

The Giving Tree- By Lukas O'Boyle

A piece of Into the Darkest Forest by Nigel Semaj

OLIVIA (she/her)- A nervous camper who has entered the forest with two of their friends, Dante and Justice, looking for witches, and to tell ghost stories. Olivia acts as the storyteller weaving a spooky tale around the campfire while the story unfolds in front of her. Dante has been cheating on Justice with her, and she tells this story to try to show the dangers of love, and the fine line between that, and obsession

MIKAEL (he/him)- One of the five witches of the forest, the witch of nature. Mikael has a deeply rooted connection to flora and fauna protected by the forest, and finds a curious in humans of the outside world, still being a young and naive witch. The representation of the Giving Tree

CARMEN (she/her)- A young adult woman who has traversed the forest looking for a way to save her loved one. She wants to control her love, and her mind begins to unravel as she takes more and more from the forest.

(Our story begins around a campfire. OLIVIA, tells a new story to her friends DANTE and JUSTICE. JUSTICE sits by a pot preparing the ingredients for some stew. DANTE writes absentmindedly in his notebook, still upset over an argument the three had over control of power and the existence of witches in the forest. The story unfolds in front of the campers as OLIVIA tells it.)

OLIVIA

The forest is silent, void of life, until footsteps are heard from a nearby bush. A young girl, Carmen, steps out from the bush. Looking for something, she carves her mark into the trees as she goes in case she gets lost, or worse. But something felt what she did to the trees, and watches her from the shadows.

CARMEN

Hello?

MIKAEL

You shouldn't do that.

CARMEN

I- uhhh-uh shit.

CARMEN has a sudden realization, and then rummages through their pockets, eventually producing a folded up note. CARMEN unfolds it, and reads it frantically, hands shaking.

I invoke the Maiden, Mother, and Crone, and ask for your assistance!

MIKAEL stops for a moment, and laughs to himself.

What's so funny?

MIKAEL

You are a curious one.

CARMEN

Are you going to help me or what?

MIKAEL

You wear such interesting protections. And such silly colors, you would not hide from thieves very well. But please. No more injuring the flora, or the fauna.

CARMEN

Ok... Uh- My girlfriend. She's sick. I heard rumors someone here could help me.

MIKAEL

Usually people want only for themselves. Why do you ask for the needs of another?

CARMEN

How will I know if they really love me, if they're sick? I want to be certain they love me.

MIKAEL

Do you not trust them?

CARMEN

What?

MIKAEL

To heal. To get better. What if they are capable-

CARMEN

-No. It needs to be me. I need- I want to help. Please. There's not a lot of time left.

MIKAEL

And what would you give to make that happen?

CARMEN

Anything.

MIKAEL walks to a nearby tree and plucks an apple from it. They polish it with their sleeve and hand it towards CARMEN

If the trade is equal, then perhaps then you will find your answer from your loved one.

MIKAEL stops before handing it to CARMEN, holding tighter for a moment.

MIKAEL

You must choose. How much does this *truly* mean to you?

CARMEN looks to MIKAEL, pulls out her knife, and cuts off their ring finger, MIKAEL is surprised by the abruptness, but again curious. CARMEN is breathing heavy from the pain.

CARMEN

Is that enough?

MIKAEL

You really are curious. Very well.

MIKAEL hands over the apple, and begins to leave the space.

CARMEN

There's more right?

MIKAEL

Pardon?

CARMEN

If I need more, I can come back, right?

MIKAEL

If your *loved one* needs more, I will be found. Trust in what must happen. As long as you do not upset the balance, we may see each other again. Until next time.

CARMEN

WAIT I'M NOT DONE...

MIKAEL sinks back into the shadows, CARMEN is left wrapping their hand with a bandage .

OLIVIA

But Carmen didn't stop there. Two apples was never enough to satisfy her, so naturally, she returned to the forest late one night.

CARMEN follows her marks through the trees, her pace more frantic this time, swinging her flashlight through the shadows, searching for MIKAEL.

CARMEN

Hello?

Silence, no response, the wind carries her words away.

