

Promises of Snow

written by

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EXT. DOWNTOWN - NIGHT

The time is about 10 PM in a small town. Cars zoom down the main thoroughfare. A handful of nearby bars and restaurants are bustling. Concentrated signs of life.

The glass front door for the shop on the corner opens. The STOREOWNER, a middle-aged man, steps out onto the sidewalk. He shivers, zipping his coat up. It's an uncharacteristically cold night.

He inserts his key into the lock. As he does so, through the door and the side windows of the shop, he sees...

A WOMAN, black with light skin. She's stumbled out of a door to one of the buildings down the side street.

Shaking, she struggles to regain her footing in her heels. Her tight dress and miniskirt combo are not suitable for the weather. She has a BRIGHT WHITE SNOWFLAKE TATTOO on her upper arm.

The STOREOWNER rounds the corner of his shop, curious.

MAN (O.C.)

Sash, get in the car! Where are you going?

The WOMAN sluggishly ambles down the sidewalk, away from a vintage black Pontiac Catalina with windows tinted almost completely dark. The driver's window is rolled down. The MAN is inside.

MAN (O.C) (CONT'D)

(taunting)

Sasha, come on now. We got people waitin'!

The STOREOWNER, concerned, carefully crosses the street towards the WOMAN, who the man called SASHA.

SASHA

(yelling, slurred)

No, Dee...I don't...feel good...

STOREOWNER

Miss?

The STOREOWNER meets SASHA as she's turned to yell at the car. She bumps into him, at first barely responding to his touch.

We now see that SASHA is not a woman, but a young girl, no older than 16.

STOREOWNER (CONT'D)
Are you alright, miss?

SASHA
(weakly)
Hey, no touch...til I see...

Her speech trails off as she collapses to the ground. The STOREOWNER pulls out his phone.

MAN (DEE) (O.C.)
HEY, man! Better leave my girl
alon- hey what're you doin!?

The STOREOWNER dials 911 and raises the phone to his ear.

The Cadillac peels out in a hurry, driving off into the night.

STOREOWNER
(into phone)
Hello? I need police and an
ambulance. There's a young woman...

INT. POLICE STATION - MORNING

A tall, dark-skinned woman, about 30 years old, walks through the front door. Her black jacket bears the letters FBI on the back. This is OLIVIA WALLS.

Her partner, a white man, slightly older, walks through behind her. He's similarly dressed.

OLIVIA WALLS (V.O.)
Chief.

CHIEF REEVES (V.O.)
Agents.

The pair approach the front desk. The DESK OFFICER looks up from a report as they do. He straightens up when he sees the letters on their jackets.

OLIVIA WALLS (V.O.)
Olivia Walls. This is my partner,
Craig Davis.

Olivia flashes her badge at the desk officer.

CHIEF REEVES (V.O.)
Welcome to Ruston. Have a seat.

INT. POLICE CHIEF'S OFFICE - MORNING

CHIEF REEVES, an older white man, sits behind his desk. OLIVIA and CRAIG sit opposite.

CHIEF REEVES

Look, agents, I spoke with your supervisor and I tried to explain all of this to him.

OLIVIA WALLS

Explain what? That you have the signs of a functional sex trafficking ring operating out of your town?

An OFFICER opens the door to the office. She's carrying a MANILA FOLDER with her.

CHIEF REEVES

This is a nice place. That kind of stuff just...doesn't happen here.

The OFFICER crosses the room and hands the folder to CHIEF REEVES.

CHIEF REEVES (CONT'D)

And when it does, it's just a few bad apples like the girls that were brought in the other night.

CRAIG DAVIS

They were found in the back room of an abandoned dress shop. Piss and needles all over the floor. That scream a couple loose girls to you?

CHIEF REEVES

(shrugging)

We get college kids breaking into those places all the time. And the shit they get up to back there...the girls of this generation, they give it away so freely. And the men encourage it.

OLIVIA shifts uncomfortably in her seat.

CRAIG DAVIS

Which is why you let the men the responding officers found with them go.

OLIVIA WALLS
(motioning at the folder)
May I?

CHIEF REEVES hands it over.

OLIVIA takes it, standing up. She opens it as she paces around the room. She flips through the documents - arrest report, witness statements, and finally mugshots. As she does:

CHIEF REEVES
You have to understand, we've gotta be tough on this. We can't have women running around like this. It's a blight on our town, but it's not human trafficking.

