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Somewhere with Wolves

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Author Bio

Natalie Orga is a junior English major with a concentration in writing and a minor in Studio art. She lives in Delaware and hopes to publish novels one day. She would like to thank her gloriously fluffy dog for his love and support.

Somewhere with Wolves

NATALIE ORGA

The town of Saint Lace, Maine, was a quiet place, rough as dried elbows and small as an afterthought. It was all wooden shingles and damp sidewalks, hemmed in by thickets of trees, green, brown, and yellow. Stark little houses with grim faces lined slick streets, and the old groves of trees seemed to lean towards the buildings as if listening for whispered rumors. And maybe they were. Saint Lace was that sort of place. It was quiet, but not for lack of gossip. It was quiet because, it seemed, all the conversations were held in hushed voices.

This is what Anne Flint, the owner of the Curio shop, was thinking when the stranger sauntered inside. She had been pretending to read a book, but she couldn't focus. The same paragraph floated before her eyes dazedly, her mind mulling over the previous customer's comments. The woman had plucked a pair of earrings from the jewelry rack, slapped them on the counter, and leaned in close. Had she heard that Millie from the bakery was pregnant? Did she know how young Millie was, and who the father was? That good-for-nothing highschool sweetheart. And didn't she know that he would leave her?

Anne hadn't known, but she really hadn't cared to. Millie was a round-faced girl with curious eyes. She used to come into the Curio shop when she was a child, tugging on the sleeve of her mother's woolen sweater, pressing her tiny fingers against glass panes. Anne had met the highschool sweetheart before, too, and couldn't see why he was a good-for-nothing. He'd seemed kind enough. But then again, nothing was ever quite kind enough for Saint Lace. The scrutinizing eyes were as cold and dull as the slate rock that the Curio shop stood on. As Anne placed the earrings into a brown paper bag, she'd wished, for a brief, burning moment (the seventh that day), that the shop wasn't her responsibility.

The Curio shop hadn't always been Anne's. It had been her husband's. His pride and joy, perched on the jagged coastline. His palace of relics; rough-edged books in the back left corner, old furniture behind the display window, odds and ends packing the place to the ceiling. Rows of shelves, dripping cobwebs, slicing the inside into a cross-section of forgotten items. It used to be a home, back when it was run by the two of them, awash with lamp light and the scent of

her husband's incense. Tangy and rich, the only exotic sliver of Saint Lace.

Now the place smelled of dust, and nothing ever stirred it. The light inside was cold, reflected from the frigid waters outside the windows. The paragraph of Anne's book taunted her eyes, unreachable.

That's when the stranger entered, shouldering his way through the door in a cloud of cigarette smoke and doorbell-music. Anne folded the page of her book carefully and watched.

He was tall and slender, a frame that didn't fare well in the chilly Maine climate. He moved with feline grace, his legs and arms swinging smoothly. His hair was shaggy and strawberry-blonde, rough as a fox's pelt. A bandana was tied tight around his throat, his coat too thin for the season.

Anne watched him prowl through the aisle towards the counter, glancing half-heartedly at a Native American wood carving on the shelf as he passed. He was not from Saint Lace, it was obvious. But there were no tourists, either, so what was he doing here? Anne closed her book slowly, folded her hands on her lap, and waited.

"What is this place?" His voice was smooth liquor, and accented. French, maybe? Anne couldn't be sure.

"It's the Curio shop," Anne pointed redundantly at the sign in the window. She realized how bland her voice sounded. Bored, unaffected. She suppressed a shudder.

"I see. So what kinds of things does a curio shop sell, exactly?" he asked, swinging a hip to one side and cupping his fingers around his cigarette. Anne watched the flame spring to life, the butt blackening and then blazing gently. The shop was supposed to be No-Smoking, but she didn't stop him. She didn't want him to go. Why was that? She shifted the book from her lap to the counter.

"Odds and ends. Anything that's strange or out-of-the-ordinary. Rare. You know," she added, although he probably didn't. He nodded anyways.

"That's why you're here, then." His lips curled around the cigarette in a smirk. Anne flushed.

"No, this is my husband's shop," she blurted, immediately wanting to shove the words back into her mouth. She could feel her cheeks burning.

"Oh? Where is he?" the man asked, unbothered.

"Dead," she responded, tactless. When was the last time she'd spoken to a stranger?

