

THE SANCTUARY

She raced through the woods. Sweat flooded her face. Her heart thudded. Her throat was so dry it was sore. Wolves howled. She now galloped, trudging on twigs and dry leaves. The trees were monsters; their spindly arms creaked in the wind. She looked behind her. She glimpsed a figure wearing a black cloak. She sped like a locomotive. Everything became blurred. She spluttered. She gasped for breath. The wind roared then thunder boomed. Lightning flashed in the sky then rain pelted the earth. She slipped. Her blouse and trousers became stained with mud. Her white trainers turned brown.

She managed to escape the incarceration of the forest. In the distance she saw a dazzling light. She chased towards the irradiated place. She turned her head. The figure in the black cloak had disappeared, however she continued to run. The light beckoned her to a white cottage. She banged on the door.

A few seconds later, the door opened. An old woman stood there.

“Can I come in?” panted the girl.

“Who are you?” wheezed the woman.

“Olivia.”

“Do you want money?”

“No, but I need protection. Someone’s been chasing me through the woods.”

“Alright, come in,” replied the woman.

The woman put one of her wrinkled, bony hands on Olivia’s arm and guided her into the cottage. She smiled. She had a cadaverous face.

“I’ll run you a bath,” croaked the woman. “You’re filthy and I don’t want you getting a cold.”

“Thanks,” replied Olivia.

The woman limped to a cupboard in the hall and held an old rug.

She returned to the lounge and flung the mat on the floor.

“Sit on that ‘til the bath’s run.”

Olivia obeyed.

“I haven’t introduced myself. I’m Miss Johnson. I live on my own. I have two daughters, one lives in Scotland and the other in Canada. I get the occasional phone call from them but I’m never invited to stay with them.”

Miss Johnson shuffled to the bathroom. Olivia sat on the rug and removed her blouse. The flickering flames from the hearth warmed her body. The room was scented with violets. The furniture was Queen Anne. The grandfather clock ticked softly; Olivia found the sound soothing. After a short while, she stood up and inspected the ornaments on the mantelpiece; she especially liked the one of a gold dolphin with a ball balanced on the tip of his nose. Soon, she noticed a twenty pound note. She grabbed it and put it in her bag.

Miss Johnson plodded into the kitchen. Soon, the aroma of fried steak and onions infiltrated the lounge.

“Check your bath,” spluttered Miss Johnson. “If it’s ready, go in and be quick as I want to serve the dinner soon.”

Olivia entered the bathroom. It had a fragrance of aromatic oils. She saw bottles of rosemary and jasmine at the side of the bath. She stepped in the warm water and then sat in the tub. After a short while, she outstretched her body. She let the scented oils ease the aching sensation in her limbs.

Olivia reflected on how unhappy her parents had made her; they disapproved of Martin, a boy she had started dating. They did not explain why they felt he was unsuitable; they sensed he was bad. Eventually, they banned her from seeing him; owing to this, she decided to leave home. Olivia put a backpack on her back containing some belongings and cycled for miles. She stopped to relax in woods that she spotted. She had some refreshments and enjoyed the pastoral scene. The sunshine shimmered on the land.

It infused Olivia's body with a warmth that induced somnolence. A few hours later, Olivia awoke. She panicked. The sunshine had disappeared and dusk was arriving. Also, wolves began howling. She sprang to her feet and started running as she believed someone was chasing her. Even while relaxing, she sensed that someone had been watching her.

Soon, the aroma of roast potatoes infused the steamy room; this precipitated Olivia to wash and dry herself, put on a bathrobe and spring down the stairs to the lounge. Her face glowed in the incandescence.

Miss Johnson had placed the meal on the table. She had filled two glasses with white wine. On a plate, in the middle of the table, lay thick slices of garlic bread saturated with melted butter. Olivia began eating a piece of bread before beginning the sumptuous meal. Miss Johnson relished every morsel she ate. Gravy was dripping from the sides of her mouth. Olivia devoured the food.

"It was delicious. Can I have more?"

Miss Johnson still had much food on her plate.

“Wait ‘til I’ve finished mine then I’ll give you more.”

While waiting for a second portion, Olivia gorged all the garlic bread. Then she burped.

“What do you say?” asked Miss Johnson solemnly.

“Excuse me,” replied Olivia.

Wolves howled. Hyenas cackled. The wind bellowed. Olivia shivered. She arose and sauntered towards the lattice window.

The trees were swaying hysterically. She pulled the velvet curtain across the window. She returned to the table. Miss Johnson had finished her repas. She staggered to the kitchen and returned with a second portion of food for Olivia and a ginger cake. While Olivia guzzled the food, Miss Johnson sipped wine.

“I’m so glad I’m here,” said Olivia. “I feel safe. Wolves and hyenas give me the creeps.”

“This is wolf country. Over the centuries, they’ve brought terror to this region.”

“How can you stand living here?” asked Olivia.

“I’m not scared of them.”

When Olivia had finished dinner, Miss Johnson and herself had slices of ginger cake. The wolves wailed.

“Play some music,” said Olivia. “I hate hearing the wolves.”

“The p word,” said Miss Johnson.

“Please,” said Olivia.

Miss Johnson lurched towards the gramophone.

“I’ve never seen one of those. Don’t you have a hi-fi?”

“A gramophone is perfectly adequate,” said Miss Johnson.

She played some nineteen twenties Jazz. The tone was so muffled that the wolves’ howling and the hyenas’ cachinnation was still

audible. While the music was playing, Miss Johnson began massaging Olivia's shoulders and back.

"You're all bone. The meal should help fatten you."

Olivia did not reply. She found the massage so soothing, she felt it would make her sleep. Her tranquillity was interrupted by a knock at the door.

Miss Johnson trudged towards the door and opened it. Arctic air blew into the warm room. The fragrance of violets was replaced by a putrescent smell. Olivia almost vomited. Her hands became sweaty. Her heart thumped. Like a frightened rabbit, she tried to dart from her captor, however she was ensnared; before her stood a figure wearing a black cloak. He was a Titan. The wolf by his side snarled at Olivia. The Titan pulled back the hood of the cloak, revealing his face.

"Martin!" gasped Olivia.

Martin grinned, revealing fangs.

“Miss Johnson, do something!” screamed Olivia.

Miss Johnson waded towards Olivia. She smiled at Olivia, revealing fangs too. Both Martin and Miss Johnson used their fangs to pierce Olivia’s neck; she fainted.

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By Sarah Lipton

