

## FICTION

# OCTOBER'S FOG

Danica Muller

Sylvie was seven when Granny loaded her and her cousins into her truck and drove them to the hardware store in the town of Grand Valley. Summer was transforming into autumn and she needed to get paint on the house before October's fog rolled in.

"What color should we paint the house?" Granny asked the cousins.

"Pink!" exclaimed one.

"Ew no, that's a girl's color! We should paint it orange," protested another.

Sylvie's cousins argued back and forth until Delly interrupted, "Can't we just be normal and paint it white?" She pushed a piece of long black hair behind her ear then crossed her arms over her red peacoat.

Delilah was the oldest and the favourite of Sylvie's cousins, but she had recently entered teenage angst mode and grew sick of having to spend time with her baby cousins. Regardless, she still let Sylvie call her Delly, the name she used since she was too small to say Delilah. When Sylvie got scared in the night and didn't want to be alone, Delly even let her sneak into her bed.

Granny put her cold hands on Sylvie's cheeks, "And what do you think my little Bluebird?" She had called her Bluebird as she was her only blue-eyed grandchild.

Sylvie's eyes landed on Delly's peacoat disappearing down the aisle. "Red, like the maples in October."

They went home with buckets of paint labeled Rapture Red.



Sylvie awoke to the feeling of Delly's warm back pulling away from her own. She watched as Delly slid out of bed and into her red coat in the dark.

"Where are you going?" Sylvie whispered.

"Nowhere," Delly replied, pressing her finger to her lips.

She slipped out the door.



"Where's Delilah?" Granny asked as she helped Sylvie into her coat and boots.

Sylvie shrugged.

Granny sighed. "Promise me that when you're a teenager you'll still spend time with your granny, okay?"



Granny led the cousins down into the reddening maple forest of the valley. In the mornings, Granny would take the kids into the woods with buckets and have them compete to see who could catch the most wood bugs to feed to the chickens. That day they had entered the trees before the fog began to fall over the mountains and smother the town.

Sylvie was on her hands and knees flipping over rocks when she felt it on her skin. Cold. The kind of cold you don't feel in your bones; a sensation only felt on exposed skin. She looked up to discover she couldn't see ten feet ahead.

The trees blurred into ghostly silhouettes and the air was painted white. Sylvie opened her mouth to call for Granny but no words came out. Goosebumps took over her body as she trembled from fear and started to cry. Her tears turned to mist before they could fall.

A familiar voice sliced through the fog. "Sylvie!"

Sylvie sucked in a breath, "Delly?"

"Sylvie!" Delly screamed.

Sylvie walked towards the voice, ignoring her body's pleas to turn and run away. It was only fog, but she could feel it in her lungs, heavy like smoke. It sounded wrong. No matter night or day, the sounds of the forest never stopped. From blackbirds to brown bears there was always someone stirring. Now it was silent other than the crunching of dead leaves under Sylvie's boots.

*Snap!*

Up above where the maple's branches were tangled in the fog, Sylvie watched a singular red maple leaf fall. Twisting and twirling all the way down until it silently collided with the ground in front of her.

"Sssylvie!" a new voice hissed. It didn't sound like Delly.

With sharp, quick breaths Sylvie pushed herself towards where she had first heard Delly. Through the curtain of fog, she could see the faint outline of a person swaying within the trees. If she could just make it to Delly, she knew she would be alright.

"Sylvie," More voices started, whispers that grew louder and turned into hisses, "Sssylvieeee!"

She spun around in a circle looking for the source but only saw fog. All of a sudden everything fell still.

Then Delly's voice screamed again, "Sylvie!"

Sylvie took off running towards Delly, the other voices still hissing and spitting her name. They were so close she could feel the hot breath of their invisible mouths through the opaque mist.

*Just keep running, she thought. Just get to Delly.*

Her foot hooked under an exposed root that sent her body crashing onto the ground landing on her shoulder. With the shock of the pain came a high-pitched sound Sylvie didn't even realize had come from herself. She was in too much pain to think. She curled up and cried.

Soon, she heard Granny's voice calling through the trees.

Sylvie looked up to call for Granny, but the words fell out of her mouth when she saw what was above her.

A dead body bent sharp at the neck where rope extended up in the maple tree. Long black hair lay stringy over the face. Her toes were black without socks or shoes. Mud was caked down the knees of her jeans and the front of her peacoat, the red of it blending amongst the crimson leaves.

Sylvie cried on the ground in front of Delly's body as Granny's arms wrapped around her. Granny brought Sylvie's head to her chest, "Shh, it's okay Bluebird. I have you."

But Sylvie felt Granny's tears fall on her cheek as Delly's body swayed in the tree.



Twenty years later Granny died alone in her home located within the maple-tree-ridden forest. When Sylvie was told that Granny had left the house to her, she wasn't sure if she'd take it. However, after talking it over with her therapist, they both decided it would be good for her to return and prove there was no reason to fear the fog.

The house was a worn-down two-story red beacon, looming over the valley. The paint chipped off the walls like falling leaves.

The summer came and went without issue. Sylvie spent her days in the garden desperately trying to bring it back to life. Her focus had mostly been on the red

roses planted underneath Delly's old bedroom window. Once those were healthy, she added a few more bushes under Granny's window. She'd admire her work over a cup of coffee in the morning dew.

Sylvie watched as the fog rolled down the mountains and into the valley, where it wrapped around the heads of maple trees like a noose. It was her first October in Grand Valley since Delly's death.

There had been evidence of a struggle; Delly had been caked with mud up to her neck, her bottom lip was bitten off and her nails were broken and bloody. Despite all of this, there wasn't any trace of DNA found on Delly other than her own. Given that and the coroner's report indicating she died from a broken neck, it was ruled a suicide.

The fog had almost completely consumed every red leaf within its cloud. Once it had crept over the edge of Granny's garden, Sylvie went to every window and door and made sure they were locked.

Then with the help of sleeping pills, she slept through to morning.

When she opened her curtains, there was nothing but blue skies covering the valley. Sylvie was about to go make coffee when her attention was stolen by the roses below.

Running to check, she saw that the roses she had showered with love all summer had been slashed at the stems, their petals laying below like a puddle of blood. All the flowers were destroyed other than a singular bloom still standing under Granny's window.

There was a chill on her skin, the kind that doesn't hit the bone. She walked through the carnage over to the last living rose. Twine was wrapped tightly around the stem below the head of the flower which caused the remaining petals to droop. Careful to not cut herself on the thorns, she pulled the twine. Releasing from where it had been tangled in the leaves, Sylvie found at the end a small bluebird, hanging by its broken neck.