

This Gorgeous Game



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A CHILLING NOVEL ABOUT THE ISOLATION OF BEING STALKED AND THE ABUSE OF POWER. Olivia Peters is over the moon when her literary idol, the celebrated novelist and much-adored local priest Mark D. Brendan, offers to become her personal writing mentor. But when Father Mark's enthusiasm for Olivia's prose develops into something more, Olivia's emotions quickly shift from wonder to confusion to despair. Exactly what game is Father Mark playing, and how on earth can she get out of it? This remarkable novel about overcoming the isolation that stems from victimization is powerful, luminous, and impossible to put down. I know I know I know I should be grateful. I should be grateful to have his attention. To have him take such an interest in me. I should. I know I should. I will. No, you are grateful, Olivia, I tell myself as if I am my self's imaginary friend, sitting across the table, giving advice. Start acting grateful then, she begs. I have a gift. I have a gift from God, he says. So rare he hasn't seen it in all his many years. I'm the real thing, he says. I'm a once in a lifetime, he says. I'm special and it's his responsibility to take me under his wing, to make sure I don't waste my talent. It would be a sin not to help me, he says. It would be a sin for me not to take his offer of help. But I swear to God . . . no . . . scratch that . . . I'll not be swearing to God . . . I swear to Who Knows What that his latest demand, this pile of typewritten pages he hands me with a face that says, Please, Olivia, oh please don't be difficult and just do this for me, is staring, no it's glaring at me from the coffee table like a monster that might eat me. I feel like if I touch it I will go up in flames or the pages might bite. Am I making too much of this? Isn't it just a matter of grabbing hold of the stack and moving it in front of my eyes so my eyes will begin to scan those black marks on the page which will magically arrange themselves into words that my brain will recognize and understand and voila, I'm finished before I know it. Then, when he asks, because he will ask, I'll be able to answer truthfully, "Yes, I read it. I did," and he will smile and I'll be Good Olivia again. I wish I'd never won that stupid prize which is what got me noticed by him . . . no . . . what got my writing noticed by him which is what led to the initial introduction which somehow turned into communications and invitations and coffees and attending office hours and going to High Profile Events together--his words--even before the summer started. He means well. He does. After all, what else could he mean? "Olivia," my mother calls from downstairs. "Time for dinner. I made your favorite. Come on, sweetie." "Be there in a minute," I yell back to her. The thought saved by dinner passes through my mind. If it's not dinner that saves me lately, it's sleep, and if it's not sleep it's, oh, I don't know, cleaning my room, scrubbing the toilet. Just about anything sounds more appealing than dealing with some God Damm demand from him. There. I did it. I took the Lord's name in vain and it doesn't feel half bad. My cell phone rings. I don't pick up. I don't even look to see who is calling. I don't need to. I already know who it is and I already know I don't want to talk. The phone stops ringing and I remember to breathe. It rings again and I want to throw it. I don't. I look away. I shove the phone down between the couch cushions to muffle it. Suffocate it. Now a ping! tells me I have a text. Ping! Ping! I start to get up but still staring at me from the coffee table is this story I've got to read. I give the stack a good glare back--two can play at that game. But as soon as my eyes hit the title page I feel regret because seeing it makes something in my stomach go queasy. Ruins my appetite. Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude. I will myself to feel gratitude with all of my being but my being revolts. I grab the stack and slam it facedown and if I can make it all go away.

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