

VILLAINY PREVIEW STORY # 3

LRRH2011

By Rob Rosen

“LRRH2011.” It was her online name, one she’d used successfully for well over three years now. That day, like all the rest, the send button had just been pressed and she had only to wait the briefest of seconds for a reply. It was, of course, her picture that drew them in: young and sweet and innocent, her dimpled chin tilted downward, her large doe eyes open wide, staring intently into the camera, watching, waiting, and oh so eager. Come and get me, they seemed to say.

“Suckers,” she whispered, with a bored shrug.

“BBWolf.” The name blinked on her screen in a bright green, Times New Roman font. “Cute pic,” the message read. “That really you?”

“Oh, it’s me, all right,” she replied, a knowing smile spreading wide across her face. “And even cuter in person, or so I’ve been told.”

“Yum,” BBWolf typed. “Good enough to eat.”

She smirked, her fingers caressing the keyboard, her hands moved hummingbird-fast. “Eat, maybe. Good is debatable.”

“LOL.” The letters flashed. Needless to say, she wasn’t in a laughing mood, out loud or

otherwise. At least not yet. “And I *am* hungry,” he quickly added. “Ravenous even.”

“Too bad,” she typed. “Kitchen’s closed for the night. On my way out the door to grandma’s house. I’m hooking up the cable to her PC today. Poor Granny, doesn’t know a thing about computers.”

The bait changed from time to time, but the response was generally the same. Throw out the hook; there was always some sort of lowlife catch to snag onto.

“U R in luck,” came the anticipated reply. “Geek Squad ex-employee here. PC specialist. Can help. For free.”

Her smile rose up, turning ever northward. Same old story. Helpless little girl, a babe in the woods. Or so it would seem. “Gee, free?

It must be my lucky day,” she wrote back, the words careening around the Internet, quick as lightning, hitting their target like a bullet between the eyes.

Another flashing response appeared. “Yep, free. Just for you. Special offer. What’s the address?”

She could practically feel his hunger now, hear the snarl, pulsing off her computer screen. Her fingers paused above the keyboard, hovering, deciding which letters and in which order to select. So many options. So many. “No strings attached?” she asked.

No pause on his end, however. Then again, there rarely ever was. “Small strings. Thin strings. Strings light as a spider’s web. Bring

me a basket of goodies for my services. It's all I ask for in return."

"Good deal," she typed. "The address is..."

But the message was suddenly blocked. Lost in the ether. An unexpected turn of events, to be sure. "Webmaster Woodsman," appeared the words in brilliant cautionary yellow. "No addies," came the admonishment.

"Bug off," BBWolf responded.

"Yeah, bug off," LRRH2011 echoed, her smile vanishing in the blink of an eye, her lips pursing tight as a drum. "Nobody asked you."

"No addies," the webmaster repeated, the words filling the screen in a size 72, bold, italic font, flashing like a firefly's ass. "It's not allowed on this server. Not safe."

Now LRRH2011 did indeed laugh. “Hey, Prince Charming, knight in shining armor, help appreciated, but not necessary. Granny needs cabling. Find a different distressed damsel to rescue,” her fingers furiously typed, and then, “BBWolf, the addie is now on MySpace. Basket is already packed. See you in sixty.”

And with that, the screen went black as coal, dead as night. BBWolf had been on her radar for some time now. And he wasn't getting away. No sir, no how. She licked her lips. After all, he wasn't the only one who was hungry. Then it was off to Granny's house, skipping in girlhood glee all the way there, basket swinging from the crook of her arm, heavy with its hidden load.

The house was unexpectedly dark upon her arrival. Dark as pitch. The lights were usually on, blazing bright, attracting those nasty moths to its flame. She crept up to the side and peeked into the window. A shadow moved across the bare wood floor. Then two. Close shadows. Practically side by side.

“Uh oh,” she muttered, grasping the basket good and tight for reassurance. “BBWolf is not alone. Two against one. Really, so not fair.” Strangely, the smile returned, plastered to her pretty face. The odds, after all, were still in her favor, all things considered. “Goodies,” she whispered, patting her stash. “Just like you asked for.”

Cautiously, she climbed up the stairs to the front of the house. The latch was open, the

door ajar, squeaking as she pushed it open. “Granny?” she uttered, her voice hesitant, meek, not her own. Not by a long shot. Timid, after all, was never her thing. “Granny, are you home?”

“In here,” came the response, high-pitched, crackling with fire and brimstone and all things very un-granny like. “In the computer room, dear.”

