



GOING BACK TO
OBERON
BY PG FORTE

A VERY SHORT STORY

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This story started out as a feature on Cabin Goddess's "Fourth Wall Friday" blog. I had a great deal of fun imagining myself returning to the scene of my very first series. And I do think I need to revisit it in the very near future. Enjoy!

GOING BACK TO OBERON

A VERY SHORT STORY

BY PG FORTE

The sun is shining overhead as I make my way along Oberon's Main Street. It's a beautiful day, warm but with a slight breeze, the air thick and heady with the sweet scent of flowers. It's been a long time since I was last here and I'm excited to be back. The carved wooden sign hanging over the door of The Crone's Nest looks a little more weathered than it did before, but the terrace adjoining the quaint little teashop is just as I remembered it; red and yellow sandstone pavers, the splash of water in the terracotta fountain, the herbaceous scents of rosemary, sage and thyme, and threaded through it all, the gentle swell of conversation.

Bells tinkle as I open the door and step inside. It's cooler in here, darker, more mysterious. Fragrances of coffee and cinnamon tease my nose along with the spicier, earthy scents of incense from the shop at the back. I glance around, still smiling at how little it's changed. Past the crowded tables, tall wooden shelves filled with books and green-glass jars still rise to the ceiling. Crystals and jewelry still sparkle in glass-fronted cabinets. It's easy to imagine the hissing roar that fills the air so suddenly must issue from the throat of a dragon, but I know it's just the noise made by the gleaming, brass-and-copper espresso machine situated behind the front counter.

"Hi! Welcome to the Crone's Nest," a cheery voice calls out.

"Hello." As I smile back at the young man who's working the counter, I'm conscious of a faint sense of disappointment. Is he new? I don't recognize him, and it's obvious he doesn't know me either. I can't help but feel just a little let down. It was my own choice to stay away so long, I know that, but once I'd spent nearly every waking moment here—and dreamed about it when I slept! I knew everyone and they knew me. It was home. Maybe you really can't go back there, after all.

"What can I get for you today?"

A quick glance at the menu board above his head has me frowning. I can see a few of my favorites are missing from the list of specials. "A large latte, please," I tell him.

"Anything to eat?" He gestures at the pastry case.

I hesitate, greedily scanning the trays of scones, biscotti, lavender shortbread...so many goodies. But, unlike the old days, my diet now is mostly gluten-

free. "I don't know if I should." Then I spy them. Gorgeous little gluten-free cream puffs. They're filled with a rose-and-honey flavored cream and decorated with crystallized violets and a drizzle of caramel. "Those," I say, pointing at them. "I'll take a plate of those."

"Good choice." My new friend smiles as he rings me up. "Those are my favorite too."

Then he hands me a small, metal signpost. It feels like wrought iron, with a cut-out star at the top emblazoned with a number: 42. Why am I not surprised?

"Go ahead and put it on your table. We'll bring your food out to you when it's ready."

I pour myself a glass of water flavored with cucumber and mint and head back outside. I glance around the terrace, looking for a place to sit and then I see her. Tawny-blond hair gleaming in the sun. A small smile playing on her lips as she reads from the book in her lap. It's a very familiar-looking book, as it happens, one of mine, and I can't stop the too-smug grin that curves my lips as I make my way across the terrace toward the table where she's seated all alone.

"Mind if I join you?"

She looks up from her book. "Hey, stranger. Welcome back." She gestures towards the empty seats. "Sure. Help yourself."

"Thanks," I say as I take a seat. "It's good to see you. It's good to be back."

"I'll bet." There's a knowing look in her hazel eyes as she nods at me, reminding me that she probably does know, better than anyone, how I feel about being here again. "It's good to see you too."

I take a sip of my water and make a mental note to try this at home. It's so simple and so delicious...and I know I'll probably forget again, just like I always do. I clear my throat. "So, Scout, how have you been? What's been going on here? What're you up to these days?"

"I'm good." She glances around the terrace. "There isn't a lot going on here these days. It's actually been pretty quiet. But that's okay, you know? It's been nice. Peaceful."

"Okay, good. Glad to hear it." If anyone deserves peace and quiet after all she's been through, it's Scout. "What do you think of the book?" I can't help asking.

Scout dips her head. "It's good." But her nose scrunches up and she looks a little uncomfortable as she adds, "You uh...you didn't leave me many secrets though, did you?"

"Sorry," I mumble as I take another sip of water. I'm not really sorry though. If I'd kept her secrets it would have made for a damn dull book. Besides, "All's well that ends well, though, right?"

Before she can answer, my food arrives. A plate with three jewel-like cream puffs is placed on the table by my elbow, along with a bowl of steamy, creamy deliciousness.

“Thank you,” I say as I look up—straight into a familiar pair of sparkling, green eyes. My breath catches a little. “Marsha.”

“PG Forte. It’s about time you came back for a visit. C’mere and give me a hug.”

I jump to my feet and do as she asks. She’s very persuasive, after all. I smile as the scent of her sandalwood perfume washes over me. At least some things haven’t changed. “You look great,” I tell her as I let her go. “And I love your hair like that.”

“Thanks.” A faint blush colors Marsha’s cheeks; I notice it as we both take our seats. My eyes meet Scout’s and we share a smile. Marsha never could take a compliment. And just like that, I’m back on familiar ground.

I bite into one of the cream puffs. The flavor explodes in my mouth—it’s a total mouthgasm. “Mmm. Oh, Marsha, these are *sooo* good!”

Marsha nods. “Chenoa,” she says—as though that explains everything. Which in a way, I guess it does. Chenoa Johnson runs the best bakery in town. Still—

“I can’t believe she’s baking gluten-free now. How did that happen?”

