

## Chapter 03 - Crepes

"You're an idiot. Why didn't you just quit?" Olivia spoke to him with no holds barred. A flash of her hand in a harsh wave gave him little solace over the lonely booth table in the back corner of their usual haunt – though that word held such a different meaning these days. "You could survive a few weeks finding a new job. This one clearly doesn't work."

"I know," He said quietly, staring down at the plain crepes on his plate, and then up to the sweet monstrosity she had made hers into, and then up to her.

Olivia was a mountain witch, a classic American archetype. She was the crazy woman at the edge of the wilderness who was set in her own ways. Her hair was wild, and her demeanor uncouth. Like the Baba Yaga of Europe, her abilities were bewildering and made no real sense. The warmth drained from the air around her, animals were comfortable near her and spoke to her, she could see auras of mortals and non-humans, she could work minor spells, and who knew what else. It was ever-changing, like the wilds themselves. She was strange. A Hedge Wizard with a mix of craziness brought by the countless mystic archetypes that helped settle the west. Of course, that meant she was human.

She had continued to grow old, and he had stayed much the same. And it was that fact that eventually broke them. He was cursed to live as he was, at least until such a time as he faded away from whatever reason. Most likely getting Van Hellsinged by some new age Hunter who considered non-humans 'dangerous'. So now, here he sat the same as the day she met him – but she, she was in her forties.

She was still beautiful to him. Of course, he had always had a thing for older women, and if he was honest, during her time as a mother she had filled out nicely. She disagreed with him. And frankly he was a complete ass forever making note of it. He couldn't help it. Of course, when she saw him the same it was the opposite. It made it clear how much she had changed, that her path had continued, whereas he had stopped on his path when his vampirism took hold.

He gave a shake of his head. "I don't know why I said yes."

"Because change scares the hell out of you. It always has, but now especially. Quitting, well that would have been a change. You'd have to move out of the safety and comfort of the place you've built for yourself. That is a big change. A frightening change. You, you would rather stay mostly comfortable and not take a damned risk." She spoke as the waitress dropped off a fresh cup of coffee for Olivia.

"You want that warmed up?" The waitress spoke as she pointed to his cup.

"That might be nice, if," Mattias added with a small point to Olivia as she started to speak up. It didn't stop her.

"No. Caffeine makes him burn through blood faster, and yet he still won't give it up."

"I can make my own decisions."

"No, you can't, obviously," Olivia said, "Bring him decaf." She tapped on the table.

“Really? Still going to modify my orders.”

“You need to stay healthy, and if you won’t do it when you’re alone, I can sure as hell do it when you’re with me. Eat up.”

“Fine, witch,” He hissed at her. The waitress had by this point wandered off. It was too early to watch a grown couple argue over things like this for her.

“How are you going to do daylight?”

“Daylight won’t kill me,”

“I know that. But the fatigue is going to tank your performance,” She paused to pick up a bite of sweet crepe and cream, holding it on her fork before she continued with another question, “And when are you going to get time for torpor, hm?”

“I’ll just sleep like humans do and get real rest during the weekend.”

“Uh-huh.” She said before taking the bite and shaking her head. “That’s never worked for humans.”

“Well, humans suck at life, but I already blew that, so I’ll figure it out.”

“That makes... zero sense.”

“Shut up. I’m still thinking about it.”

“Why don’t you try talking to them? They know you’re a vampire. They have to help how they can. Maybe a dark room for your office, or at least shades.” She sighed, “Why don’t you just do what you want to do?”

“I don’t know what I want to do.”

“Uh-huh... keep saying that.” She said quietly with a shake of her head. She took another bite and the two sat quietly for a minute.

“What do you mean?” He sighed, realizing she was leading him to a question but that she was just going to sit there and give him the silent treatment until he asked. They had known one another long enough that she knew he would eventually push her to say something. It was the same old game. It always was. Not that he didn’t like playing.

“You know what you want to do,” She said, “The place you’ve always talked about opening. The place you think it would be so great for people to have access too.”

Of course, that was vague, even for her.

He did know what she was talking about, though. Not that he was going to admit it here or anywhere. “Just because I talk about something doesn’t mean its what I want to actually do. I talk about professionally playing video games sometimes, it doesn’t mean I’ll quit and become an actual pro gamer or some bullshit.”

"Yeah, but you don't care about that," She pointed her fork at him. "You do care about other things, though. Like that Fomorian girl on your team,"

"Lindsay?"

"Sure," She shrugged, "I don't have any idea what her name is."

"You want me to go after Lindsay,"

"No, pervert. I want you to admit that there are things you like doing. That you consider yourself lucky to get a chance to do," She said quietly, "You've had a shitty run of it, and you made something of yourself anyway. Beyond what was expected of you. So why won't you admit that and actually, oh I don't know," She took another bite, and through gritted teeth gave a final word. "Try."