Hello!

Again, silence

I know you're out there... Please!

No response, CARMEN pulls her knife off of her belt, and carves a deep, straight line down the side of one of the marked trees As the knife drags, the wind screeches, and MIKAEL suddenly rises behind CARMEN. Grabbing her wrist before she can continue.

MIKAEL

I warned you last time? Why do you still not listen?

CARMEN

Why didn't you answer me the first time?

MIKAEL

I wanted to see what you would do, I hoped it wouldn't be this.

CARMEN

(Lets go of held breath.) Fine.

CARMEN motions that she means no more harm. MIKAEL loosens his grip on the wrist, and CARMEN pulls their hand away, rubbing at where MIKAEL grabbed them. She shoots MIKAEL a hateful look that he can't see. CARMEN tosses the two rotten apple cores towards MIKAEL, and they roll to his feet. MIKAEL studies them for a moment.

MIKAEL

I only gave you one.

CARMEN

I was hungry. Things are tough out there and I didn't know what might happen, so I took one for safety. I'm sorry.

MIKAEL

You don't mean it.

CARMEN

Yes I do.

MIKAEL

It's ok... I understand. It was hard out there for us too once.

CARMEN

You came from out there?

MIKAEL

Yes. A long time ago. This has been my home since.

CARMEN

Can't you leave?

MIKAEL

The forest gives only what one needs, not what one wants. And it is our responsibility to see those needs met. It is our burden to bear.

CARMEN

But you can't know that for sure.

MIKAEL

And yet, here you are. What is it this time?

CARMEN

First, tell me what I have to give. I want a real answer

MIKAEL

There is no tricks with trust. That's the scary part. We take the leap together.

CARMEN

... I need money. She's gotten better. But what if she wants to leave now? I need her to stay. Please.

MIKAEL

You came here once to ask for what she needs, yet now you ask now for yourself. What does *she* need?

CARMEN

She needs love. She needs my love. She is nothing without it.

MIKAEL

Really?

CARMEN

What would you know? You don't know her like I do.

MIKAEL

...I assume you are correct, perhaps I do not.

CARMEN

I want my second gift now. No tricks.

MIKAEL

Very well. You ask for a ring, for wealth? The vines of the forest are plentiful, long standing, and very sought after by those who would wish to take from here.

MIKAEL pulls a vine out of his arm as if it grows from him, and presents it to CARMEN. MIKAEL seems strained in this action, it seems to hurt him to do this.

It binds us all to this place, and protects us from the outside. Perhaps it can do that for you and your loved one. ..

CARMEN begins impatiently reaching for the vine, ready to tear it from MIKAEL. He moves just out of her grasp.

But this time-

CARMEN

I said no tricks.

MIKAEL

Not a trick, a request. A simple one.

CARMEN

No-

MIKAEL

-Please. I have missed connection to outsiders. Would you only stay a moment with me, and could I have the pleasure of one dance with you? I only wish to see what the outside world is like. Please.

CARMEN takes a moment to weigh her options, feels her side for her knife, but decides against it, and then takes his hand. The two dance in a waltz like dance across the stage, a moment of human connection. CARMEN does not understand the rhythm of MIKAEL's waltz right away, but picks it up, at the end of the dance MIKAEL spins out, and CARMEN grabs ahold of the vine attached to MIKAEL and begins to pull. MIKAEL winces in pain, and drops to a knee as CARMEN begins to pull. It looks as if intestines are being taken from MIKAEL. After a moment of CARMEN collecting vines MIKAEL clutches his end of the vine, stopping the movement.

MIKAEL

Please. This is all I can offer you.

CARMEN

You think this is enough? Have you seen the outside world?!

MIKAEL

I gave you part of myself, I cannot give you all of it.

CARMEN

Bullshit.

CARMEN begins to rip the vines from MIKAEL, now weakened, no longer holding on. CARMEN pulls the tangled mass of life force from MIKAEL's body. He crumples to the ground, wheezing, reaching for breath.

