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NOTHING IMPORTANT HAPPENED TODAY

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## NOTHING IMPORTANT HAPPENED TODAY

Nereid smiled and waved at the owner of the newly reopened Sufferin' Sappho Cafe, a sweet-faced not-quite-elderly butch dyke named "Two-W" who used to occasionally slip Nereid "samples" of new pastries she was experimenting with in the kitchen. Two-W grinned at her while cashing out a trio of college-aged women with buzzcuts and tattoos, and gestured with her head back toward the corner.

X was there, sipping a cup of coffee. Sie was dressed in a black wool suit, a black silk shirt, and a red brocade tie patterned with dragons. There was a distracted smile for Nereid as she dropped into the chair opposite, feeling inevitably underdressed.

"How's it going?" X said.

Nereid sighed and opened the menu (all new and shiny—it had been almost a year since the cafe had been closed for "sanitation" issues that everyone knew had to do with Two-W and the screaming match with the Mod Squad out on the sidewalk). "Sophie's not coming out of her lab pretty much at all, and she's not taking care of herself. I'm feeling a little fried."

X studied zir cup. "The problem with mad scientists is that there's this culture of immersing themselves in their work. Breakup? Build a new robot. Problems with your parents? Invent a superweapon. Nearly destroy the world? That requires an even bigger project."

Nereid smiled up at the server, who was a college-aged queer she'd never seen before, as she dealt a cup of coffee onto the table. "Yeah. Mom says the men are even worse. She says they get all Frankenstein and start trying to build children for themselves."

"Ugh." X finished zir coffee and sighed. "You shouldn't be doing all this work, you know. Sophie's an adult. She can feed and bathe herself without being cozened into it. She did something really fucking stupid and she needs to learn to live with it. Or not. But you shouldn't be part of that equation if she doesn't."

"I... guess I've thought about breaking up with her," Nereid admitted. "Sometimes. But it hurts to think about."

"Because you love her," X said kindly. "But this kind of thing is one reason she and Wire had such a tempestuous relationship. She would get depressed and Wire—who is, in case you haven't noticed, a control freak—would burn out on managing her, and then there would be a big blowup. Sophie would drag herself out of it by sheer force of will, get back on an even keel, and they'd end up back together. It was a stupid cycle."

"She stuck with me when I was down," Nereid said, voicing the thing that had been running through her mind repeatedly for the last week. "I feel like I can't abandon her."

"You were constantly dragging yourself out of it," X pointed out. "You figured out what had happened, you were sad about it, and then you just kept going. You never decomped into no eating, no drinking, no talking. You're not depressive like Sophie is."

Nereid said, "Huh," because it had certainly *felt* like she'd needed someone to lead her around by the hand for at least a year after the whole Tam incident. She drank her coffee to buy herself some thinking time, and finally said, "I don't *want* to abandon her. I know she did something stupid and horrible. But I get why she felt like she had to, and I get why she feels guilty. I just wish she'd stop hurting herself all the time."

"Then you need to talk to her about it," X said, with a grimace. "She's running roughshod over you with all this. You have shit to deal with too, and you're not because you're taking care of her. Your whole team is fucked up at this point. Are you taking care of all of them too right now?"

Nereid ducked her head a little and thought of taking Vector out and giving her time to vent, and the couple of times she'd let Gemini drunkenly cry on her shoulder for a few hours. "But, you know, I didn't go through that horrible thing with them."

"No, you saved them from it," X said. "Just talk to her, okay? That's all I'm saying."

"I'll try," Nereid said.

They studied their menus in silence for a few moments. X sighed and closed zir menu, looking away at the art on the wall.

"Are *you* doing okay?" Nereid said, spotting a sandwich that looked interesting and closing her menu.

X shrugged. Nereid reflected on the fact that everything X did was ridiculously graceful and beautiful to watch, and was once again sorry that X wasn't interested in a relationship with her. But X was a terrific friend, and the crush was mostly under control.

"What's going on?" Nereid said, and then they had to pause and order their food.

When the server left, X said, "Madame is incredibly sweet and I mostly find her much easier to get along with than before the Oracle 'moved in' with me. Except she's like a *teenager* with this new relationship. Which would be charming, except Juniper is a bitch to me."

"Oh, *no*," Nereid said, having little flashbacks to her early interactions with Wire. "Do you think she's jealous of all the time Madame spends with you?"

"No, I think she's a fucking TERF," X said, expression more angry than Nereid could remember seeing zir. X immediately lost that look when the server came to pour more

coffee for both of them, and smiled. If it were possible, Nereid thought, X would sparkle while smiling.

"Remind me?" Nereid said after the server was gone, feeling ignorant.

"Trans-exclusionary radical feminist," X translated. "And, yeah, I'm not trans, but TERFs don't like anyone who's nonbinary, really. *And* I've heard her giving Madame shit for calling herself bisexual."

Nereid bristled on both their behalf. "Why is Madame putting up with that? She hasn't had a relationship in how many years and her first lover is doing *that?*"

"Madame's feeling old and unloved," X said, with a depressed grimace and shrug. "She and Juniper have been friends for years and years. I didn't think it was a good idea anyway, with Juniper having been her martial arts teacher, but Madame said that was so long ago, et cetera, et cetera. Madame's really good at excusing everything."

"Even Juniper being bitchy to you?" Nereid said, outraged.

X shrugged again. "Juniper only does it when Madame isn't around, like when she's waiting for Madame to get home from something, or in email to me."

"In email," Nereid said flatly. Even *she* knew not to say things in email that could be forwarded to other people or otherwise tracked.

"Oh, yeah, I have these long emails about how confused I am and how sad it is that Madame has had to deal with me all this time, and that my being around must be why Madame is not dealing with her own sexuality."

"You need to say something to Madame."

"And pop her cloud of joy?" X said, leaning zir chin on zir hand. "I can't bear to do that to her. She's so *happy*, Pacifica. You just can't imagine. I've been living with her since I was 19—5 years now. She got me through college, through coming out, through *everything*. I've watched her fight depression and just the *weight* of the Oracle on her practically every fucking day of her life just to get out of bed and put one foot in front of the other." X rubbed zir face. "You know, I heard her *singing* the other day. I've never heard her sing before. She's not bad! It's like she's getting a chance to open up *finally* as a sixty-something. I *can't* destroy that."

Nereid put her head to one side. "I don't think you'd destroy that. I don't think her being happy is all about *getting laid*, X. That's kind of shallow, and Madame is anything but shallow."

X was about to respond, but the server returned with their lunch just then, and they fell silent.

After the server was gone, Nereid added, "You're like the child she never had, X. You're her kid and her protégé and her student and her *friend*, and I think she would be devastated to find out that her lover was being horrible to you and you never told her."

The surprised look on X's face was very rewarding, Nereid thought. For once in her life, Nereid was getting to be the voice of reason. *I can't believe I'm giving effective advice! Go me!*

"I... do you really think she thinks of me that way?" X said.

"Yes," Nereid said without a second's hesitation. "Madame loves you. You love Madame, though you always deny it. You guys are family. Juniper *can't* be making her as happy as you say if Juniper is already talking over her self-identification."

X stared down at zir plate and started assembling the falafel and other items into a pita sandwich. "I hate talking about emotional things with Madame."

"I hate talking about emotional things with *anyone*," Nereid said.

"I'll talk to Madame if you talk to Sophie," X said.

"All right," Nereid said, nearly losing her appetite with the stomach-clenching that went with that agreement. "Deal."