"I'm sorry," he followed, sounding mostly indifferent. She relished the lack of pity in his voice. She was sick of sympathy, suffocat-

ing and sweet.

“What’s this?”

“It’s a carving of a wolf. From one of the tribes that used to live in this area. Do you like it?”

“Not particularly. But I want to remember this shop. May I?” he inquired, reaching towards the handle of the glass case. Anne nodded. His hands were long-fingered, feminine. He lifted the little wolf from its perch and turned it around in his palms, watching the pale light glint from its rugged snout.

“I’ll take it. How much?”

“You can have it,” Anne said before she could stop herself. He cocked a reddish eyebrow, but shrugged and slipped the little figurine into a leather bag at his waist.

“Are there many wolves here, in Maine?”

“Not outside of this shop. Not for a long time,” Anne responded.

“Have you ever seen one?”

“Yes.”

It was a lie. When she was a child, she swore up and down that a wolf lived in her backyard. She wouldn’t go outside at night alone, and even then she was afraid. When she checked the mailbox (usually empty), she’d scamper as quickly as she could in her bare feet down the drive and dash back into the house. Years later, she’d told her husband about the wolf. She was convinced of its existence; she thought she had heard it howling, a sound like a child’s scream, and she’d seen reflective eyes in the bushes, round and searching. Her husband had told her that it had been a fox. Don’t worry, he’d said. Nothing dangerous is in Saint Lace. But wouldn’t she love to see a wolf up close? Wouldn’t that be an adventure?

At the time, Anne had wanted nothing to do with wolves. He had been adventure enough. He was wild and fresh and untrapped. But now, thinking of the fierce little carving, she felt a raw thrill at the thought of seeing those eyes again. Of feeling that fear. Of feeling anything.

“Do you miss having them around?” the man asked, smoke curling around his words.

“Very much.”

What if she got into the old Prius out back, drove away from the coast, away from the cold, into the forest? Where would she go? Somewhere with wolves, she decided.

“Hmm. I’m sorry. Maybe they’ll come back someday.”

“They won’t. Not to Saint Lace.”

“Quiet town.”

“Definitely.”

The man seemed distracted now, and was swaggering his way back towards the door. A plume of smoke trailed over his shoulder, a scent lingering in his wake that reminded her of lamplight. He threw the half-dead cigarette butt into the trash can by the door and turned over his shoulder, grinning as a thought occurred to him.

“Hey. Maybe there’ll be a wolf outside of this shop sooner than you think,” he chortled. The sound was light.

He slipped outside the door, sending the bells into their frenzied dance, and turned towards her on the other side of the glass. Smiling, he pulled the wolf carving from his waist pack and, with dramatic flair, placed it on the ground just outside. Ta-da! Anne could see him laughing, and she couldn’t help but chuckle weakly at his little joke. He walked back into the parking lot; Anne watched him speed off in a little green Sedan. The odor of the cigarette filled the room as she gazed at the spot where his car had disappeared into the trees. That was when she realized it: the trash can was on fire.

Anne leapt from behind the counter and lunged towards it, panicked. A small blaze was kindling, fueled by the little brown paper bags that she folded things in, paper cups from the ice cream store, and receipts. Nothing she couldn’t put out quickly. The smell was crisp, old. But tinged with something exotic.

Anne froze. It smelled of incense. She watched the flames grow, spilling from the waste bin like a drooping plant. It snagged a tapestry on the wall, and she watched it climb the woven threads eagerly.

Slowly, Anne opened the door and marched outside into the brisk wind. The water slapped the broken-jaw shoreline, and the trees seemed to glow in the dusk. She bent down and picked up the little wooden wolf at her feet. His little eyes peered up at her like a pair of promises. By the time she reached her car, the Curio shop was an inferno. The fire had spread more quickly than she could have imagined, and flames billowed like streamers from the windows. The wooden shingles slid to the ground, charred, pieces of the building crumbling as if it were nothing but a poorly constructed gingerbread house.

Anne slid into the driver’s seat of the Prius and angled the rear-view mirror away from the blaze. Already, alarms blared somewhere near the center of town. People would whisper about this event for years, she knew. But that was no longer her concern.

Where would she go?

Somewhere with wolves, she thought. She placed the carving on her dashboard and twisting her key into the ignition, letting the engine purr to life. Somewhere with wolves.