OLIVIA

Carmen wraps up the vines in a haste, eyes darting between her path out, and MIKAEL. The winds howl, the trees groan, and Carmen runs from the forest as the witch reaches out for help, dragging himself across the floor. She runs from the forest again. But the vines were never going to be enough. It only postponed Carmen finding out the truth, that her lover never wanted a life with her. So she came back to the forest one final time to try and take her love *back*.

A dim light illuminates MIKAEL, still in a pile on the ground, breathing shallowly. He looks drained, withered of life, tired. A shuffling of leaves is heard in the distance as CARMEN approaches again with her hiking equipment, seeing MIKAEL, walks up to him, and places their bag down nearby, rummaging through it, looking for something.

CARMEN

I had a feeling you would still be here.

MIKAEL

Please... I have nothing left to give. I am sorry.

CARMEN

You're still breathing aren't you? Blood still pumping? *(Beat)* You still have a heart don't you? *(Realization)* You still have a heart.

CARMEN pulls a machete from the inside of her camping pack, and stands up to face MIKAEL.

MIKAEL

What more can you need?

CARMEN

I lost my heart! I lost her! We had the ring, we had the house and she left. You said it would work! I need this to work.

MIKAEL

What she needed has changed.

CARMEN

Then do something about it!

MIKAEL

I cannot.

CARMEN

FIX IT!... I bet you're hiding something from me-

MIKAEL

-Perhaps what she needs is not you.

(Beat.)

CARMEN

What?

MIKAEL

Perhaps *you* are no longer what she needs.

OLIVIA

Carmen's heart can't take this. She slowly moves towards Mikael, dragging the machete across the ground as the witch tries desperately to drag himself away from her.

CARMEN

You don't know her.

MIKAEL

Wait-

CARMEN

You don't know me.

MIKAEL

-please.

CARMEN

You're hiding it from me! Give it!

MIKAEL

I have no more! Please! Stop-

CARMEN shoves MIKAEL to the ground, pinning him and raising the machete. MIKAEL tries to make an effort to stop CARMEN but is quickly overpowered. CARMEN hacks into his body.

CARMEN

I NEED IT! *(chop)* I NEED IT! *(chop)* I NEED IT! *(final chop)*

OLIVIA

Carmen pulls the machete from the chest of Mikael. The forest is silent. After a moment. A heartbeat cuts through the silence. The hole in Mikael's chest begins to glow. Carmen stares into the light, entranced for a moment. She reaches in elbow deep, and rips the glowing heart from Mikael's chest. She stares at it for a moment, looking around to see if someone is watching.

CARMEN

Shit.

OLIVIA

She looks around in a panic, and begins to run. As she takes her final step to the edge of the forest, the heartbeat is heard again. Faint this time, but growing stronger with each pulse. MIKAEL's body rises from the ground, slowly, painfully. CARMEN tries to run, but their feet are stuck to the floor, they fall.

CARMEN

Wait! Please!- I'm sorry, I'll do whatever you want just-

MIKAEL

-NO... No more.

CARMEN

HHHHHEEEELLPP HHEE-MMMPPHMPPS

OLIVIA

Carmen's mouth is sewn shut by vines. Roots grow from their feet, deep into the ground. She tries to rip them out, but they grow back faster than she can pull.

MIKAEL

I am sorry, friend. I gave you patience. It is too late now. The forest must be protected. It saddens me that it must be this way. A balance must be remade.

CARMEN continues to try to free herself, with no use. As the roots grow deeper, her skin begins to stiffen and crack.

You took from the forest, and now you must give back. Your branches will bear fruit. Vines will root you to the ground. And maybe one day your heart will provide protection for those who need it.

CARMEN

MMMMMMMPPHHMMMMMM

CARMEN's body slows. Their skin, now bark, their veins a tangled mess of vines, their blood turns to sap, and they move, for the last time. Reaching for the way out

MIKAEL

Goodnight, Carmen.

MIKAEL drags his thumb across the dirt, and marks CARMEN's forehead with the symbol she has been carving on all the trees in the forest. The mark of cain. MIKAEL takes one last look of pity, and sinks back into the shadows.

END