Wolf At The Door Productions Susan Hulbert

Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Wolf At The Door Productions

By Susan Hulbert

"Cassandra, you're looking as young and lovely as ever." Jackson breezed into her office.

"And you're an old flatterer." She beamed at the compliment. "I'll get Jane to bring coffee and we can get down to business."

They sat at the meeting table in her office with accounts on paper, some of them hand written, scattered around.

"I've looked through the accounts," Cassandra said. "Whilst they're satisfactory, the trend isn't good. Your new releases aren't selling as well as I'd hoped."

"I agree." Jackson frowned. "I think we're running short of fresh faces at the moment."

"Fresh faces?" Cassandra asked. "I thought you needed some fresh bodies as well."

"You're right." Jackson sipped his coffee and sat back. "I've a lot of studs on the books; guys who are so ready that they're able to do it with anyone. I'm short of new girls and I don't know where I can get them."

"Surely there are any number of boys who want to be girls hanging around?"

"There may be, but they're not actresses." Jackson paused. "They're willing to suck their boyfriends and let him take them in the rear but I need my girls to do that and more, on camera."

"Surely that's enough?" Cassandra frowned.

"You're not getting my meaning," Jackson said. "They need to look really pretty and act as if they're enjoying every minute. They need to be bold and aggressive sometimes, not passive and waiting for the guy to do all the work. I need a really confident exhibitionist who's going to be more feminine and sexual than any girl."

"So there must be some real girls out there. Can't vou edit them in?"

"It's not that easy, and that's not what people pay for." Jackson waved his arms as if that would help his explanation. "I need an extrovert but above all they have to be believable."

"Surely there are the ones I see in the clubs you take me to sometimes."

"They're not the same. Some have steady relationships and they're not going to want to be in the movies; at least, not in the movies *I* make."

"But there must be others?"

"There are the ones with a bad drug habit and I can't use them either" Jackson said. "They're not reliable and they don't have the healthy 'girl up for anything' looks that I want."

"I get it; so where's the new girl who has everything going to come from?"

"I've been thinking about that and I have a plan."

"I'm listening. Remember this is my investment as well as yours." Cassandra's eyes narrowed. "Looking at these accounts, you need someone new soon."

"I did hear you were hiring staff," Jackson said. "Maybe you could hire some young guy who might fit the profile."

"Oh, yes, I like it." Cassandra laughed. "I hire him in all innocence. You lead him on, hook him. and reel him in "

"If there's one who's hungry for money; more than he can make selling real estate, that would be good."

"But he'd have to be right physically."

"Yes and I want someone who would adapt easily to changing his sexuality and enjoy being that boy who's a girl with a penis that works on boys as well as girls."

"You're putting it all so simply." Cassandra laughed. "I can see the want ad now in the paper."

"It could be done." Jackson nodded. "And if it works, he may be more amenable to control than the others we've used. Let's try it and see who we can find."

"I'll get a job specification drafted today." She saw Jackson's grin. "It has to be for a real estate agent, of course; nothing more. You can help me to vet the applicants. If you're so sure this could work, we might as well get on with it."

"I thought the law restricted what you could ask on a job application."

"It does, and we have to be careful," Cassandra said. "We offer full medical cover, so asking about height, weight, and family history wouldn't attract too much attention."

"How about asking for a picture as well?" Jackson added. "That could save on interview time."

Cassandra's look told him that he had just stated the obvious.

I'd only been working at Diamond Properties for a couple of weeks and was a bit reluctant to go to the party. I didn't know many people who'd be there and I don't find it easy to mix in a crowd like that. It was the summer social event for the company and important clients would be there as well.

I hung around the outskirts of the crowd, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. I watched the great and the good as they circulated effortlessly. The suave and the glamorous were there too as you'd expect; the company provided all kinds of services to movie and television companies.

It was so hot in the restaurant garden that had been hired for the occasion. I'd worn my best chinos and bought a really expensive linen shirt that I really couldn't afford until I received my first month's cheque. By the time my share of the apartment rent was taken out, I'd have very little spare cash for the next few months.

I was so happy to get the job, even though it didn't pay much. I'd done some amateur theatre in college and got the bug. I didn't want to be an actor. My thing was the continuity, props, and all the dogsbody tasks which are essential to the smooth running of every production.