OLIVIA holds up one mugshot.

OLIVIA WALLS
This girl's no older than fifteen.

CRAIG DAVIS
You're holding underage girls on prostitution charges?

CHIEF REEVES
How many children do you see dressed like that? They also didn't have any ID on them.

OLIVIA continues flipping through the folder.

OLIVIA WALLS
The pimps control identifying documents.

CRAIG DAVIS
Could've been one of the upstanding men you let go.

CHIEF REEVES
No, they were all accounted for. Said they found the girls through Craigslist, or whatever replaced Backpage.

CRAIG DAVIS
(suspicious, wryly smiling)
What do you know about Backpage?

Awkward silence.

CHIEF REEVES

Look, if the Feds want to spend their time on a couple of small-time harlots, they're welcome-

OLIVIA's eyes widen as she flips to another mugshot, then turns to address the CHIEF.

OLIVIA WALLS

(calmly, plain-spoken)

We will gladly spend our time on them, Mr. Reeves. Because teenage girls don't just become 'small-time harlots' on their own. I know from experience.

She holds up a MUGSHOT from the folder. It's of SASHA. Her SNOWFLAKE TATTOO is plainly visible.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

I need to talk to this one.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

SASHA sits alone in a metal chair at a table. She is wearing the same dress from the night she was found. Visibly cold, nervous, clutching herself.

The door opens. OLIVIA walks in.

She's carrying a laminated menu with pictures of donuts on it.

OLIVIA WALLS

Good morning.

SASHA says nothing, but regards her with surprise. She was expecting another cop.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

I was told you hadn't eaten anything.

She slides the menu in front of SASHA.

SASHA looks at it, then back at OLIVIA.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

That's right. Whatever you want.

SASHA senses some sort of trap. She studies the menu anyway. She makes a selection.

OLIVIA takes the menu.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
(sincerely)
Mmmm, maple glazed. That's one of
my favorites.

She opens the door. She hands the menu to someone outside.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
(to someone outside)
Bring me a maple, and also a
blanket. Thanks.

The door closes. OLIVIA walks back to the table and sits.

SASHA
Who are you?

OLIVIA WALLS
Sorry, I'm Olivia. Sometimes I'm
terrible at introducing myself.

SASHA
You're not a cop.

OLIVIA chuckles. This one's smart.

OLIVIA WALLS
No, I'm not. I'm with the FBI.

SASHA absorbs.

The door opens. Someone hands OLIVIA a donut on a napkin and
a blanket.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
Thank you.

The door closes.

OLIVIA sets the donut down in front of SASHA. She offers her
the blanket.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
You looked cold.

SASHA takes the blanket, draping it across her lap. She looks
at the donut, suspiciously, but hungrily. She looks at
OLIVIA.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
Go on.

SASHA picks it up, taking a large bite.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
Sasha, Sasha, Sasha...that's a
pretty name. Is it really yours?

SASHA
...it was my grammy's.

OLIVIA WALLS
Is your grammy still around?

SASHA shakes her head.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
No other family that could come get
you?

SASHA
My mom doesn't really worry about
me.

OLIVIA nods, remorsefully.

SASHA (CONT'D)
Why are you here?

OLIVIA WALLS
I'm here because I help girls like
you.

SASHA
I don't need help.

OLIVIA WALLS
Of course you don't. Underage girls
held on prostitution charges can
usually help themselves.

SASHA pauses. She puts the donut down.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
Oh wait, that's right. You're
"eighteen." Convenient, that,
otherwise that prostitution charge
couldn't reasonably stick. They'd
have to go looking for a pimp...or
a boyfriend.

SASHA
My boyfriend's not a pimp!

OLIVIA WALLS

(nods)

I read that you talked about having to get back with him. If you give me his name...

SASHA folds her arms.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

...or I can call him for you. Have him come bail you out.

SASHA

No, he can't come here. He busy.

OLIVIA WALLS

I imagine he is.

(sighs)

That's okay. I already know who he is.

SASHA looks at OLIVIA, incredulous, worried.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

I'm curious how the two of you met. Maybe you were walking home from school one day. Or you were chillin' at the convenience store. He pulled up in his nice car. And he flirted with you and he showered praise on you. Said you were the prettiest girl he'd ever seen, right?