Marsha bites her lip. Scout chuckles quietly. I glance from one to the other in surprise. Before I can ask what’s going on, a voice speaks up behind me.

“Well, well. Would you look at what the cat’s dragged in.”

Scout rolls her eyes and even Marsha’s sigh sounds vaguely exasperated, but I can’t help grinning.

“Hi, Lucy,” I say as she circles the table to sit beside Scout—and across from me.

“Don’t you ‘hi, Lucy’ me,” she grumbles. Crossing her arms over her chest, she fixes me with her trademark glare. “You’ve got your nerve showing up here now after the way you walked away from everything, without so much as a single glance back. You never even gave us another thought, did you?”

“I wouldn’t exactly put it that way,” I say, taking another bite of cream puff.

“No, I’m sure you wouldn’t.” She shakes her head. “Look at you. All gluten-free and everything.” She glances around at the table, eyebrows rising. “Hey, why aren’t we eating?”

Scout and Marsha both shrug. I swallow hurriedly and try to look innocent. Lucy waves down a passing waitress. “Tina, could you bring us all our usual?” She makes a circular gesture to indicate the entire table, then points at my cream puffs and adds, “And four more plates of those.”

“Lucy,” I protest. “Thanks, but I don’t really need another order.”

“Are you kidding me? After all the trouble she went to? You damn well better eat them.”

“What trouble?” I ask. “Who are you talking about.”

“Chenoa, of course. Who else? She made them especially for you because she knew you’d like them.”

“Damn it, Luce.” Scout folds her arms and glares at her friend. “You weren’t even going to try and ease into this, were you?”

Lucy shakes her head. “Nope. Why waste time?”

“I don’t understand,” I say. “What’re you talking about? Chenoa didn’t know I was coming. No one knew. This is a totally, spur-of-the-moment visit.”

“Girlfriend, please.” Lucy shakes her head. “When did you get so dense?” Marsha winces, but she doesn’t disagree; even Scout is looking at me pityingly.

“What?” I ask, mystified by their reaction. “What am I missing?”

Lucy and Scout share a look then Scout turns to me. “Marsha knew.”

Marsha meets my questioning glance with a smile and a small shrug. “Psychic. Remember?”

“Right, right.” I damn well *should* have remembered. I like to think that it’s all in my head, that *they’re* all in my head, but sometimes...it really does seem like it’s really the other way around—that I’m in theirs.

“Okay, I give up,” I say at last. “This is obviously your show. So, what’s going on, guys? Why am I here?”

Lucy leans forward eagerly. “We want—” She breaks off as the waitress reappears with a pot of tea for Marsha, an espresso for Lucy, two more lattes and the cream puffs. We all wait silently until she walks away then Lucy continues. “We want you to write more books.”

“Really?” I’m a little surprised but, if I’m honest, I do perk up at the thought.

“There’s a lot more stories here,” Lucy says. She nods at the cream puffs. “Like Chenoa’s for example.”

Beside me, Marsha nods agreement. “And you did promise, you know.”

I feel a twinge of guilt. I *had* promised. “I know.”

I look at Scout. “How do *you* feel about this?”

She shrugs. “I don’t know,” she says slowly. “I’ll admit, I’m somewhat conflicted. I kind of like how you left things. I don’t really want anything to change.”

“Oh, c’mon, Scout,” Lucy says. “Everything changes. Besides, you can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, right?”

“Really?” Scout glares at her friend. “That’s all you have to say? Maybe you don’t remember what it was like last time? For you and Dan—not to mention what she did to poor Seth.”

Now it’s Lucy’s turn to glare. “Back off, Scout. Don’t bring Seth into it, you hear? And, of course, I remember! It’s just—”

“Enough!” It’s Marsha who intervenes—as usual. In the pause that follows, we

all become aware that the terrace has fallen silent. Everyone seated at the surrounding tables is watching, listening, waiting...

Lucy shoots them all a glare. "Well? What are you all looking at? Nothing to see here. Go on about your business. Go!"

As the conversations resume around us, Marsha focuses her attention on the other two women who are sharing our table. "Look, we all agreed to this, didn't we?"

Lucy and Scout both nod reluctantly, but it's easy to see who the mastermind behind this plan is. I turn to Marsha. "What is it you want?"

"Not a lot," she replies with a persuasive smile. I know that look and that tone. I'm in big trouble now. "Just a few more stories to round things out. Give Chenoa her Happily Ever After; maybe give us all another wedding, a few more kids, a couple of Christmas stories? And, you know, you've *never* spent Thanksgiving with us. Not even once."

It's like she's been reading my mind...or my website. I guess it's possible. "Sure," I say, smiling now. "I can do that."

"But nothing dramatic," Scout cautions. "Don't get any crazy ideas, or start thinking you have to change everything, all right?"

Oh, Scout, I think, a little sadly, even as I nod my head. You have no idea.

"And don't think you can get away with giving us the same thing over and over again," Lucy chimes in "We hate that."

I continue nodding. "Okay, Lucy, I hear you."

"All right," Lucy sighs. "Great. Perfect. That's that settled. Now, let's eat and catch up with each other. But we have to hurry. It's getting late. I have to get home soon."

"What do you mean...late?" I glance around in surprise. The late afternoon sun is gilding everything in a golden glow. The time couldn't have passed that quickly, could it? But I guess it has. And I guess that's typical of Oberon. There's always been something a little magical about this place...

You can read more about the OBERON series on the series website at OberonCalifornia.US Or join us on Facebook at [The Crone's Nest](https://www.facebook.com/TheCrone'sNest).