

# MISS JULIE.

By dadio

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Miss Julie Jocksmead stood in the dark passageway leaning against the dark wood panelling, listening to the raised voices in a room further along the passage. The voices were slightly muffled, but she could hear them; the anger in them; the taunting sounds; the occasional silence, icy between the words. Her father's voice, deep but lifting in tone, filtered down the passage towards her. Her mother's voice high, almost a screech, followed that of her father's, and seemed to echo, still arguing, in a disjointed manner. Julie closed her eyes and attempted to decipher the words as they flowed unevenly by her. The words were heavy, as if dragged down by the emotional weight they carried. Leaning forward away from the panelling, she almost stretched out her hand in an effort to grasp the words, but they were distorted and their meaning was lost to her.

- What are you doing in the dark, Miss Julie? said Betty Biggs the cook, as she opened the door from the stairs, letting in a wedge of light and seeing the child standing, eyes closed in the darkness. The child opened her eyes. She blinked against the light and moved her small hands behind her back, as if hiding some precious object from view.

- Theyâ€™re arguing again, Betty, Miss Julie said in a hushed voice as the tall, plump woman came towards her. Betty Biggs looked into the dark passage and listened for a few seconds to the voices. She let the door close behind her and the darkness returned to the passage. Why must they argue? the child asked despondently. The plump cook stood next to the child and listened a few more seconds.

- Some folks do, Miss Julie, the cook replied, looking into the passage, touching the child's shoulder. Some find no other way of making themselves understood, she added, looking away from the passage and gazing at the young girl in her dark-red pinafore dress, who stood, ill at ease, before her.

- Tonight we leave for Southampton to board the ship for New York, tomorrow, the child said. She peered up at the cook with a troubled look in her eyes. She brought her hands from behind her back, took hold of the large hand on her shoulder, pulled it down, and held it between her own small, soft hands. Wish you were coming, Betty, Julie informed quietly, forgetting for a few moments the voices still raised down the passageway.

- Iâ€™ll be here, when you get back, Miss Julie. Will only be for a few months, so I've heard. Anyway, Nanny

**Nonspeck will be with you all the time as well as the Master and Madam, Betty said, feeling her hand clutched tight.**

**- I hate Nanny Nonspeck, the child moaned. She's a dragon. And smells of disinfectant and medicine, the child added.**

**- But there's many as would like to sail in that great ship, Miss Julie, Betty suggested hopefully. I, for one, would love to sail on Titanic. I've heard said it's a fine ship and unsinkable. So there's no need to be so gloomy, Miss, no need whatsoever. But the cook felt there was, even if her words did not convey the fact.**

**She warmed to the young child as if she were her own. And there were days when she wished she were, even with her funny ways and talk. The small hands clutched her own tightly as if they feared departure was coming too soon. She leaned forward and whispered, - You'll soon be back here to me and my cooking. The child smiled in the semi-darkness and was about to say something when a door opened at the far end of the passageway and voices, softer now, united seemingly, filtered towards them.**

**- That you, Mrs Biggs? Lady Louisa Jocksmead said, as she saw the two figures in the semi-darkness. The child let go of the large hand and placed her hands behind her back again. And Julie? What are you doing here in the darkness, child?**

**- I came to ask, Madam, about supplies for when you return, Betty said, moving away from the young girl, wishing deep down she could stay and feel the hands holding her own again. Lady Louisa put her hand to her brow and pushed away strands of her black hair from her face. Her crimson dress seemed almost black in the semi-darkness and as she moved passed the two figures and opened the door to the stairs, light revealed its true bright redness to them. Sir Joseph Jocksmead came out of the darkness and stood staring at his daughter as she leaned against the panelling.**

**- Best go down to the kitchen, Mrs Biggs, Lady Louisa suggested as she walked down the stairs with the plump cook behind her. Sir Joseph watched them go and then turned to his daughter.**

**- Why hiding in the dark, Julie? he enquired.**

**The child shrugged her shoulders. Her head lowered, she looked at the dark-stained wooden floor. Her father lifted her chin gently and looked into her pale-green eyes. - Thinking, she said, softly. Sir Joseph smiled and nodded his head.**

**- Important that, Sir Joseph informed the child. Unusual in a woman, he added, taking the child's hand and leading her through the door that lead to the stairs. But of course, you are an unusual young woman,**

aren't you, Julie, he said, walking hand in hand with her down the stairs. The small, soft hand in his seemed even smaller and he held it as if it were a delicate object of priceless value. So what were you thinking about? he enquired.