SASHA listens, aloof.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

Eventually he takes you on rides in that nice black car...

This comment gets SASHA's attention.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

...and he treats you to clothes and jewelry, nicer than anything you've ever had. Definitely nothin' mama could buy for you. Or even for herself.

(almost whispering, like admitting a secret)

Might even make her a little jealous.

OLIVIA leans forward.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

Then the sex starts. He's your first. And it feels good. Makes you feel like a grown-up, cuz he's older, and you've got something none of the other girls have. He tells you he loves you.

SASHA

Dee does love me.

SASHA tightens her lips. She let it slip. OLIVIA cocks her head to the side. She's unsurprised, but saddened.

OLIVIA WALLS

Soon Dee starts bringin' his friends around. He tells you "babe, all this fancy shit's expensive. You gonna have to contribute." So you start turnin' tricks for 'em. You don't like it, but hey, if this is what Dee needs...

SASHA

He's not a bad man. We love each other.

OLIVIA WALLS

Does he tell the other girls that too?

SASHA curls her face in anger at the suggestion.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

There are others, aren't there?

SASHA

You don't know shit.

OLIVIA WALLS

What kind of car does Deion drive nowadays?

SASHA is shocked she completed the name.

SASHA

How do you-

OLIVIA WALLS

Back in my day it was a black mustang. The storeowner reported a black car peeling off the other night. Consistent.

Confused silence. Olivia leans back in her chair.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
You know I asked specifically to
talk to you first, Sasha. Before
the other girls. Wanna know why?

SASHA
Drew my name out of a hat?

OLIVIA WALLS
It was this.

OLIVIA points at her shoulder.

SASHA looks down at her own - at the WHITE SNOWFLAKE TATTOO.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
None of the other girls have that.
It's not uncommon to see brands,
but it's strange to see only one of
you with one.
(beat)
Was he trying to sell you?

A painful fury lights behind SASHA's eyes.

SASHA
SELL ME??

OLIVIA WALLS
You were so high on heroine you
wouldn't have been aware of much.
Wouldn't protest.
(beat)
A brand like that has a story.
There's something magical, romantic
about snow, don't you think?
Louisiana girl like you probably
doesn't get to see it often, if
ever. But Deion...he came from up
north. From Detroit. He's still got
connections up there.

OLIVIA leans forward.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
He promised to take you to see the
snow, didn't he?

SASHA doesn't know what to say.

SASHA
How did you know?

OLIVIA WALLS
 Because ten years ago, he was
 living in Georgia when he promised
 me the same thing.

OLIVIA pulls up her sleeve. SASHA looks.

Her forearm bears the same WHITE SNOWFLAKE TATTOO.

SASHA is genuinely shocked at the revelation. She begins to
 tear up.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
 Sasha, guys like Deion...they don't
 give a shit. They use people. And
 you're not the first he's done this
 to. Not by a long shot.

SASHA
 No, no, I don't believe...

OLIVIA reaches for SASHA'S hand.

OLIVIA WALLS
 It's okay. It's not your fault. And
 we can do something about it. We
 can help you.

SASHA looks up.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)
 But I need to know where he is.

EXT. MOTEL - AFTERNOON

The BLACK PONTIAC CATALINA is parked outside a room. A
 TATTOOED MAN dressed in baggy clothes and puffing on a
 cigarette walks up to the door.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - AFTERNOON

TWO GIRLS nervously fix their hair and make-up in the
 bathroom. They are dressed in tight skirts and tube tops. A
 FAT MAN sits on the toilet, reading a sports magazine.

Another GIRL lay on the bed. She's lethargically slipping her
 bra back on but having some difficulty - the strap has been
 violently broken. Her hair is messed up from frantic tussle.

A thin black man sits on the end of the bed. He's wearing
 only his boxers as he sips a Gatorade, watching a football
 game. This is DEION.

The TATTOOED MAN walks in, closing the door. Deion turns his head to look.

TATTOOED MAN
Just got the address, Dee.

DEION nods. He turns to the girl behind him.

DEION
Ayy. Put your clothes on. Got you a couple extras tonight.

The GIRL looks at him in pain and exhaustion.

DEION (CONT'D)
Uh uh. Don't give me that. If you'd been a little nicer with the last one I wouldn't have had to do you like I did.

