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THE LOVE YOU THOUGHT I'D BE

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THE LOVE YOU THOUGHT I'D BE

"So I've been thinking," Kit said as he stirred the bean soup he was making.

Angelica braced herself, and sipped casually at her ginger ale. She had been bracing herself for this discussion for days now; longer, even, since he told her who he was. Every time he started a conversation in a portentous way, she braced herself, and every time, he slid off into some other topic. So she braced herself for that too.

"I'm thinking maybe it's getting to be time for me to move along," Kit said.

Her stomach fell to her toes and she got a little dizzy: the roller coaster had finally hit the big drop. The can crinkled slightly under her grip, and she made herself breathe and set the can down on the side table. After a moment of steadying herself, she got up and walked over to stand next to him.

Both of them stared into the soup pot.

She said, "I guess I knew that."

He laughed, "I'm a playa, not a staya!"

Those words felt like a deliberate splash of something acrid and nasty in her face. She had sworn she wouldn't ever hit back again when a lover hit her, but Angelica had to clench her fists to stop herself from slapping the grin off his face.

She took a deep breath to still the sob that was trying to choke her, and said, waveringly, "That was unworthy of you. And me."

He sobered immediately, set the spoon down, and peered into her face. "Oh... hell. You're right. I'm sorry."

She looked up at him. He was still a blank to her new power, restful and strange. "Old habits die hard?"

"Heh," he said, sheepishly. "Yeah."

"I'm guessing you're not the sort to stay in touch either," she said, looking back into the pot.

"I dunno," he said, picking the spoon back up and scraping the bottom of the pot where things had started to adhere. "Email and texting makes it easy even for someone as lazy as me."

"If you don't lose your phone," Angelica said, letting the conversation take the sting away.

"If I don't lose my phone," Kit said. "Or end up in jail again. Or get killed again."

She swallowed hard. "Do you... get killed often?"

"Have you ever *read* any of my stories?" Kit said, snorting. "And like in *this* time, with *this* government in charge, I'm any less likely to get killed? I could tell you a story about how many bullets I pulled outta my hide last time around..." He glanced aside at her, and added, hastily, "But I won't."

"Does it hurt?" she said.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "But I don't remember it much later. Probably why I end up dead so often."

"Do you look the same or different when you come back?" She couldn't help asking; it was a distraction from the horrible immediacy of his departure, plus she was possibly understandably curious about the workings of the gods.

He thought for a moment, chewing his lower lip (the lower lip Angelica liked to bite). "It depends on... where I am, my intentions in coming back, that kind of thing. If I'm in this world, I tend to be kinda like that guy on that TV show you said you liked as a kid—I come back, but I look different and act different. I *have* come back the same way before, especially when I need to deal with the same situation. Like, there was this stuff going on with the Army a while back, and I kept coming back as the same guy because it really freaked their shit out when I showed up for meetings and fights." He smiled reminiscently.

Angelica laughed and something felt like it broke in the back of her throat. The tears just poured out of her and she couldn't stop them, so she covered her face with her hands and tried to stop the sad moaning noises.

He pulled her against him and she buried her face in his t-shirt. He smelled of sweat and car oil and beer, and for just a second, she got a complicated whiff of gunpowder and horse and wet dog. And then, of course, her nose was useless because of the tears and congestion that came with them, and she cried harder while he stroked her back and made soothing noises in her ear.

At some point, she shook him by the back of his shirt and muttered, "Goddammit, you asshole, I didn't mean to fall in love with you."

He snorted. "I wasn't *enough* of an asshole, clearly."

"Asshole," she said again, and let go of him. "I probably look like a damn raccoon now," she said, peering at her reflection in the glass of the microwave.

"Well, at least I kept the soup from burning?" he said.

She went to the bathroom and spent some time repairing the damage. When she emerged, she knew she looked okay, but still felt hollow-eyed and snotty.

Kit served up the soup and a green salad and some glasses of white wine from Argentina. They ate in silence for a while, until Angelica managed to work up her courage to say, "When?"

He said, "I hate dragging this kind of thing out. I was... thinking tomorrow, actually."

Angelica swallowed with care, then gave him an arch look and said, "You were going to leave without saying goodbye to Abuelita?"

His eyes got big, and then he shook his head. "Friday?"

Angelica gave a little nod. "All right." Two more days with him. Two more nights. Maybe she could call out of work... then she started laughing.

"What?" he said.

"I just realized that I can call out of work and not worry about making rent," she said. She'd shut down her camgirl business without a second thought, pulling her website offline and disappearing all her social media connections. But somehow, she hadn't wrapped her head around the fact that she didn't need to work for Queer Energy for money any more. She could tell them to direct her pay into something else... hiring another admin, maybe, who she could train to take over the heavy lifting.

"Does that help a little with how pissed you are at her?" he said.

"A little, I guess," she said. "I don't think I'll ever really forgive her, though." Another thought struck her. "Oh, god, how am I going to find another lover I can actually *look* at again?"

Kit pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I know a coupla Mystikai who might be interested..."

"That wasn't a cue for you to start matchmaking for your soon-to-be-ex," Angelica said sourly.

"You know," he said, finishing his glass of wine, "this is one of the few times I really regret having to leave."

"Do you 'have' to leave?" Angelica said. "Is it part of your built-in wanderlust or something?"

He shrugged. "It's my job to help my people. I did my thing here, and the rest, other people are picking up. There are other places I should be, where no one else is doing enough, or *can* do enough."

Angelica quirked a smile. "So you admit to having a job."

He laughed and raised his hands. "Got me," he admitted. "A job I've had a really long time now, no retirement in sight. You kids make me feel old sometimes."