Miss Julie looked at her father beside her. Tall, lean and bearded, he reminded her of a romantic hero out of a Byron poem. His hand holding hers, she could imagine, holding a sword and slaying a dragon to rescue some damsel in distress. - Byronic heroes, she muttered quickly. Her father laughed, but something in his eyes, conveyed to her, as they reached the last step, which he knew there was more than that she had been thinking about, and she blushed slightly, looking away and wished she hadn't lied, but knew it was too late to undo the lie. It had been told and remained like a sore waiting to be healed. Having left her father in the library, Julie wandered through the reception hall, through the large oak door that led to a smaller passage and then down the grey stone steps that opened onto the gloomy passageway that led to the kitchen. As she strolled along the passageway towards the kitchen, she could hear her mother's voice conversing with Mrs Biggs. Not wanting to be seen, Julie made a quick sidestep into the scullery and ran into the young scullery-maid who was carrying a large pot across the room.

- What the bloody hell, the young maid exclaimed looking over the pot at the young girl. Oh, sorry Miss Julie, didn't know it was you, the young maid said apologetically. Julie put her small finger to her lips and signalled for silence.

- Hush, Susie, I don't want my mother to know I'm here, Julie whispered round her small finger still attached to her lips. The scullery-maid nodded and walked over to a large sink beneath a small window and began to peel the potatoes she had in the large pot. Julie stood against the wall of the scullery hoping her mother would not enter and discover her there. The voice of her mother grew momentarily loud and then came silence except for the footsteps moving along the passageway and disappearing altogether up the stone steps. She waited for a few minutes until she was sure her mother would not return. Thank you, Susie, she said, giving the young maid a smile and walked out of the scullery and along to the kitchen.

- Miss Julie, Betty said, what are you doing down here? The young child stood at the kitchen door with her hands behind her back and a sorrowful look on her face.

- Want to talk with you, Julie said, moving into the kitchen in a tiptoe manner.

- Talk to me? Betty enquired, rolling out a huge piece of dough on a large wooden table. The child nodded and moved closer to the cook.

- You always listen, Julie said, softly. She watched the large hands pushing the huge rolling pin over the dough. The hands were white and pink like small piglets playing in snow. The dough became flatter and flatter until the hands set aside the rolling pin and lifted the dough on to a large dish and set it down gently, smoothing out the edges. They don't listen, the child said watching the large hands smoothing the

pastry on the dish, they just pretend to, but they don't.

- Iâ€™m sure they do, Miss Julie, Betty said, but knowing they probably didn't. But grown-ups do have the tendency to not listen to children, Betty added, brushing her hands against each other and then on her apron. She stood for a few moments looking around the kitchen as if deciding what to do next.

- There are times, Betty, the child exclaimed seriously, when I wish that you were my mother. The cook stopped and looked down at the child who now stood beside her near the wooden table. A pain stabbed at her breast as if a knife had entered her. She looked away across the room as if pretending she'd not heard the words. Then a small hand grabbed her right hand from her apron and squeezed it. Iâ€™m sure they don't really want me, the child said sadly, looking up at the pump woman who at that moment was staring across the room out of the small window.

- Now you're being silly, Miss Julie, Betty remarked tapping the small hand holding hers. I must get on; I've loads to do. And she eased her hand from the child's grip. The child stood forlorn. Betty moved across the kitchen, reached up to the high shelf, and removed a large saucepan. She studied the child opposite her who stood gazing at her with her small grey-green eyes. I am listening, though, she added, sauntering across the floor with the saucepan. But the child was silent. The grey-green eyes focused on her every move. She stopped, put down the saucepan on the table and moving over to the child beside the table, took her small hand, led her to a large brown armchair by an open fire, and sat her down on her lap. I am listening now, Betty exclaimed, gently, easing herself back on the chair for comfort. The child almost seemed to seep into the cook's ample lap and lay her head on the breast as if they were cushions.