"Hi; you're new." The voice took me by surprise.

"I'm very new." I turned and shook the hand held out to me. "I'm Jimmy Brown. I've only been with the company two weeks and don't know anyone here."

"Well you know me now," he replied. "I'm Jackson Wolf, from Wolf at the Door Productions."

He handed me an embossed card with a cartoon of the wolf smiling as it half opened a door. It was really cute and I smiled as I put it in my pocket.

His smile was genuine as he stood surveying the crowd. I noticed the expensive cut of his clothes, the neat haircut, and tanned complexion. He could have been thirty but was probably much older. He looked as if he belonged with all these people.

"Come on." Jackson took my arm and propelled me towards the bar. "I'll introduce you round."

My first thought was to protest but then he was off. I gave up any thought of resistance; if my new acquaintance wanted to introduce me round, who was I to object?

Jackson circulated easily and, true to his word, introduced me everywhere. I didn't get to say much, but I got air kissed several times and some of the appraising looks from people were blatant. The occasional leer confirmed my thoughts about some of the people I met.

"I think that the party's winding down," Jackson said as we stood at the edge of the crowd. "I'd invite you to the private party later but I have to be on set this evening."

"You have to be on set?" My ears pricked up and I couldn't resist asking.

"It's a small production," he said evasively. "And we always shoot on a closed set. Why don't I give you a call and you can drop over sometime, then I can show you round."

"I'd love to."

A quick handshake which turned into a hug and then he was gone, leaving me with the invitation and the citrus scent lingering where my shirt touched his jacket. It smelled very expensive.

"Jackson Wolf called for you." Jane, our receptionist handed me a paper a few days later. "He asks that you call him back. He said that he's free to give you the tour he promised this evening if you call him back."

"That's good," I said. "I met him at the social. I didn't know anyone and he took me round. Did he say where I should meet him?"

"His office is on the West Park Estate but he hires properties all over town for his projects."

"I guess I'd better find out where it is and call him," I thanked Jane but she hung back, wanting to say more.

"I'd be a bit careful around Jackson and some of his friends," she said. "He has a liking for pretty boys like you."

"I'm not pretty." I was astonished that she could say such a thing.

"Maybe not but you're young and skinny, with that shoulder length hair. You don't shave much, and you're probably naïve about the ways of the world."

"I don't think you know me enough to say that," I bristled.

With a knowing nod, she turned, leaving me wondering about Jackson's friends.

I picked up my mobile and called him.

"It'd be good to see you this evening," he answered almost straight away. "I always try to keep my promises."

"I'm told you're on the West Park Estate," I said. "I'm new in town so I don't really know how long it will take me to get there."

"Hey, no worries," He replied. "Tell me what time you finish and I'll pick you up from the office door."

"I'm not dressed..." I started. I was in jeans and a T-shirt because I'd spent much of the morning hauling wardrobe from storage to a set across town.

"It doesn't matter," Jackson replied. "There's nothing formal tonight."

When the opportunity arose later that day, I found Jane alone in the staff kitchen.

"What are you trying to warn me about with Jackson Wolf?" I asked.

"It's only that he's too friendly sometimes." Jane seemed to be holding something back. "He poaches our staff, and we never see them again. It's usually the young guys like you. They get ensnared in his web."

"Does that mean he's a serial killer?" I joked.

"That's not what I mean," Jane laughed. "I mean, take care of yourself and be warned."

"Are you warning me that he's gay?"

"I don't think he is." Jane looked thoughtful. "I've never seen him out with a guy in that way; quite the opposite. He always seems to have an attractive girl with him."

Three hours later and I emerged from the office door, blinking in the bright sunlight. A car horn sounded and I looked across to see Jackson leaning against the passenger door of a white Mercedes coupe with the roof down. He waved and stood as I walked across.

"I'm sorry about the short notice, but it's good that you could come." He shook my hand and once again

it turned to a hug which lasted a little longer this time.

"Let's not waste time." He opened the car door for me to slot myself into the red leather seats.

"I'm going to show you some of the properties we're using at the moment," he said. "Diamond Properties have most of our business and of course we're always looking for new locations."

"Don't you use studio sets?" I asked.