DEION stands up, grabbing a needle and a little black balloon of drugs from the dresser. He throws them at the GIRL. She flinches at their impact.

DEION (CONT'D)
Here. Feel better, bitch.
(to the TATTOOED MAN)
No sign of the cops?

TATTOOED MAN
It's a ghost town out there.

Deion fishes a stack of cash out of his pants, which lay on the floor. He counts it.

DEION
Damn.

TATTOOED MAN
Still short?

DEION
I told you we shouldn't have been tryin' to drop Sasha.

DEION starts counting again.

TATTOOED MAN
She was startin' to act up. She wasn't gonna be worth more than what she was bringin-

KNOCK KNOCK.

FEMALE POLICE OFFICER (O.C.)
Housekeeping!

DEION stops counting. He and the TATTOOED MAN look at the door, then back at each other.

BANG! The FEMALE POLICE OFFICER kicks in the door. She and another POLICE OFFICER step into the room, guns drawn.

POLICE OFFICER 1
HANDS UP! ON THE GROUND, NOW!

The GIRLS scream. The TATTOOED MAN complies. DEION heads for the bathroom.

The FAT MAN is trying to climb out of the window. DEION pushes him out of the way. He climbs out himself...

EXT. BACK OF MOTEL - AFTERNOON - CONTINUOUS

...and sloppily lands on the ground outside. He picks himself up.

POLICE OFFICER 2 (O.C.)
STOP!

DEION looks, then runs into the woods behind the motel.

He scrapes through the cracking branches, emerging out onto a road.

Two UNMARKED CARS screech to a halt in front of him. He can't go anywhere.

POLICE OFFICER 3 (O.C.)
HANDS BEHIND YOUR BACK AND GET ON
THE GROUND!

DEION begrudgingly complies.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

OLIVIA sits on a bench outside the Police Station. She's sipping a hot cup of coffee and looking up at the sky.

CRAIG DAVIS (O.C.)
I thought you'd be checkin' out our
perp.

She looks at Craig as he walks up with two greasy bags of fast food. She looks back up at the sky.

OLIVIA WALLS

Did you hear the weather forecast
for tonight?

CRAIG DAVIS

That snow is gonna miss us. The
whole storm cell is moving north,
and fast.

He offers one bag to her. She refuses.

Craig sits down next to her, setting the unclaimed bag on the
ground. He begins digging into his sandwich.

CRAIG DAVIS (CONT'D)

You're not interested in talking to
him?

OLIVIA WALLS

I'll let the police have him for a
bit. There'll be time.

CRAIG DAVIS

Unbelievable we found your guy all
the way down here.

OLIVIA WALLS

They should've had him when they
found me.

CRAIG DAVIS

You think he's part of the larger
operation?

OLIVIA thinks.

OLIVIA WALLS

I think he was mainly operating
alone. But he likely knows the
players in the larger ring.

(beat)

We'll get him to talk.

A couple of OFFICERS escort SASHA out of the building. She is
wearing a sweater and sweatpants.

OLIVIA sees.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

I should've been the last one, for
him. Just think, how many more
between me and her there must've
been.

CRAIG DAVIS

I think it's best to try not to.
We've done our best.

OLIVIA stands up.

OLIVIA WALLS

"Our best." I guess that's all
we've got.

OLIVIA walks up to SASHA and the OFFICERS as they reach an
unmarked police car.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

Warmer now?

SASHA nods.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

Good. Good...

She points at the officers.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

These guys are gonna take you to a
local shelter. You'll have a bed,
proper meals, be able to get you
some proper rest.

SASHA

I know. The lady told me in there.

OLIVIA WALLS

Ah, right.

SASHA

Did you go to one of these? After
they found you?

OLIVIA WALLS

(pause)

No. They didn't really have places
like this then.

A heavy silence. SASHA seems anxious.

OLIVIA WALLS (CONT'D)

You'll be okay. They're good
people. They'll take care of you.

(beat)

You got another name? Or still
wanna be Sasha?

SASHA thinks.

SASHA
I'll be Sasha. For now.

OLIVIA nods.

OLIVIA WALLS
(faint smile)
That's okay.

OLIVIA helps SASHA into the car, closing the door. The car
pulls away as OLIVIA watches.

It begins to snow.

THE END