

The Blackout

By C. Jade Wyton

Olivia Oakenheart gets a fright when there is an unexpected blackout during the night.

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Thirteen was too old to be scared of the dark.

Olivia knew this.

She *knew* this!

But, still, she couldn't help it.

The string-lights along the wall glowed dimly beside her, barely noticeable with the room's main light on, and she poked at them with a sigh.

It was so, *so* dark in Thistlebond at night. The darkest place she'd ever been. She was glad, of course, that Farren had suggested they move in. And happy that Sheshalan had agreed and found them a place to live. Thistlebond was great. It had everything they needed. At least during the day it did. But then at night... when the sun went down, and all the shadows crept out from the trees, stretching along the ground until everything was pitch black, Olivia had to draw the curtains and turn on all the lamp-lights, just to keep the hackles on her back from rising up.

The cities had never been dark like this. This kind of darkness felt *hungry*. Like if she went out into it, it would consume her.

Sheshalan seemed to love it, though; she'd heard the old goat chirping to Farren about how Olivia hadn't snuck out at night *once* since they'd moved into Thistlebond.... But why would she, when the darkness was so.... So....

*So dark!*

A light knock on her door sounded, and Olivia grumbled unhappily as a familiar man poked his head in.

'What do you want, Blueballs?'

'It's past yer bedtime,' Bertram told her. 'Time for phone off and lights out, kiddo.'

'I know, I know,' Olivia hid that her hackles rose in fear, by making out like she was annoyed and rolling her eyes. She then grabbed her phone and leant dangerously off her bunk to throw it on her desk underneath her. 'Sheshalan's stupid bed-by-eight rule!'

'Sha said you should be in bed by *eight*, did she?' Bertram quirked a brow as Olivia pulled herself back into bed. 'Farren said yer bedtime was at nine. Am I a whole *hour* late, putting you down to sleep, then?'

'It's eight when Sheshalan's home, nine when she's not,' she explained as she wrapped herself in her blanket and flopped heavily over. 'Just like it's one *scoop* of ice cream when Sha's home, and one *bowl* when it's just Dad.'

It earned a chuckle. 'Alright, nine it is, then.'

'As if you could stop me!' she grumbled. Then, as the overhead light went out, she flinched and gave a squeak.

'Y'all alright?' Bertram asked.

Olivia felt herself blushing, and reached out to bat at the string-lights again. They were much more visibly glowing, now. 'I'm fine. I'm not scared.'

'Ah, I didn't think y'all were,' Bertram reassured. 'Yer wanting me to leave the door open, or should I close it?'

Olivia thought of the long, dark shadows that the hall-light cast through her room and shuddered. 'Shut it,' she answered.

The door creaked before *clicking* closed.

Without the hall-light, the lights beside Olivia started seeming a lot brighter, and she tried to make her fur lay flatter. But she wasn't very successful.

She lay in the dark room, facing the dim lights on the wall, and tried to will herself to sleep. The sooner she slept, the sooner it would be sunrise, after all....

Something rustled by the window, and Olivia sat up; listening carefully.

*Raccoon*, she realised as she heard the bin outside fall over. *It's just a raccoon—*

Suddenly, the entire room was pitch black, and Olivia gave a shriek of fear. It was probably the loudest sound that had ever escaped her, and she was including the time she gotten in a shouting match with Sheshalan about being allowed to go out on a date with Daimon.

And it was shortly followed by Bertram rushing into her room with his phone in his hand; the torch by its camera shining brightly as the hall behind him sat in blackness.

'Hey! Hey, it's alright, kiddo!' he exclaimed, shining his phone light up at her. 'It's just a blackout!'

Olivia didn't say anything, as she breathed heavily. For a moment she felt like she was choking. And then Bertram's words sunk in, and she felt a hot, burning humiliation flood her as she realised how loudly and fearfully she'd screamed at a *stupid blackout!*

'You alright, kiddo?'

*No.*

She couldn't help it as tears came to her eyes. She was so *embarrassed*. But even worse— Even though she knew it was just a blackout, she was *still scared!*

Her breath came out with a wavering tremble as she tried to hold back the humiliated sob that pushed its way up and out of her throat. And before she could stop herself, she was crying. And not a little cry, either. A stupidly embarrassing fucking *wail* that she couldn't swallow down no matter how much she tried.

The fastest she'd ever seen him move, Bertram was up the ladder to join her on the bed and pull her into a tight hug.

'Shh, shh, it's alright,' he comforted, softly. 'Y'all're safe. I promise.'

She felt like a fucking *toddler!* It was so humiliating to cry over the fucking dark! But she couldn't stop herself; in fact, it made her feel so degraded and stupid, she found herself crying even *harder* the more she thought about it.

'It's alright,' Bertram said again.

*'I'm not scared!'* Olivia sobbed out the lie. *'I'm not! I'm not! I'm not scared of the fucking dark!'*

'I know yer not,' Bertram reassured. It was clear he knew it was a lie, but was trying to help her save face. 'Yer not scared of anything.'

'I'm not scared of *anything!*' Olivia echoed, wheezing through her tears as she pushed him away. 'I'm not! I'm not! I'm *not!* You don't have to comfort me!'

'I'm not, I promise,' Bertram told her. 'I'm up here 'cause *I'm* scared. I can't bear being alone, in the dark. And I need yer close to help me feel better.'

It was clearly bullshit. But, somehow, it helped to hear.

'I'm not scared,' Olivia repeated, the sobs finally turning into a breathless pant. '*You're* the one who's scared!'

'*Yep,*' Bertram agreed, pulling her close again. 'I'm terrified, and I need y'all to come close to me, to help *me* feel better.'

Olivia didn't fight the hug this time; even if his lie was so incredibly transparent that *Farren* would have understood it was bullshit, it was the excuse she needed in the moment to accept his comfort.

She buried her face under his arm and wrapped her arms around him, quietly repeating about how not-scared she was as he pet along her back.

'Thank y'all,' he mumbled. 'Yer helping me feel much better.'

She didn't answer, and just sniffed loudly into him. And then she wiped her face on his shirt, and he raised an unimpressed brow... though he lowered it again as she pulled away, and instead gave her a sympathetic look.

They sat together a moment as Olivia sniffled, and Bertram watched her patiently, holding his phone in one hand as he rubbed her shoulder with the other....

And then the lights flickered back on; the string-lights recovering their glow and the hall light shining in through the open door bright and yellow.

'Ah. There we are,' Bertram mumbled. 'That's better.'

Olivia wiped her eyes, the lights immediately calming her nerves.

'*Y'all right?*' it was a soft, understanding question. Without judgement.

Olivia nodded, and let out a shaky sigh as she settled back down.

'Y'all want me to stay, or leave?' asked Bertram.

'Leave,' Olivia answered, quietly; she was already so embarrassed, she didn't want Bertram sitting around and watching her about it.... 'But leave the door open?'

'Course,' Bertram promised, slowly making his way down the ladder. 'Y'all need to be able to hear me, t'make sure I'm not getting too scared, after all.'

'Yeah,' Olivia agreed; well aware that it was *Bertram* listening out for *her*. 'Yeah. That's it.'

'Alright... night, kiddo.'

'Night, Blue... *Bertram.*'

—END—

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