"Occasionally, but we find that real places, homes, pools, offices and places like that help us to keep the costs down," he replied. "That's where your employers come in. I rely on them to find me places that I can use."

"What about the continuity?" I was still rather naive.

"There's not much of that."

Jackson turned into a gated estate, pressed the keypad and once the barrier opened, drove through and onto a drive which curved around to the front of a split level house. There was another coupe and a couple of SUVs on the drive.

"I thought they'd have finished here by now," he said, getting out of the car. "Excuse me a minute while I go and check."

I sat in the car for ages. It was so hot. I got out and wandered onto the grass, wondering how one person could afford a place like this with so much land around it. I heard someone loading one of the SUVs and walked across to offer to help but the tailgate

slammed, the door slammed and the driver was off with a slight wave in my direction.

A girl with long dark hair who appeared to be dressed only in a robe ran from the house and got into the coupe, slammed the door, started the engine and drove away. Her head was turned so that I couldn't see her face as she left without any acknowledgement, even though I was standing only a few feet away.

A couple of minutes later, Jackson appeared with a second man. They loaded some cases into the trunk of the second SUV. They talked a little at the side. Instinct told me to keep away. They shook hands and the vehicle drove past me, this time with a wave from the older man who was driving.

"I'm sorry about that," Jackson said as he walked towards me. "They should have cleared a couple of hours ago according to the schedule."

"What were they doing?"

"Only recording a few scenes to be edited in to a promotional video we're making."

"There didn't seem to be a lot of equipment," I said.

"It's all state-of-the-art miniaturized hi-tech stuff these days," Jackson said.

He took my arm proprietorially and steered me towards the entrance, then stood back to let me go first. We entered through the huge double doors at the front. It was amazingly opulent, with bleached wood floors and elegant drapes. Sofas and easy chairs, occasional tables and flowers were in alcoves, but my main impression was of the sheer space.

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"I wish I had a home like this." I turned to Jackson, to see him scowling.

I followed his eyes to see that he was looking at a black bra lying on the floor underneath one of the tables. He picked it up and finding nowhere else to put it, he stuffed it into the pocket of his linen jacket

The house was beautiful. There was lots of space and light in all the main rooms. The bathroom and shower were the most amazing that I'd ever seen; out back there was a patio and pool, with sun loungers and changing rooms. The scent from the flowers around was so strong and sweet.

The main bedroom must have been used in the movie. The bed was all over the place and the shower room was still wet. The scent of soap and shampoo was really flowery. A couple of wet towels were left on the floor.

"The cleaning company will sort this out tomorrow morning," Jackson said. "We're filming again here later in the day."

"I think your actress left her makeup bag." I saw it lying under the stool by the vanity.

"She'll be back tomorrow. I'm sure she'll have more makeup at home."

"This must be fabulous to own," I said, looking round at all the opulence there.

"It's the sort of setting we need," Jackson replied. "It makes everyone relax and give their best performances. Sometimes I let the cast stay a few nights

before we shoot so that they're natural around each other."

"It's a beautiful house," I agreed. "It beats my shared room any day."

"Of course." Jackson smiled. "You've moved across country to get this job and I bet they don't pay until you've done a month."

"You're right," I agreed, not pausing to ask how he knew all this. "I even sold my car to get the deposit on the room. It's beans for dinner every day until payday, probably payday this time next year unless I get some good commissions."

"I'm sure something will come along." He smiled again, showing those white Hollywood teeth, so perfect. "In the meantime, I'll treat you to dinner."

"You don't have to."

"It's my treat," he insisted. "All those beans you're eating can't be good for the ozone layer."

It was a great meal at somewhere I'd never have found, let alone afforded.

"Everyone's so glamorous here," I said as we sipped our coffees. "I feel really down-at-heel dowdy."

"All it not what it seems here," Jackson leaned to whisper. "It's all a show. Everyone's playing a part."

"And what part are you playing?" I asked.

"I'm the wolf at your door of course." He laughed. "Beware, the wicked wolf always gets his evil way."

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"Are you warning me about something that I don't understand?" I asked.

"Maybe; then again maybe not but probably." He smiled whilst I tried to unravel the enigma.