- Itâ€™s lonely being an only child, Julia informed in a whisper. One has no one to share one's loneliness with; no one with whom one can play or converse with intimately; no one to share one's parents with. Here the child broke off and became silent. Betty nodded to herself, not out of understanding from experience, she herself was one of seven, but out of a human need to share sadness as well as happiness.

- Iâ€™m sure your mother and father love you very much, Miss Julie, Betty said. But being an only child must have its draw backs, I suppose. Betty paused. The child snuggled closer to her.

- I hate being an only child, Betty. I want brothers and sisters, Julie exclaimed as if it were in Betty's ability to provide such as in a given meal or dish. And then there's this trip to New York. The sea to contend with. The ship to live on for days on end. And worse of all, the child added mournfully, you not being there.

Betty Biggs laid her head back on the armchair rest.- Iâ€™ll miss you too, Miss Julie, Betty confessed, quietly, in a voice that came from her breast not her lips. But you'll be back, Miss, before you know what. She paused. It suddenly struck her that she'd never held a child this close before. And something told her deep within that maybe she never would. She shuddered at the thought and squeezed the child closer.

**And Iâ€™ll prepare you the best cake you've ever tasted, Betty said emotionally, more emotionally than she realized. The young child lifted her head and gazed at her intently.**

**- Promise? Julie asked.**

**- Promise, Betty answered.**

**- On your heart and hope to die sort of thing? Julie asked.**

**- Yes, on my heart and hope to die if I lie sort of thing, Betty replied in a singsong voice.**

**Lady Louisa heard voices from the kitchen as she walked down the passage. - Hello, Julie, are you down here, child? she asked. There was a murmur of voices and a shuffle of sound and after a second or so Julie's head appeared around the kitchen door.**

**- Did you want me, Mama? Julie said innocently.**

**- What are you doing down here? Lady Louisa asked, brushing her hand against her brow. Weâ€™ve been looking for you everywhere. Nanny Nonspeck is beside herself with worry. The child moved out from the kitchen and stood in the passageway.**

**- Sorry to cause concern, Mama, Julie muttered. I didn't think I would be needed.**

**- Have you forgotten we're to leave this evening? Lady Louisa asked firmly. The child shook her head and stood with arms folded behind her back.**

**- No, Julie replied. She lowered her eyes to the dark floor. If only she could stay behind, she mused as her mother approached her.**

**- The kitchen is no place for a young lady, Lady Louisa remarked. She took the child by the arm and led her into the kitchen. Mrs Biggs, I wish you would not encourage my daughter to make visits to the kitchen. She has more important things to attend to and places to be.**

**Mrs Biggs put down the saucepan on the stove and turned.**

**- Sorry, Madam, Mrs Biggs exclaimed. I was wishing Miss Julie a good voyage. She paused at the sight of Lady Louisa's glance.**

- Nanny Nonspeck has much to finish with Julie before we depart this evening, and you, Mrs Biggs have much to do too. And with this, Lady Louisa left the kitchen with her daughter and walked along the passageway up the stone steps and into the hall.

Betty Biggs stood listening to the footsteps until they were gone. She shook her head, went to the stove, and stirred the contents of the large saucepan with a wooden spoon. Poor child, she mused. Poor child, she repeated to herself, stirring the spoon round the saucepan. And she sensed an emptiness fill her. An emptiness where the child had lain against her. And before her eyes a huge wide horizon appeared with a large ship settled upon it. She saw clearly the four funnels and the waving hands of passengers and happy faces. She closed her eyes and saw more clearly. Then she heard the sound running footsteps in the passageway outside and suddenly like a rabbit out of a magician's hat, Julie appeared white-faced and red-eyed. The child said nothing, but ran to her and clutched at her like a person drowning. Betty lifted the child up into her arms and carried her across the room to the window. She sensed the child snuggle down. She felt the child's hair against her chin.

- What will your mother say, Miss Julie? What will she say? Betty exclaimed nervously holding the child close. But the child said nothing. The silence was cold. And the child's clothes felt damp, she sensed suddenly, as if she'd fallen into water. And opening her eyes she realized the child wasn't there. Only an empty space where once she'd been. And would never be again.

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