

That Dreadful Night

That Dreadful Night

Giorgione was the best florist in the kingdom of Picco. His garden thrived high on the meadow of the mountain, where his roses romanced the bees and his daffodils gave the birds reason to sing. Nearby, was a deep cave, hewn and refined by his great-grandfather from the body of a titan of old. The remains of the titan, having melded with the natural environment provided many minerals and elements that nourished Giorgione's flowers and vegetation; the titan's skeleton, filled-in with mud and rock served as the perfect greenhouse suitable for all the seasons. Roots grown from the cave's soil were used in many herbal remedies to cure the sick. Flowers adorning the top of the cave were so radiant, as well as fragrant, that knights would travel far and wide to Giorgione's shop in town, only to fight each other for the carefully arranged bouquets – wishing to give only the best arrangement to their noble ladies. Because of the abundance and care with which Giorgione provided every product, he became very popular and was given home-made gifts from the town-folk on a daily basis; if he ever needed anything, the news spread faster than wild-fire and someone would donate the supplies.

For thirty years, Giorgione joyfully woke up early every morning and ascended the mountain, while the dew was still fresh, in order to tend to and collect the fresh growth. He made it back to town before second breakfast to set up shop. There was always a line outside his little vendetta when he returned, and shoppers were present all the way until afternoon tea when he was more or less sold out. He was so busy that he never married, nor made time for friendships, outside the grateful conversations with clients. He was the last of his family and he didn't have time or the energy to care for pets. Holidays were always lonely, and soon all of his evenings became melancholic too. As he would watch children play, running home right before sunset, or witnessing a young couple holding hands as they strolled down the street, he would feel a deep jealousy, and he raged about what he had given up for this town. Each night he puffed carefully measured smoke rings from his hand-carved pipe, and his heart would harden even more; he mulled over just how much the town owed him. During the next three years, he determinedly raised prices until everything was triple the original amount; he decided to also become stingier with the quantity that he provided. The foreign knights didn't mind so much, but the mothers looking for ailments for their ill ones, were hurting the most from this change. No amount of bartering altered his stubbornly high fees. His once cheerful demeanor was replaced with a hardened scowl. Eventually, the town-folk stopped coming around to share their lives; their gifts slowed to a stop;

That Dreadful Night

children no longer waved as they played in the street, and although he still had steady business, there rarely was a line waiting outside of his vendetta. All of this made him even more bitter; he had thought that his price changes would make them appreciate him, but it instead it made the town even more ungrateful to him. He grew angrier every day. He muttered regularly: *“Who do they think they are? How dare they!”*

One day, he noticed the baker proposing to a plain maiden. He was holding out to her a modest bouquet of daisies and petunias. The maiden’s face was radiant. *“Where did the baker get those flowers? Certainly not from me! Why, those flowers are pale in comparison to what I could have made for him!”* The next day while in the butcher’s shop, he overheard the seamstress tell one of the farmers that she was now buying her herbs and medicines from the orphanage at the edge of the town, and that the orphanage only asked for a modest donation according to the buyer’s craft and means; she was bragging how she decided to go above and beyond by patching holes in the children’s clothes and that the exchange was a great blessing to her since now she had a place to donate her unused bulk cloth and scraps. *“So much more affordable than Giorgione’s!”* When they noticed that he was listening, they turned away and stopped talking. Giorgione decided that he needed to check out this orphanage. He returned to his shop and put up his sign that displayed: *“closed for the day.”*

At the orphanage, there were many of his old customers; they were in a tiny side room browsing through herbs, fruits, vegetables and floral arrangements. Everything that was on display was modest; it was an embarrassment for a “shop”. There were no ornate roses, or even any rare vegetation. The products were also not as big or colorful as what was in his shop. He shook his head in pity. The customers were also paying not with coins, but with bread, cheese, other homemade goods, and some with their labor. The carpenter was sitting outside of the room fixing a chair. The blacksmith was donating gardening tools. The atmosphere was joyous and peaceful; it made Giorgione feel sick. He walked beyond the room and peaked behind the gate. There were children of all ages playing and laughing while pulling weeds, and others were dancing and giggling as they were watering the tomato plants. Their caretaker was smiling and offering gentle guidance here and there. Giorgione felt the rage build up inside of himself; his competition was a ratty pack of poor children – who didn’t even take their endeavors seriously. He seethed all the way home.

That Dreadful Night

A few months passed; his shop was becoming more and more empty with only a customer or two every few hours – most of them travelers or locals seeking very specific roots. His golden daffodils were drooping, his basil was starting to wither. He put outside of his shop a sign that read: “*today everything half off*”. This did boost his sales, but not enough to rescue his dying inventory; he angrily threw many of the plants into his compost pile. He needed to do something about that orphanage! If they were out of the picture, the town would have to come to him for all of their floral and herbal needs! He decided that he was going to destroy their garden that very night. He packed up his tools and waited for the sun to set. Luckily, it was a dark cloudy evening. He could smell rain on the horizon; this was good because rain would keep most of the town’s folk inside. When Giorgione was confident that the town finally went to sleep, he crept out and journeyed through the shadows, making sure that any sleepless character peering through his window to watch the gentle drizzle would not be able to see him. When he opened the gate to the orphanage’s garden, the creak was so loud that it startled him to the point that he almost decided to return home, but his anger kept him on task. He spat on the oregano, dug up the carrots, and threw them about. He stomped on the violets and pulled apart the green bean vines. He overturned, pulled, hit, stabbed, stomped and damaged everything that he could. The cold rain began to descend heavily as he determined to destroy the fruit trees. He looked at the plump plums and the fat figs. All of a sudden a wave of justice flooded over him. It was unfair to destroy that which he didn’t sell, let alone even grow; in a hurried manner, he decided to leave the fruit trees and ran out the garden, accidentally slamming the gate. By now it was early morning and it was raining very violently; he was grateful, because the rain would do more damage while also covering his tracks. Giorgione hurried up the mountain to make sure that his own garden was secured. He collected everything outside of the cave that he knew he couldn’t save, covered the rest to the best of his ability and went home wetter than a river rat.