He dropped me a block from home, promising to show me a real bit of moviemaking when I was free next week.

I never expected to hear from him again.

"Your company medical is due," Jane said as I arrived at the office a few days later. "Someone hasn't turned up, so you can go in this morning."

"You should have told me," I replied. "I'd have bought new underwear."

Jane pulled a face and handed me a card. "The doctor's using the staff room. You can go straight up."

The doctor turned out to be a rather severe looking lady of indeterminate age with an air of professional authority that I found to be immediately intimidating.

"I've all your records," the doctor said after a brief introduction and handed me a sheet which contained the details I'd provided on my application. "I've a few tests and a few things to measure," she said.

Twenty minutes later, I'd given blood and urine samples, blown into separate meters, been connected by electrodes to a laptop, and been prodded and poked all over.

"That's about all," the doctor said. "I'll give you your injections and then you can go."

"Injections?" I spluttered.

"Yes, it's the normal vitamins and influenza, and a couple of other things." She prepared a syringe. "Bend over and drop your trousers."

"Is that necessary?"

"Don't be a baby, it's all routine," she snapped, pushing me into position as one, then a second needle emptied into my gluteus maximus.

"You can go now. I'll see you again in a month or so when I have the results back."

With that, I was dismissed.

"What's Jackson's business?" I asked Jane a few days later.

"I was wondering when you'd ask." Jane turned and beckoned me to follow her. "I think he makes some films of the sort that would shock your grandmother," she said.

"My grandmother's not easily shocked," I replied. "She was one of the original hippies in the sixties."

"Jackson may still shock her," she replied. "He's not the worst in the business but he always seems to walk on water."

"I take it that you're warning me?" I asked.

"Don't say no one told you," Jane said. "Anyway, he's a client and brings in good business, so we've got to humor him."

"How good a client is he?" I asked.

"He's so good that I'd hate to cross him," Jane replied. "I'd probably never work in this town again if I did."

"So give me a clue. What is it that you're not telling me?"

"He's like a spider at the centre of a web. He pulls the strings and gets what he wants. And heaven help anyone who doesn't fit in."

I didn't hear from Jackson for the next few days, then a week turned into ten days. I got an email from Cassandra, my boss, asking me to contact Jackson and to show him a property which he might like to use.

I looked at the property description. Knight's House was a huge eccentric building, again with extensive grounds. It was like a kid's drawing of a medieval castle; obviously someone's fantasy from a bygone age.

From the pictures, it had been modernized and refurbished with just about everything that could be needed. I emailed a copy to Wolf at the Door's office.

"Yes, I'd love to see it," Jackson replied when I finally got through to him. "If you get the keys, I'll pick you up after lunch on Saturday."

I wanted to say that I didn't work Saturdays but then thought again. The boss might not like that. "Would you rather that I get the boss to show you round?" I asked. "I don't have the authority to negotiate prices."

"I'd rather deal with you," Jack emphasized "I can always call your boss if the price is too steep."

"I'll ask the boss what I can do." I said.

"Thanks," Jackson replied. "If we can sort it out, it may help your career there. I guess this could be your first commission."

"You're right," I admitted, asking myself how he knew. "I'll give you my mobile number and my address, then you can tell me what time you want me on Saturday."

"I have those details," Jack said. "I'll call you on Saturday afternoon and pick you up."

"I could meet you there if they'll allow me to use the office car," I said, wondering if he really knew where I lived

"No need," Jack said. "Just tell your boss what you're doing."

I hesitated to see Cassandra in person. She was a formidable lady who didn't waste time on underlings. I emailed to tell her what Jack proposed, expecting to get a reply telling me that someone more senior should handle it.

The reply told me to get the keys to the property and get on with it. I could offer ten percent discount if I could get Jack to sign the agreement.

She didn't offer the office car.

I sat nervously in my room in the apartment where I shared the rent. I tried to be smart-casual in blue jeans and a leather jacket. It didn't feel right which didn't help my nerves but it was all that I possessed. I was still broke. My first pay cheque still left me in the red.

I heard a car horn in the street; an expensive sounding car horn which I guessed must be Jackson. I hurried down, and got into the passenger seat of a big Jeep. I was immediately aware of two girls in the back seat and the expensive scent of perfume which filled the car.

