said, “An Eye for An Eye Makes the Whole World Blind.” The cameras whirred. The birds twittered. The refrigerated trucks rolled up to the edge of the band shell, and the man at the podium smiled.

“I supported the courageous decision of our brave leaders,” he said. His voice was less quiet now. “There was only one way to respond to this devastating grief, this hideous loss, this violation of all that we hold dear and sacred. This was the principled stance taken by millions of people in our great nation. But certain others among us, among you”—here he glared at the person who had waved the second sign—“have claimed that this makes me unworthy to continue to hold office, unworthy to continue to be your leader. If that is true, then many of the leaders of this country are also unworthy.”

His voice had risen to something like a crescendo. The woman standing next to the man who had waved the second sign cupped her hands around her mouth and called out cheerfully, “No argument there, boss!” A few people laughed; a few people booed; the cameras whirred. The man at the podium glared, and spoke again, now not quietly at all.

“But it is *not* true! The leaders of this city, of this state, of this nation must be brave! Must be principled! Must be ready to fight wrong wherever they find it!”

“Must be ready to send innocent young people to kill other innocent young people,” the same woman called back. The booing was louder now. The man at the podium smiled, grimly.

“Let us remember who is truly innocent. Let us remember who was truly innocent four months ago. If they could speak to us, what would they say? Well, you are about to find out. I have brought them here today, our beloved dead, to speak to us, to tell us what they would have us do.”

He gave a signal. The truck doors were opened. The corpses shambled out, blinking in the glorious sunshine, gaping at trees and flowers and folding chairs and whirring cameras. The crowd gave a gratifying gasp, and several people began to sob. Others began to retch. Additional aides in the audience, well prepared for all eventualities, began handing out packets of tissues and barf bags, both imprinted with campaign slogans.

Rusty Kerfuffle, doggedly ignoring the trees and flowers and folding chairs and cameras, doggedly ignoring the knowledge that his beloved paperweight was in his pocket, moved toward the podium, dragging the unwanted corpses with him. In the van, he had accomplished the very difficult task of removing certain items of clothing from other corpses and outfitting these two, so maybe the man with the quiet voice wouldn't realize what he was doing and try to stop him. At least for the moment, it seemed to be working.

The man with the quiet voice was saying something about love and loss and outrage. His aides were trying to corral wandering corpses. More people in the audience were retching. Rusty, holding an unwanted corpse's hand in each of his—the three of them like small children crossing a street together—squinted his eyes almost shut, so he wouldn't see all the distracting things around him. Stay focused, Rusty. Get to the podium.

He got to the podium. Three steps up and he was on the podium, the unwanted corpses beside him. The man with the quiet voice turned and smiled at him. "And now, ladies and gentlemen, I give you Rusty Kerfuffle, the heroic husband of Linda Kerfuffle, whom you've all seen on television. Linda, are you here?"

"Darling!" gasped a woman in the crowd. She ran toward the podium but was overtaken by retching halfway there. Rusty wondered how much she was being paid.

An aide patted Linda on the back and handed her a barf bag. The aide on the platform murmured "public-relations disaster" too softly for the microphones. The quiet man coughed and cleared his throat and poked Rusty in the back.

Rusty understood that this was his cue to do something. "Hi, Linda," said Rusty. He couldn't tell if the microphones had picked that up, so he waved. Linda waved back, took a few steps closer to the podium, and was overcome with retching again.

The aide on the platform groaned, and the man with the quiet voice forged grimly ahead. "I have brought back Rusty and these other brave citizens and patriots, your lost loved ones, to tell you how important it is to fight evil, to tell you about the waste and horror of their deaths, to implore you to do the right thing, since some of you have become misled by propaganda."

Rusty had just caught a glimpse of a butterfly, and it took every ounce of his will not to turn to run after it, to walk up to the microphone instead. But he did his duty. He walked up to the microphone, pulling his two companions.

"Hi," he said. "I'm Rusty. Wait, you know that."

The crowd stared at him, some still retching. Linda was wiping her mouth. Some people were walking away. "Wait," Rusty called after them. "It's really important. It really is." A few stopped and turned, standing with their arms folded; others kept walking. Rusty had to say something to make them stop. "Wait," he said. "This guy's wrong. I wasn't brave. I wasn't patriotic. I cheated on my wife. Linda, I cheated on you, but I think you knew that. I think you were cheating on me too. It's okay; it doesn't matter now. I cheated on other stuff too. I cheated on my taxes. I was guilty of insider trading. I was a morally bankrupt shithead." He pointed at the

man with the quiet voice. “That’s his phrase, not mine, but it fits.” There: now he couldn’t be blackmailed.

Most of the people who’d been walking away had stopped now: good. The man with the quiet voice was hissing. “Rusty, what are you doing?”

“I’m doing what he wants me to do,” Rusty said into the microphone. “I’m, what was that word, imploring you to do the right thing.”

He stopped, out of words, and concentrated very hard on what he was going to say next. He caught a flash of purple out of the corner of his left eye. Was that another butterfly? He turned. No: it was a splendid purple bandana. The aide on the platform was waving it at Rusty. Rusty’s heart melted. He fell in love with the bandana. The bandana was the most exquisite thing he had ever seen. Who wouldn’t covet the bandana? And indeed, one of his companions, the one on the left, was snatching at it.

Rusty took a step toward the bandana and then forced himself to stop. No. The aide was trying to distract him. The aide was cheating. The bandana was a trick. Rusty still had his paperweight. He didn’t need the bandana.

Heartsick, nearly sobbing, Rusty turned back to the podium, dragging the other corpse with him. The other corpse whimpered, but Rusty prevailed. He knew that this was very important. It was as important as the paperweight in his pocket. He could no longer remember why, but he remembered that he had known once.

