

Orsa in the Forest

Told by Will Mead

[Folk Music]

Imagine a village where everyone helps each other.

Imagine the sounds of children laughing as they play.

Imagine the smell of woodsmoke filling the air.

And now imagine that you hate all those things. Orsa hated the fact that everyone in the Grove knew all about her. She hated the smell of meat cooking on the fire. And she hated the feel of the wooden floorboards underneath her feet. And so, when she could, Orsa sought sanctuary deep in the forest.

One step. Two. Now three. Now four. She stole further and further into the trees. Underfoot were mushrooms and insects, and the smell of damp earth filled her nostrils. The light filtered through the canopy and all around her, she could hear the sounds of birds singing in the trees. When she got further into the forest, she would arrive at the home of the bears, with their soft brown fur, their nuzzling noses and their kind eyes. Here she would eat with the bears, she would play with the bears, and she would grow with the bears. But all too soon, she would rush away back to the Grove before anyone noticed she was missing. This as how she lived her life, half-life.

One day, Orsa saw a group of young men and women with fine caps upon their heads by the edge of the forest. They were joking, jovial, jostling one another as they armed themselves with newly woven nets, neatly fletched arrows, and an axe fresh from the whetstone's kiss. Orsa, eyes wide with panic, ran after them into the forest.

They were easy to track for they left a trail of destruction behind them: broken twigs, axe marks in trees, and upturned earth. She could no longer hear the sounds of birds singing in the trees; instead, that sound was replaced with the sound of the group, jeering and cheering as they marched along.

Orsa followed the trail as swiftly as she could but she was not swift enough. She came upon a horrible sight: in front of the group, lay two bears with bloodied brown fur, noses now still and kind eyes that no longer saw. In the bears' arms, a mewling cub kept alive only for capture. Orsa's sadness turned to rage inside her. Her fists clenched.

[overlaid] Her heart stopped. Her heart sank.

[overlaid] Her skin went cold. Her boots were rooted to the ground.

[overlaid] She heard her bones cracking. And her eyes filled with tears.

She lashed out at the group.

Neither those newly woven nets, nor those nearly fletched arrows, not even that axe, fresh from the whetstones kiss, could save them, and soon they lay scattered on the floor beside the bears.

Orsa found herself back, once again, a human. And, still with tears in her eyes, she took one last look in the direction of the Grove, before scooping up the cub in her arms, and setting off into the forest.