It was the darkest, loneliest, saddest, fearful and most anxious day that Giorgione had ever experienced. Not only did the rain not let up, and thus, no customers, but the fear and anxiety of being found out haunted him, and his soul felt more dreadful than the angry storm outside. Giorgione frightfully imagined that the rain was a personal punishment or judgment on him. He had never been so maliciously destructive before. He went to bed that night with debilitating guilty thoughts and woke up many times from nervous induced nightmares. He tried to rationalize and justify destroying the means of poor orphans, but his conscience raged against him.

That Dreadful Night

Two days later, the storm had finally let up. Rays from the sun were offering joy through beautiful fresh white clouds. Giorgione stepped outside to breathe in the new air and to hopefully melt the tension still surging through his aging body. Walking around, he saw that many areas of the town had received some minor damage from flash flooding and that many men and older boys were rallying together to drain the streets and to remove dead trees that fell over the entryway of the general store. Giorgione decided to help. For the first time, he felt normal on the inside; he didn't realise how much he missed being involved in the community.

It had been a long day of working with others to restore the town, and it was rewarded by a generous warm buffet meal provided by the women-folk. That night, emotionally and physically exhausted, he sobbed himself to sleep. He slept in later than he ever had before, and he laid there in bed at first fighting, and then, accepting the difficult realization that over these past years, it was he, not the townsfolk, who was in the wrong. A loud knock, interrupted his thoughts, followed by his shop's buzzer, forced him to hop out of bed and throw on his shopkeepers outfit. He hurried towards the door. To his embarrassment, standing before him, was the orphanage's headmistress with a boy around the age of nine. He was holding a basket of fruit. "*Come in, come in.*" Giorgione muttered, running his hand through his disheveled hair. They seemed a bit nervous, or he thought, even fearful in his presence. The lady described very sadly that their garden was completely destroyed by the storm, and she humbly begged him for seeds to regrow their supply; and meanwhile, for fresh vegetables to make a large soup to feed the children. She had the boy bring forward the basket of fruit. She explained that the fruit alone was miraculously spared and that this was all that she could pay him with. Giorgione was speechless. He looked at the plump plums and fat figs. He wanted to vomit. He quickly turned away. The lady misunderstood this action. She continued that she knew that he was a hard bargainer, but begged that he have mercy on the poor children, and that, they would give him more, as they could afford it.

"*No.*" Giorgione weakly said. He turned to face her front on and said more strongly: "*No, I will not take your fruit.*" The lady and boy looked so dejected. He continued: "*Look around you. Do you see my flowers, and herbs, and vegetables? I worked over thirty years to master the craft of growing, harvesting and formulating medicines. You are right, I will not barter any of this away.*" The lady's

That Dreadful Night

eyes filled with tears. He continued: *“Instead, I want to give these to you freely. Take whatever you want! Take the lavender! The potatoes! Anything! Everything! See those empty baskets in the corner! Fill them! Also, send this child here to me every other day at noon, starting tomorrow, and I will teach him my craft. In the evening, he may take back to the orphanage whatever is still good that does not sell. On the days that he is not here, he can teach the others what he has learned.”* The lady gave him the biggest hug that he had ever received in his life and she thanked him repeatedly. His heart melted and he fought back tears. He watched as they gratefully and with giddiness bounced around the shop, deliberating about which items to place in the baskets. They took only what they needed and that impressed him. He stole from them, but they were good and just towards him. If only they knew what he had done – they wouldn’t be smiling and thanking him repeatedly. He almost blurted out that everything was his fault, but he decided not to also destroy their faith in people. He didn’t want them to become as bitter as he was. He knew what he needed to do.

When they left, he closed the door after them, locked up his shop and went to find the local priest. It had been many years since he had gone to confession, and it was a torturous event getting out the words describing his dreadful deed. Despite the complete humiliation, it felt so good to be absolved. Tension left his body, he felt light and young again. The priest agreed that he did well in offering freely the gifts of his shop, and that it was a great idea to apprentice the child as a first step towards penance, but he added that Giorgione was to continue to provide for the orphanage for the rest of his life. The orphanage was now to be his family. Also, due to the long three years of selling his goods at an inflated price, that effective immediately, he was to no longer overcharge any of his products.

Soon the town noticed the change in Giorgione, but no one else ever found out about that dreadful night. His shop once again flourished as it had previously. Giorgione truly adopted the orphanage in his heart as his family, and eventually legally adopted his apprentice. He took his adopted son up the mountain and taught him the traditions of his father and grandfather, revealing the secrets of his titan greenhouse. Giorgione lived to see his son grow up and get married. When he died, he was buried in the town’s cemetery, mourned by many. The son taught his wife the same traditions, and together, they tended Giorgione’s garden when the dew was still fresh, and they continued to take care of the orphanage for the duration of their lives.