“Darling!” Linda said, running toward him. “Darling! I forgive you! I love you! Dear Rusty!”

She was wearing a shiny barrette. She never wore barrettes. It was another trick. Rusty began to tremble. “Linda,” he said into the microphone. “Shut up. Shut up and go away, Linda. I have to say something.”

Rusty’s other companion, the one on his right, let out a small squeal and tried to lurch toward Linda, towards the barrette. “No,” Rusty said, keeping desperate hold. “You stay here. Linda, take that shiny thing off! Hide it, Linda!”

“Darling!” she said, and the right-hand corpse broke away from Rusty and hopped off the podium, toward Linda. Linda screamed and ran, the corpse trotting after her. Rusty sighed; the aide groaned again; the quiet man cursed, softly.

“Okay,” Rusty said, “so here’s what I have to tell you.” Some of the people in the crowd who’d turned to watch Linda and her pursuer turned back toward Rusty now, but others didn’t. Well, he couldn’t do anything about that. He had to say this thing. He could remember what he had to say, but he couldn’t remember why. That was all right. He’d say it, and then maybe he’d remember.

“What I have to tell you is, dying hurts,” Rusty said. The crowd murmured. “Dying hurts a lot. It hurts—everybody hurts.” Rusty struggled to remember why this mattered. He dimly remembered dying, remembered other people dying around him. “It hurts everybody. It makes everybody the same. This guy, and that other one who ran away, they hurt too. This is Ari. That was Ahmed. They were the ones who planted the bomb. They didn’t get out in time. They died too.” Gasps, some louder murmurs, louder cursing from the man with the quiet voice. Rusty definitely had everyone’s attention now.

He prodded Ari. "It hurt," Ari said.

"And?" said Rusty.

"We're sorry," said Ari.

"Ahmed's sorry too," said Rusty. "He told me. He'd have told you, if he weren't chasing Linda's shiny hair thing."

"If we'd known, we wouldn't have done it," Ari said.

"Because?" Rusty said patiently.

"We did it for the wrong reasons," Ari said. "We expected things to happen that didn't happen. Paradise, and, like, virgins." Ari looked shyly down at his decaying feet. "I'm sorry."

"More," Rusty said. "Tell them more."

"Dying hurts," said Ari. "It won't make you happy. It won't make anybody happy."

"So please do the right thing," said Rusty. "Don't kill anybody else."

The man with the quiet voice let out a howl and leaped toward Rusty. He grabbed Rusty's free arm, the right one, and pulled; the arm came off, and the man with the quiet voice started hitting Rusty over the head with it. "You fucking incompetent! You traitor! You said you'd tell them—"

"I said I'd do the right thing," Rusty said. "I never said my version of the right thing was the same as yours."

"You lied!"

"No, I didn't. I misled you, but I told the truth. What are you going to do, kill me?" He looked out at the crowd and said, "We're the dead. You loved some of us. You hated others. We're the dead. We're here to tell you: please don't kill anybody else. Everybody will be dead soon enough, whether you kill them or not. It hurts."

The crowd stared; the cameras whirred. None of the living there that day had ever heard such long speeches from the dead. It was truly a historic occasion. A group of aides had managed to drag away the man with the quiet voice, who was still brandishing Rusty's arm; Rusty, with his one arm, stood at the podium with Ari.

"Look," Rusty said. He let go of Ari's hand and reached around to pull the paperweight out of his pocket. He held it up in front of the crowd. Ari cooed and reached for it, entranced, but Rusty held it above his head. "Look at this! Look at the shiny glass. Look at the flower. It's beautiful. You have all this stuff in your life, all this beautiful stuff. Sunshine and grass and butterflies. Barrettes. Bandanas. You don't have that when you're dead. That's why dying hurts."

And Rusty shivered, and remembered: he remembered dying, knowing he'd never see trees again, never drink coffee, never smell flowers or see buildings reflected in windows. He remembered that pain, the pain of knowing what he was losing only when it was too late. And he knew that the living wouldn't understand, couldn't understand. Or maybe some of them did, but the others would only make fun of them. He finished his speech lamely, miserably, knowing that everyone would say it was just a cliché. "Enjoy the beautiful stuff while you have it."

The woman who had heckled the man with the quiet voice was frowning. "You're

advocating greed! That's what gets people killed. People murder each other for stuff!"

"No," Rusty said. He was exhausted. She didn't understand. She'd probably never understand unless she died and got revived. "Just enjoy it. Look at it. Don't fight. You don't get it, do you?"

"No," she said. "I don't."

Rusty shrugged. He was too tired; he couldn't keep his focus anymore. He no longer cared if the woman got it or not. The man with the quiet voice had been taken away, and Rusty had done what he had wanted to do, although it seemed much less important now than it had even a month ago, when he was first revived. He remembered, dimly, that no one had ever managed to teach the living anything much. Some of them might get it. He'd done what he could. He'd told them what mattered.

His attention wandered away from the woman, away from the crowd. He brought the paperweight back down to chest level, and then he sat down on the edge of the platform, and Ari sat with him, and they both stared at the paperweight, touching it, humming in happiness there in the sunshine.

The crowd watched them for a while, and then it wandered away, too. The other corpses had already wandered. The dead meandered through the beautiful budding park, all of them in love: one with a sparrow on the walk, one with a silk scarf a woman in the audience had given him, one with an empty, semicrushed milk carton she had plucked out of a trash can. The dead fell in love, and they walked or they sat, carrying what they loved or letting it hold them in place. They loved their beautiful stuff for the rest of the day, until the sun went down; and then they lay down too, their treasures beside them, and slept again, and this time did not wake.