She entered, the floorboards creaking beneath her shoes, the sound echoing in the tight space around her. The only light came from her left, the blue from a screen, casting a pale moon-like glow. Ominous. Cold. She followed it to its source. A lone figure sat in a chair, a blanket draped over its head and body, fanning outward like a shroud.

“Granny, are you okay? Why are all the lights off?” she asked, her breath lodged in her throat, a lemon-sized pit forming in her belly. Something was off, different than normal.

“Not all of them,” came the near-whispered reply. “The computer’s is enough to see you by, my dear. And look how nice you look. Good enough...good enough...”

“To eat?” she giggled, despite the direness of the situation. “So I’ve been told.” Repeatedly and often.

The figure growled, baring yellowed, jagged teeth. “Come closer, dear. Let Granny get a better look at you.”

She inched in closer, closer still. “My, Granny, I do believe you’re drooling.”

The figure twitched. The voice deepened. “Just eager to kiss you, my dear. Kiss your tender, young skin. Come closer, dear, and let Granny give you a great, big kiss.”

A muffled sound came from beneath the blanket; a slight tremor shook the center of it. “Your stomach is growling, Granny. Lucky for you, I brought a basket of goodies.” She patted the basket, her smile beguiling.

The figure’s growl turned to a groan, sending a sickened chill down her spine. “First the goodies, then the kiss,” he told her, licking his chops.

Her heart beat even faster, racing in her chest like a runaway train, the sound roaring in her ears. She reached into the basket and felt the cold certainty of what lay inside. Her fears

were allayed. Two against one? No matter; her *one* was good enough. Always enough.

“Granny,” she said, staring at the monitor. “You know, those computers can be very dangerous. People hide in waiting on the other side of the connection. Bad people behind innocuous names. *Big, bad* people, in fact.”

“Predators in search of prey,” the figure rasped, standing up so that the blanket shifted and dropped. “*Hungry* predators.” On the floor, sitting cross-legged and trembling, was a man with a gun pointed at his head, the shiny black of it barely discernable in the computer’s dim light.

“Now come give Granny a kiss or the webmaster gets it.”

She stared down at her would-be rescuer, surprised that such a man still existed outside of fairytales. She smiled, her heart again fluttering. Almost melting. Almost. “Let him go. I’ll kiss you. As much as you like. *He* can even watch, if that’s what turns you on.” She sidled in closer, her face contorted into a mischievous grin, her own proverbial fangs now bared, the doe eyes now sly as a fox’s.

The man above kept the gun pointed at the man down below. All in all, it was a good place for it to be. Better than pointed at her, at any rate, she figured. He stared as she approached, rapt in awe, in amazement, in lust. Her mouth parted, as did his. She drew ever nearer, until her breath could be felt on his neck. He shivered, moaned. Her hand rose

and stroked the side of his head. Not soft and warm as he expected, but cold, hard, steely.

“Goodies,” she purred, pulling the trigger.

A burst of light flooded the room, as did the nearly deafening boom. The standing man was standing no more but was now crumpled in a heap on the floor, the crimson pooling, flooding around him.

“LRRH2011?” the only man in the room still alive asked, his voice wispy, faint.

“The L is for Lieutenant,” she responded. “And I thought I told you, I don’t need rescuing.”

He stood up on wobbly legs and managed a weak smile. “That picture you use, I thought you were a little girl.”

She laughed, putting the gun back in the basket for safe keeping. “I was, when it was taken,” The laughter grew, her eyes suddenly aflame. “But I’m all grown up now. Wolves don’t like adult flesh, you know. Too *tough*.”

His laughter echoed hers. “Good word for it. And thanks for saving me.”

“Thank you yourself. For trying, at least, to rescue me.”

“*At least*,” he repeated, with a heavy sigh.

“Well, Woodsman, some girls just don’t need rescuing. Some girls are fine and dandy all on their own.” She paused, taking him in. In fact, he was pretty nice to look at, now that he finally stopped shaking. “But keep trying. *This* girl appreciates the effort.” She smiled and walked him back outside. “And a happy

ending,” she added, coyly, her red cape fluttering in the crisp autumn breeze. “Isn’t that how all good stories end?”

“Or begin,” he replied, a smile so big and bright as to put the sun to shame.

“Ah,” she said, with a grin of her own and a spring to her step as the two of them walked away from the house. “You mean, the stuff that happens after happily ever after. I always wondered about that. Are lessons learned, straw houses rebuilt with brick? Evil step-sisters kicked to the palace curb?”

