A TELEPHONE CALL FOR GENEVIEVE SNOW

GENEVIEVE SNOW was a small dainty woman who taught at the primary school. The men on the staff teased her about being so little and quiet—called her Snow White. Sometimes in the lunch hour Genevieve's mother would ring up—or the girl from the bank would ring. Never a man—there was no romance in Genevieve's life.

The teacher on duty would send the message out over the public address: There is a telephone call for Miss Genevieve Snow.

The public address was the true centre of power in the school. It could stop all the staff and most of the children in their tracks.

'Will Emily Hammond please go to her violin lesson. Lamingtons for the lamington stall must be left at the office by noon on Friday. Will Christopher Worth please go to trombone. People without sunhats will not be permitted to have lunch out of doors. Emily Hammond, your violin lesson has been cancelled today. Football practice will be at two o'clock. Will Verity Sanderson please go to flute at once. Parents who wish to help at the sausage sizzle must leave their names at the office by three tomorrow. There is a telephone call for Genevieve Snow.'

These messages rang out across the school yard and into the street so that people who lived in the houses surrounding the school always knew what was going on. They followed the musical careers of the violinists and the flautists; they knew when Emily Hammond had an audition for a children's orchestra and they hoped all afternoon that she was going OK. The relief, a week later, when they learned that Emily had been called for an orchestra rehearsal at the Town Hall.

Listening to the PA was like listening to a serial on the radio, but getting only tantalising little bits and imagining the rest. You never knew when The Voice was going to interrupt your thoughts, when you were going to get a

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new and vital piece of information. Verity took up the piano as well as the flute.

It wasn't only the locals who knew what was going on in the school. So did the passing motorists.

It happened one day that Nigel West was driving past as The Voice said there was a telephone call for Miss Genevieve Snow. Nigel was a man who had little else to do but drive around ringing people up on his car phone. He would park across the street from, say, the Silk Stocking or the Veronica Lodge Boutique and he would get a thrill out of knowing that when he spoke to the woman who answered the phone, she didn't know he was the man in the car nearby.

How nice to have a woman to ask for by name. Genevieve Snow.

He stopped the car, looked up the number of the school, and, when Genevieve had had time to take her other phone call, Nigel rang her. 'There is a telephone call for Genevieve Snow,' The Voice yelled into the PA, and Nigel heard it, and it was a terrific thrill.

Genevieve said hello. Nigel said: 'That's you Genevieve? Genevieve, I understand your students have a very real interest in the environment. I have some information to give you. Information about the Wolf.' And Genevieve just said: 'Yes?'

Nigel was surprised by the matter-of-fact tone in that yes. They often hung up, or blew whistles at him, or said angry things. Genevieve said yes? just like that. So Nigel drew in his breath and paused and went on. He was whispering now. 'Well, Genevieve, the Wolf was once found in most habitats throughout the northern hemisphere, through Asia, Northern America and as far south as Mexico. Are you following me Genevieve?'

'Yes,' she said,'yes, I'm with you.'

'Well, Genevieve, after centuries of persecution, the Wolf is now extinct or endangered over most of its range, and the few remaining populations are in danger from fur trappers. This is sad. Don't you find it sad, Genevieve?' *PAR* 'Yes. It's very sad.'

'The Wolf hunts in small packs and feeds on a wide variety of mammal prey up to the size of deer or moose. They are by nature enquiring, intuitive, fierce and brave.'

'I am familiar with most of this. Are you collecting money?'

Nigel had never been asked that question before. It threw him for a minute. Then he said: 'Not exactly money at this stage, Genevieve. I am simply enlisting Friends of the Wolf and Other Endangered Species. Can I put your name down?' And Genevieve said yes, and he did. He asked her how to spell

it and then he asked for her address and phone number and Genevieve, a Friend of the Wolf and Other Endangered Species, told him. ‘Thank you for that,’ Nigel said. ‘Goodbye Genevieve.’

The Voice looked at her sideways as she left the office. The PA was silent and a funny sort of silence hung over the school. Genevieve went back to her classroom, thinking about the man who had whispered to her about wolves. It was a very unusual experience.

And it was the beginning of the strange affair between Genevieve Snow and the Wolf Man.

He rang her at home and she sat curled in an armchair listening to more facts about the Wolf. He told her about the Sun Bear, about the Red Fox, the Wilderbeast, and about Cheetas that hunt alone.

Genevieve loved listening to Nigel. It was a secret. She wanted to keep the thing, whatever it was, going. Nigel was nuts of course. And Genevieve, in her own funny way, was as nutty as Nigel.

Life went on, and Christopher Worth gave up the trombone. People without sunhats didn’t have lunch in the yard. Huge sums of money were raised at the sausage sizzles. Verity Sanderson took up the guitar.

‘The African Buffalo grows to a length of up to three metres, and weighs nine hundred kilos,’ Nigel whispered. It was like a drug to Genevieve. Every night she waited for his call. She wondered what he looked like. And then one Sunday, when she was curled up in the chair, listening to him, he said: ‘If you look out the window, I’ll wave.’

She pulled back the curtain, and there he was, a pleasant, ordinary-looking man waving to her from a white Celica.

A neighbour saw Genevieve get into the car, thought nothing of it, and was later unable to say whether the car was a Nissan or a Honda, whether the driver was a man or a woman, whether it happened on Saturday or Sunday. Genevieve was listed as a missing person, and they put her picture on the backs of taxis, on the sides of buses.

The fact of the matter is that Nigel took Genevieve home to his house in the hills behind the city, his cabin where he kept his books about wild life, his guns and his videos. Genevieve became his prisoner, his love, and his victim.

She stayed in the cabin with him in terror, locked in, tied up. He read to her from the books about wild animals—stark and horrible details of their lives, their deaths, their dwindling populations. She hardly spoke; just stared at him with a blank and stupified horror. Don’t bother to scream, Nigel told her. There’s nobody to hear. Naked, she would submit to him in silence.

One day he untied the ropes that bound her. With a kind of ridiculous ceremony he unlocked the door, threw it open so that the trees outside appeared suddenly, like a picture on a screen, the light of late afternoon slanting through the branches. Genevieve did not move. Why don't you run away? He snarled at her as he said this. She stared at him with the familiar pale incomprehension. Then suddenly she sprang, her little naked body flying clean across the room and out the door into the twilight and the bush. She was faster than he expected, but within seconds he was after her, the rifle in his hand. The white flash of her skin was luminous against the grey-green shadows of the trees. Two shots and he had her and she fell. Slowly he walked towards her, and in his mind the ground was smooth with gleaming snow. She lay upon the snow, gouts of her sweet bright blood falling as cherries on the sheet.

Nigel carried Genevieve—he carried her tenderly—into the cabin where, after a while, he cut her body into sections. He put some parts of her down the well. Some parts of her cut into strips, and then he ate them raw. It was the first time he had done that, given in to his great desire. He was sorry, but she had deserved it. He felt he had given her plenty of warning. She didn't have to listen to him. She didn't have to pick up the phone, didn't have to get into the car. Didn't really have to run for it, out the open door into the bush.

He used to hear stuff on the radio about the mysterious disappearance of twenty-five year-old school teacher Genevieve Snow, hear the appeals for information. Sometimes it was a temptation to ring the number and tell them the truth: I am the Wolf Man, and I have eaten Genevieve Snow. Gradually the name Genevieve Snow disappeared. Genevieve's picture faded from the backs of taxis, the sides of buses.

The Voice continued to ring out across the schoolground.