He paused and considered diffusing the situation with another perverted joke, but it seemed unfair. Unfair, and unfunny. And likely ineffective at doing anything but raising her ire. He took a deep breath and shook his head. "I don't want to abandon my team at Christmas."

"Christmas is two months away."

"Christmas starts on November 1<sup>st</sup> in every customer-facing industry..." Mattias

"Not for me."

"You're a witch. Witch season ends on November 1<sup>st</sup>, so you guys hibernate until next Halloween, as far as I can tell."

"Not too far off." She said quietly, before giving a little smile. "So, breakfast on the new year to see how far you've gotten, and maybe you've geared up and can jump in to try what you really want to do. I'm happy to help if you decide to do that. But this," She waved at him just as the waitress returned with a decaffeinated coffee for him. She stood awkwardly there for a moment, causing Olivia to pause.

Mattias glanced up to the Waitress with a practiced but hesitant smile, "Thank you,"

"Anything else I can do for you? Or are you ready for the check?"

"Check," Olivia said pointing at him, "He just got a promotion."

"Oh," The waitress said, pulling out that little black book with the check tucked inside and setting it on the table in front of him. "Congratulations,"

"Thanks..."

"And a box for me," Olivia said softly, pointing to the mountain of food on her plate. "I think I'll finish this later."

"No, you won't," Mattias said quietly with a shake of his head as he reached for his wallet. He flipped out an old beaten up debit card and slipped it in the black book with the check. "Take your time," His head shook slightly, and then pointed towards Olivia, "You were saying."

"I forget," Olivia replied with another bite

“What? You pointed at me and said, ‘but this’,” He put his hands on his chest and sighed. “It was twenty seconds ago.”

“Oh, yeah,” She said quietly, waving back at him. “This whole lazy just surviving thing. That has to stop. You were better than this before your vampirism. There is no reason you can’t succeed at what you want to do with it. Even if it did change the end goal a bit.”

“A bit? A bit? You think?”

“Don’t be an ass.” She raised one finger and stared over at him for a moment. “Alright?”

“Fine. Have it your way. After Christmas, if I survive, I’ll give you an update and we can see about making something of my bigger plan.”

“This, like all things, is temporary,” She said calmly. “You should do the great thing you know you can do and make that temporary matter. Even if it comes from a cursed place, you can still do good, and do more than just survive.” She smiled up at the Waitress, who returned for a moment to drop off a plane white to-go box, which she then slid over to his side of the table. “Would you mind?”

He rolled his eyes a bit as the check was laid back on the table. “Thanks again, you all. Come back and see us again.”

“I’m sure we’ll be back,” Olivia gave a wide smile as Mattias took up the to-go box and put both her leftovers and his in the box, and then passed it back over to her. She smiled, “And thank you for breakfast. And I guess, congrats, you’re an idiot, do better.”

“Thanks, Olivia,” He said with a sigh, picking up the check. He glanced at the cost, and with a pause, he figured up the tip in his head and jotted down that number. He left a decent tip, nothing too spectacular. “And I’m always happy to get a meal when you come by. It’s nice seeing you.”

“And you... come by the house from time to time. And maybe say hi to Morrigan from time to time. She does like non-humans, you know. And is always reading about them.” She spoke with a grin, “But you know how six-year-olds are. They don’t understand that non-humans live a different life than the rest of us. It’d be healthy for her to see the truth before she’s older.”

“Is she in Kindergarten now?”

“First grade. I just said six.”

“I don’t know how children work. You know that. Part of the problem, if you remember.”

“I remember.” She said, scooting down the bench-style seating as she prepared to leave.

Olivia stood up and stretched, stepping out of the booth. There was a little shuffling as she stepped away, and he watched as her purse jumped down off the booth seat and followed a few steps behind her – the strap twisted to form a couple of little fat legs that the creature moved on. It kept pace with its mistress for a moment before Mattias shook his head.

“Forget something?” He said as he leaned over the table to grab the to-go box.

“Oh, thanks. Purse, would you?” Olivia requested, waving the purse back towards the table. “Meet me in the lobby. I’m going to stop by the restroom.”

The purse waddled back over to the table and twisted as if to look up at Mattias. The vampire just grinned and offered the to-go box over to it, holding it above the creature for a moment.

“Just want me to set it on top of you.”

The purse twisted and bobbed, which was as close to a nod as he should have expected. It was enough for him. He sat the white box on top of the purse, and it turned away and waddled off towards the door. He turned back to the table to catch his eyes on the waitress. She seemed pale, watching that small purse carry away a take-out box.

“Ah... huh. She’s a witch – they like to animate things.” Mattias explained before picking up his coffee and taking a sip. “Could I get a to-go cup for the rest of this?”