“Dwarfs go out and hire a housekeeper, gingerbread house oven gets replaced by a microwave?” he added, his arm brushing hers, a spark riding up both their backs like wildfire.

They reached her car. “Need a lift?” she asked, tentatively.

He shook his head, a frown now evident. “Mine’s just down the street.” He paused, unsure of what to do next, the circumstances behind their meeting so strange. “But, um, thanks, thanks again for rescuing me.”

“No problem,” she replied, getting into the car and rolling down the window. “And thanks for *almost* rescuing me.” She waved and slowly pulled away, a pang in her heart despite having just met him.

He waved in return and hollered, “Next time, for sure!”

She watched as he grew smaller and smaller in her rearview mirror. “Next time, huh?”

Her car sped away, back to her house, back to the grind. What choice did she have? It never ended, really. The wolves were always out there, always on the hunt. She turned on her computer and scrolled around, searching. It didn't take long to find another one. She wasn't surprised. The same address was given as before, the previous mess already cleaned up, she was certain. That's just how it worked.

Though this time was different.

She got there before him, the house dark, empty this go around. As she had guessed, nothing but a bleached stain remained from her last visit. The computer was left on, though, the place dead quiet. She logged in; the quarry was nowhere to be found, no messages. "I'm waiting," she typed, anxiously, her hand resting

on her basket. “Goodies are getting cold.” She laughed, more out of nerves than anything else. The job must’ve been getting to her, she figured.

Ten minutes turned to twenty. “Maybe this one learned his lesson already,” she said, getting up and walking to the kitchen. “Lucky me.” She opened the cupboards; they were bare. “Guess that luck of mine ran out. Maybe next time I’ll carry around some real goodies, just in case.” Her stomach growled. She opened the fridge. A box of baking powder and a shiny red apple were all she could find inside.

She shrugged and grabbed the fruit, flicking it in the air before catching it in her upturned palm. Sitting down, a polish with her

cape, she sunk her teeth in, the juice spraying and then dribbling down her chin. Her stomach settled down a bit. And then just as quickly erupted. She dropped the apple onto the floor. It rolled across the linoleum, coming to a stop against a waiting foot.

“Who, who are you?” she gasped, her hand clutching her belly, the pain overwhelming as she fell out of the chair, her body landing in a dull thud.

“You killed my son,” growled the crone, moving within an inch of her writhing body. “Now it’s your turn to die.” The withered, old hag kicked her, cackling all the while.

She stared up in a daze, her eyes clouding over, the room in a spin before everything started going dark. *An apple*, she thought to

herself. *Oldest friggin' trick in the book.* The light shrunk to a pinprick. Then the sound, a blast, a sudden bright light before the nothingness enveloped her.

Stupid friggin' apple.

A new light woke her, 100 watt bright. She scrunched up her eyes and yawned. “Am I dead?” she managed.

“Not just yet,” came the surprising response.

Her peepers popped open. “You?” she gasped.

“Webmaster Woodsman, at your service.” He smiled and stroked her hand, the warmth returning to her aching limbs.

“How?” she asked, her stomach still in knots, the pain thankfully receding.

“Told you,” he said, with a smirk, “no addies.”

She smiled, despite herself. “Prince Charming came to my rescue yet again?”

He nodded, reaching into his coat pocket, holding up the remnants of the apple she’d eaten. “Got it out just in time. Lucky for you, I know the Heimlich.” He blushed, though his eyes remained locked on hers. “And mouth to mouth.”

That’s when she remembered the last sound she’d heard. “And how to use a gun, I take it.”

Again he nodded. “That’s some goodie basket you got there.” He moved in, their faces suddenly an inch apart. “Guess that makes us even now, huh?”

She reached up and put her hand behind his neck. “Not quite.” She pulled him in, their lips colliding, meshing as one, that spark of theirs turning four alarm fire hot. She sighed and stroked his head, then pulled away, just an inch, his breath warm as a summer’s day. “See, I know mouth to mouth, too,” she whispered.

“Go figure,” he whispered back.

“Yeah, but don’t go too far. I feel an after coming on. And, wouldn’t you know it, it’s one of those happily ever ones.”

“Ah,” he chuckled, brushing his lips against hers, the kiss soft as a cloud, “those are the best kind.”

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Look for this and 22 other exciting stories in the upcoming Hall Brothers Entertainment anthology VILLAINY, available June 9th.

