

## Playing the Fool

by Mia Sundby

Agatha began filling a plate with toast, eggs and bacon before bringing it over to the circular dining table.

"Here you are, Jay, dear." She said with a smile, all hostility seemingly evaporated.

"Er, thank you," I said, smiling back uncertainly as I accepted the plate and cutlery. The plate was lined with patterns of beige-y fruit and leaves, as were the resin handles of the cutlery. Both were phenomenally ugly, but the food looked delicious. Bewildered, I turned to Agatha. "Is this all for me? You're not going to have any?"

"No, dear, I ate earlier."

"...What about Frank?"

"Frank ate with me."

"...Alright, then. Thank you." I said again, curling my fingers around the ugly cutlery and beginning to dig into the mountain of food on my plate.

The dining chair across from me creaked as Agatha perched on it, wiping her hands on a floral tea towel. She smiled at me.

"Now," she said, "Frank and I have agreed that you ought to stay for another night."

I stopped chewing, turning to look at her. Covering my mouth, I frowned, "Sorry?"

"Well, dear, you can't very well go traipsing about on that ankle, can you?"

I swallowed. "Well, it's just a sprain, it should be--"

Agatha shook her head. "It may be little more than a sprain now, but what happens when you fall into a rabbit hole? Or trip on a rock? It'll only worsen, dear, it's not worth the risk."

"I appreciate you letting me stay, but I really ought to be heading off. I have a deadline--"

"Jay, you don't know the woods around here as I do." Her tone was that of someone trying to reason with a difficult child. Her hand spread on the tea towel as though she were trying to placate me mid-tantrum. "There's all sorts of things to hurt yourself on. No, no, it won't do. You will simply have to stay."

"But I--"

"No, no," she said, lifting a small wrinkled hand to silence me. "I won't hear of it."

Frustration flashed through me. With a soft clink, I placed the knife and fork on the sides of the plate. "Agatha--"

"You won't be staying here for free, mind, I'll need some help around the house."

I stopped, mouth already open to argue as politely as I could. I raised a brow. "Help around the house?"

Agatha nodded. "I know it may be but a humble home, but it can be rather a large undertaking for one my age. You wouldn't mind, would you?"

My lips thinned.

I considered how my ankle was throbbing under the table, even encased in a thick sock and a very supportive walking boot. I considered the large bed, indoors. And I considered the little hallway I'd found earlier, with the locked room and the abandoned sitting room. I considered my camera, and the shots I could get of this house. Parts of the house which couldn't be traced back to Agatha and Frank. Though if Agatha didn't know what a phone was, maybe she'd never even know that I'd very much toed the line on our agreement of privacy.

'There's something about this house', I thought. Maybe if I could stay just another night, maybe if I could just take some photos of it, I'd begin to understand what it was.

With a small sigh, I picked up the ugly cutlery and smiled at Agatha. "One more night. Thank you."

Agatha smiled back. "No, Jay, thank you."