

# Won't Be Missed

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By Chris Longhurst

The castle stands, proud and incongruous, in the scrubby desert not far outside Las Vegas. It had been raised in a single day and night by the sorcerer Corwin, costing him what was left of his childhood memories. Now he sits at the centre of this castle, watching television and waiting for his enemy. Above him rolls the blue-purple heart of his power, casting strange shadows.

Eventually Corwin glances up from a rerun of *Seinfeld* and notes the vision in his scrying window: his castle tumbling stone from stone, flashes of golden light in the dark glass.

"About time," he mutters. He jabs at the remote, consigning the adventures of Jerry Seinfeld to the unsilence of a television on standby. His staff flies to his outstretched hand. He pours the memory of the comedy into the blue-purple void without regret. His past already hangs around him in rags and tatters, traded away for momentary power one scrap at a time: Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer won't be missed.

Corwin slams his staff on the flagstone floor and calls forth an unspeakable horror of claws and poison, to which the light of the sun is anathema. He intones four words in the tongue of the sun and moon – a spell which had cost him all memories of the taste of whiskey, good and bad alike – and wraps the thing in the impenetrable dark of night, shielding it from Nevadan sunshine.

Outside, the stillness of the air is broken by the throb of a motorcycle. The rider – Sarah, daughter of the Leviathan, not that she likes to talk about that – kills the engine and dismounts. Her solid, practical boots *schff* in the dust. Her knuckles are rough from a life of violence, her fingernails ragged and unpainted. She draws back her arm and balls a fist.

"Knock knock."

The scrying window bends and implodes with a sound more scream than breaking glass. The wall beneath it bursts inwards, scattering fragments of white masonry across the floor. Framed in the wounded stonework is

*Sarah. Corwin remembers her as she was: lying in his bed, eyes closed, the light falling across her just so. Her fingers are entwined with his, the grip that can crack stone gentle against his skin.*

The sorcerer flicks his wrist and the night-wrapped horror slithers forward like a wave, engulfing Sarah in darkness and poison. Something golden gleams in the depths of the shadow and the darkness bursts, the creature burning away into ash. Sarah brushes smouldering pieces from her hair. In one hand she clutches a crescent of shining gold that Corwin cannot look directly at.

"A little piece of Helios," she says. There is no anger in her voice. "I got it off him after the last time you tried the whole 'monster shrouded in darkness' thing. But you don't remember that, do you?"

Corwin does not. He raises his staff but Sarah is *right there* and her arm sweeps across–

The staff goes flying across the room. His fingers are broken. Pain and surprise knock him to the floor. He had forgotten what her impossible strength *felt* like, had forgotten her terrible speed. What else had he forgotten about her?

"I'm here to rescue you," Sarah says. "From that." She points at the blue-purple thing that hovers overhead. Corwin looks blank.

"It's an identivore," she says, stepping around the fallen sorcerer to approach the thing. "A parasite. It's been eating away everything that defines you and feeding you power so you can keep it safe." She looks back at Corwin with sorrow. "You probably think I'm your enemy, if you even remember me at all."

"You are *everything* I remember!" Corwin shouts. Every memory is clear to him, gleaming like polished pearls in the wasteland of his self. Every hurt and slight and insult in perfect resolution.

"I did some things I regret—" Sarah begins but Corwin is in no mood for words. His staff flies to his outstretched hand and he spits magic words of power like bullets. Sarah dodges; Corwin's furniture bursts into fragments where stray magic grounds.

Corwin tears memories from his mind like pages from a book, casting them into the void and demanding strength in return. Gone is *how she lied about her family, about the source of her power*: lightning stabs from Corwin's staff but Sarah grits her teeth and soaks it up, her hair dancing, her skin smoking.

Gone is *the way she would flirt with any man she took a shine to*: Corwin multiplies gravity where Sarah stands, then again, but her strength is equal to his power. She grits her teeth and takes a step forward, the castle stones cracking under her suddenly weighty feet.

Gone is *how she left him*: a gale born of Corwin's wrath bursts forth, and the wind is full of knives. Sarah's clothes rip. Her skin splits. She bleeds but she does not fall. She pushes against the gale, reaches for him.

Gone is *how much it hurt*. And suddenly Corwin realises that he doesn't want to see Sarah suffer any more. He can't remember why he ever did. He dismisses the wind, returns gravity to normal; she stumbles and he drops his staff to help her with his good arm. There is a moment of quiet.

"Do you remember anything?" she asks, detaching herself from his arm to stand on her own feet once again.

*Sarah, half-asleep in his bed on a sunny afternoon.*

"You. Nothing else." Corwin frowns. "Are we lovers?"

"We were," Sarah says. "Not any more."

Corwin reads her tone, her body language.

"Was it a bad breakup?"

Sarah nods slowly. "It was pretty terrible. *I* was pretty terrible."

"I can't remember any of it," Corwin says.

"I'm kind of glad," Sarah admits. She sighs. "Do you want to know?"

Corwin considers what he put Sarah through: shadowed beasts and lightning, crushing force and a wind full of knives. He weighs it against a theoretical pretty terrible breakup.

He shakes his head. Those memories won't be missed.