"The girls are coming to give me a second opinion on the property," Jack explained. The titters from the rear as they heard this made me doubt their value as consultants. "Say hello to Jasmine and Coriander."

I turned round, trying to be polite, and introduced myself. We shook hands; the seat belts prevented anything else. They could have been a matched pair; one blonde, the other dark. From the front, I couldn't make out much more about them but I saw enough to look forward to seeing them when they got out of the car

"I studied the descriptions you emailed," Jackson said as he steered the car up the twisting roads of the valley towards Knight's House. "If it's as good as it seems, we'll have a deal."

"That's great," I replied, a little distracted by the soft noises from the rear seats.

Jackson saw me glance over my shoulder and looked over at me. "You can meet the girls when we

get there," he said. "I think they're playing in the back to distract us from business."

"They're sure doing that." I couldn't help myself.

A hand was rubbing, then gently scratching the back of my neck. I could smell the perfume and shrugged my shoulders, partly to get control of my senses and partly, I suppose, to show I was enjoying it. Jackson looked amused as if this happened to everyone in his car.

Jackson pulled into a driveway and I leaned out with the automatic key to open the electric gates. They slid away, we drove round a couple of curves and the house came into view.

I wished I'd seen Knight's House before as soon as I saw it. The place was like a small palace with sweeping lawns to the front and I could see a glimpse of a pool house to the rear. I knew the place came fully furnished but I'd have to vamp my way through the rooms because I had no idea where they all were.

Jackson parked and we got out. I got my first real glimpse of Jasmine and Coriander as they stood looking up at the place. I remembered Jane's warning as I took it all in. I'd like to say that there were alarm bells ringing in my head, but that would be a lie. I was too fascinated and only wanted to watch them.

They both wore tight red dresses, cut high on the thigh and low on the breast. They were almost like a matched pair, from the top of their heads to the fabulously high heels they wore, except one was blonde and the other was dark.

Jackson didn't bother with introductions but set off towards the door with the blonde girl clinging to his arm with both her hands wrapped around it. I set



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off to follow and found the girl with the dark hair attached herself to me in the same way.

I smiled at her and tried to act as if this was the sort of thing that happened to me every day. If Jackson thought that there was anything unusual in this behavior, he didn't show it as we progressed through the place.

"I like this place already." Jackson's gaze went round the entrance hall as we went through to the other rooms; the library and the snug; the huge lounge, and what was probably a family room. The dining room opened to the kitchen and a wall of glass had doors through to the terrace, garden and pool, which had sliding covers.

"I think we're going to take this," he said as I saw his girl, the blonde one, start stroking his rear.

I felt a hand stroking my rear too. It was as if there was mirroring behavior going on. I didn't object and I didn't object as we went to the first floor and walked through the main bedrooms, each with dressing rooms and a terrace, a shower room and walk-in wardrobes.

"We should talk business." Jackson held out a hand to me and we shook, quite why I don't know. "Girls, can you amuse yourselves for a while. Jimmy and I are going to the library to sort things out."

He led the way and I followed. The girls detached themselves from us and stood with their arms around each other, looking from the terrace. We walked round the ground floor again, then outside and around the pool. He said nothing until we got back to the library.

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"Here's the deal," he said. "You give me the ten per cent discount; no bargaining. I'll tell Cassandra you drove a real hard bargain and I'll pay you five percent over the rental period. If there's anything else like this, you give me the heads up first."

I looked at him, a little stunned at the speed of all this.

"Do we have a deal?" He held out his hand again.

I shook it, pulled the rental agreement from my briefcase, and he signed it with a flourish.

"Now let's go and find the girls."

His look told me that he knew something that I didn't. For my part, I was staggered to think how easy it had been and how easy I found it to take a commission like the one he'd offered.

I don't think I was supposed to take it but I was really broke.

The girls were sitting really close to each other when we found them back in the conservatory. Jackson was a couple of paces in front of me so I didn't get a clear view, but I saw their hands being hastily shifted from each other as we entered.

Jackson didn't seem to notice anything amiss as they both repaired their makeup. It looked pretty perfect to me, but I didn't wonder how it had got mussed up.

"We've made a deal," he announced. "Take a look round; this is where you'll be shooting next week."