

CRAVING CONSTANCE

**By
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CHARACTERS:

Oscar

Janis

SETTING:

A park.

(Oscar sits on a bench in the park. An umbrella is propped up on the bench beside him. Janis enters, looks around for another bench and realises there are no others. Oscar looks up and smiles at her. He moves along a little and indicates there is room next to him. She sits and takes out her sandwiches.)

JANIS: Thank you.

OSCAR: No problem.

(Pause)

It's crowded today.

JANIS: Hmm?

OSCAR: The park. Lots of people out.

JANIS: Sunny weather. Brings them all out.

OSCAR: On your lunch break?

JANIS: Yes.

OSCAR: Good to get out of the office on a sunny day.

JANIS: Yes, it is.

OSCAR: My wife and I love this park. The birds, the lake, the trees...

JANIS: It's very nice.

(Pause)

Do you work nearby too?

OSCAR: Oh no, I'm retired.

JANIS: *(Surprised)* Oh.

OSCAR: Early retirement. Medical reasons.

JANIS: I see.

OSCAR: So my poor wife has to look after me.

JANIS: I'm sure she doesn't mind.

OSCAR: My name's Oscar, by the way.

JANIS: I'm Janis.

OSCAR: *(Indicating his umbrella)* And this is Constance.

JANIS: Constance?

OSCAR: I know...it's an old fashioned name, isn't it. Most people call her Connie, but I like Constance. Constance isn't too well herself at the moment. Has a touch of laryngitis so you must excuse her lack of conversation.

JANIS: Oh...right.

(Pause)

Does your wife know where you are, Oscar?

(Oscar is initially puzzled, then laughs.)

OSCAR: Oh, this *is* my wife. Don't worry, I'm not having clandestine meetings in the park with another woman.

JANIS: Okay well...I'd better head off. Back to work. Getting late.

OSCAR: Oh dear, that was a short break. What a shame on such a beautiful day. Can't you stay a little longer?

JANIS: I'd love to, but...y'know how it is.

OSCAR: Of course. Someone's got to keep the country running. Very nice to meet you Janis. Maybe we'll run into you again another day. We come here often, Constance and I.

JANIS: Yes...maybe.

(She starts to exit, then stops and looks back. Oscar sits happily enjoying the sun. She comes back.)

Oscar?

OSCAR: Hmm?

JANIS: Constance.

OSCAR: Yes?

JANIS: You do realise that...she's an umbrella. Don't you?

(Pause)

OSCAR: What did you say?

JANIS: Constance...she's an umbrella.

OSCAR: *(Incredulous)* You see her like that too?

JANIS: Ah...yeah.

OSCAR: *(Laughing, relieved)* Oh my God! I thought I was doing it again!

JANIS: Doing what?

OSCAR: I thought it was my illness...I thought...Perhaps I should explain. You must think I'm crazy.

JANIS: Well, now that you mention it.

OSCAR: I have this neurological defect...Well, the doctors have a fancy name for it, but that's what it is. I sometimes see things as something else. Our labradoodle, for example...to me he looks like an armchair.

JANIS: A chair?

- OSCAR: Caused all sorts of problems at first. The poor creature barely survived our first encounter. But now I know that when I see this particular chair it's really the dog, so I don't try to sit on it anymore.
- JANIS: And...you thought you were seeing your wife as an umbrella?
- OSCAR: I thought it was getting worse. You've no idea how relieved I am. Thank you so much for setting me straight! No one else told me and I've been carrying her around for weeks.
- JANIS: But...why would you think that? I mean, isn't your wife around?
- OSCAR: Well...no. (*His mood becomes somber.*) A few weeks ago I woke up and she wasn't in bed beside me. She'd been out late the night before with friends. That wasn't unusual...she often did that. And I take medication...for my condition...so I usually don't wake up when she comes home. But this one morning she wasn't there, and I came downstairs and the umbrella was propped up in her favourite armchair. A real one, not the dog. And I just thought...
- JANIS: But...she wasn't moving or talking...
- OSCAR: Well, they don't. It's not like that. It's hard to explain, but...I *know* in my heart it's the dog but my head just keeps telling me it's an armchair. It's hard to explain...
- JANIS: Didn't you see your doctor?
- OSCAR: I rang my psychiatrist's office that very day and they said he'd gone on holiday. I thought it was strange that he hadn't notified me. I used to see him quite regularly. He was even writing a book on me. "Such an unusual case," he said. He came to our house for dinner, interviewed my wife several times...
- JANIS: So you didn't get to speak to him?
- OSCAR: Oh yes, I rang his mobile and he was at the airport. He was in a hurry to catch his plane but I told him what was happening and...
- JANIS: And?
- OSCAR: He said that it wasn't uncommon for my condition to worsen and that I shouldn't worry. Just treat the umbrella as I would treat my wife and he'd call me when he got back.
- JANIS: And did he?

OSCAR: I guess he's still away.

(Pause)

JANIS: Oscar...maybe you should call the police.

OSCAR: Why?

JANIS: Well...your wife is missing. She might be in trouble.

OSCAR: Oh, I don't think so.

JANIS: How do you know?

OSCAR: She's been using our credit card.

JANIS: Really?

OSCAR: The last bill I got showed several purchases. I thought maybe she'd been shopping while I wasn't with her.

JANIS: It could be someone else using it.

OSCAR: And she phoned me.

JANIS: When?

OSCAR: A couple of weeks after I spoke to Dr Crane. I was at my miniature railway enthusiasts meeting and I'd left her at home lying down with a migraine. She called me on my mobile and asked if I was okay. I thought how thoughtful of her to be checking up on me when she was unwell herself.

(Pause)

JANIS: Oscar?

OSCAR: Hmm?

JANIS: There is another possibility.

OSCAR: What's that?

JANIS: Your wife might have left you.

OSCAR: Left me!

JANIS: In fact, she might have gone away with Dr Crane.

OSCAR: Dr Crane! No. No...he wouldn't do that to me. He's a man of integrity. A professional. A scholar.

JANIS: A bastard.

OSCAR: Pardon?

JANIS: Think about it, Oscar. They both disappeared at the same time. You said he'd interviewed her on several occasions. He hasn't been in touch with you or referred you to anyone else. Your wife rang and didn't tell you where she was. It all adds up...

(Pause)

I think maybe they're together and letting you believe she's still with you.

(Pause)

I think maybe you know that...in your heart.

(Long Pause)

OSCAR: Shouldn't you be getting back to work? It's late.

JANIS: Yes...Yes, I probably should.

(She stands.)

Maybe I'll see you again tomorrow.

OSCAR: Perhaps.

(She turns to leave, a little reluctantly.)

JANIS: Take care, Oscar.

(He is lost in his thoughts. She exits. He sits for a while, then picks up the umbrella. He embraces it tenderly and kisses it, then places it back on the bench.)

OSCAR: Goodbye, my Constance.

(He exits without her. Lights down.)