

Job Hunting

“So,” she said quietly. “Tell me about yourself, Marion.”

Truth to tell, she made me a bit uncomfortable but she’d been nice enough so far. Making myself as comfortable as I could, I told her, “I grew up in Cactus Ridge. It’s a quiet little town and the name fits as it features many, many cactus, quite a bit of which grows on a ridge just outside downtown. My mother abandoned me when I was seven. Left me with my father.”

“This upset you a great deal, didn’t it?” she asked gently.

“Yes,” I agreed, again feeling a lesser version of the rising anger and sense of loss that I’d felt back then. I had realized a couple of years ago that she hadn’t left because of me. But that realization had been a long time in coming. “And that left me all alone with my father.”

“Tell me about him, please?” I hadn’t realized these folks were going to be so nosy.

“He worked a lot. When I was young, a teenager from down the street would watch me. Glenda Berger was her name. In the evenings when my father got home, he’d cook us microwave dinners. Sometimes he’d drink. Other times he didn’t. Regardless, he always seemed to hate me. Blamed me for everything that went wrong in his life. It took me a long time to understand that wasn’t my fault either.”

“Do you hate him?” she asked.

“Sometimes. Most of the time I don’t feel much of anything about him.”

“What would you do if you were to meet him in a restaurant?”

“That seems pretty unlikely, all things being equal,” I replied, looking around to emphasize my point. There was nothing but the ever present grey of the spirit world around us.

“Nevertheless, please answer the question,” she insisted.

“Fine. I’d probably ask him why he chose to heap all his anger and frustrations on me. Why he never took responsibility for his anger. Why he always lashed out at me instead of whoever it was who seemed to leave him perpetually mad. Why he always tried to build himself up by bringing me down.”

“Those sound like good questions,” she told me. “Perhaps someday you’ll get your chance to ask them. Now, tell me about the vampire.”

“Oh, you know about him?” I asked, surprised and at the same time, not so surprised as I might have been the other day.

“Indeed,” she said. “I know quite a lot about him. It is quite likely I know more about him than he does about himself. So, tell me... what do you think about him?”

“I love him,” I replied. “It’s as simple as that.”

“Love is seldom simple, Miss Flanders,” she contradicted. “And loving a vampire is virtually never simple. Tell me how you feel about the way he chose to meet you. Surrounding you with apparently hungry coyotes seems a mean trick.”

“Well, yes. It was.” I had a strong urge to defend the man I loved, but this woman could and would see through any lie I might tell. Even if it was made to myself. And lying to her would definitely hurt my chances of getting what I wanted. “Naturally, at the time I was frightened half out of my mind. Later, when I realized Alex was the one who’d set the coyotes upon me, I was angry. But it was too late by then. I was already in love with him.”

“Would you have done anything differently if you could have?” she asked.

“You mean regarding the coyotes?” At her nod, I pursed my lips in thought. “Probably not. It was a lousy way for him to set up a meeting, but he had his reasons. Lame though they were. While I’d have preferred to have met him at a coffee shop or something, it worked out well enough for us.”

“Do you think meeting him at a coffee shop would have generated the same impact as the coyotes?” she asked curiously.

“No. But Alex himself was really the major impact. The coyotes were overshadowed by him the moment he showed up. He underestimated himself. Alex hadn’t needed the coyotes to make an impression on me. He did that all by himself.”

“What’s your greatest regret?” she asked.

“I have two,” I replied slowly, a bit surprised that talking to this woman now came so easily. “My first is that we never married.” She nodded her understanding. “My other is that I rushed into the whole shadow world thing. I should have been more patient. He tried to tell me that, but I wanted to be in his world so badly that I just couldn’t wait.”

“Sadly, most people don’t truly understand the value of patience until it is too late,” she told me sympathetically. “Still, you took a chance. You took charge of your life and you took a chance. This time it didn’t payoff for you. Who knows what might happen next time?”

“Next time?”

“All things are possible. It’s just that many are so improbable as to be next to impossible. The next time you take a chance, it might work out well for you. You never know.”

“Okay. To be honest, I hadn’t realized I’d have any further chances left.”

“Why of course you do. You’re barely getting started. However, I have one more question for you about Alex Wilde.” At my nod, she continued, “What do you want for him now?”

“Pardon?”

“What do you wish for him now?”

“I suppose I wish him health and happiness. To be honest, I’ve kinda been wondering when he might be joining me here.”

“What would you say if I told you he was destined to marry another? That even your leaving his life was part of that destiny?”

“Well, to be perfectly honest, I’d be pretty upset. I love him. I don’t think I really want him to marry anyone else.”

“That is a wonderfully honest answer. Selfish and shallow to be sure, but as honest as it gets.” I remained silent but only with an effort. “Ah,” she said, with a faint smile. “You disagree with my judgement of selfish and shallow. In that case, I’ll point out that if you loved him as much as you say, you would want the best for him. Regardless of where that put you. Face it, you are outside his life now. You cannot hop back into his bed. You cannot watch movies with him or take long walks with him or do any of the things you used to do with him anymore.”

Sniffing back tears, I told her, “I’m quite aware of what cannot be, thank you very much. That doesn’t mean I don’t still love him.”

“Of course you still love him,” she replied, surprised. “I never said or implied otherwise. I’m simply saying that if you loved him as much as you say, you’d want him to be happy and healthy.”

“That’s what *I said*,” I declared with a frown.

“Yes you did. But you didn’t mean it. What you meant was happy, so long as he was able to get through the rest of his life without you and never finding another to love. Healthy, so long as that included no sexual intercourse with anyone else who might love him as much as yourself.”

“Well, yes,” I grudgingly admitted as much to myself as to her. “I suppose that’s true.”

“Good,” she smiled. “Another perfectly honest answer. Please, allow me to share a personal observation.” At my rather reluctant nod, she continued, “I’ve been studying people for a very long time now. Love is a fire that never truly fades. It can be turned into something dark and vile, but it never fades so much that it cannot be rekindled.

“Marion, you’ve done as I asked. You’ve answered all my questions honestly. Now tell me, why do you want to join us?”

“I want to help him. I met Jack the other day. Jack Cosgrove.” At her understanding nod, I continued, “He told me Alex was without a daytime protector. Seems fairly obvious in hindsight. I’ve learned that it’s the job of those within the host of the archangel Gabriel to be the guiding hands of fate. I want to learn to do this so I can help him.”

“Please understand Marion that our job is much bigger than aiding a single man, regardless of his fate. There are billions of people just on earth. When you go out beyond that one small world... you end up with a very busy host of angels. To be honest I’m not entirely sure we’d be able to get you assigned to him. Fate has been using Alexander Wilde for quite some time.”

“I understand that,” I explained. “I want to learn how all this works. I want to help other people. While Alex is at the top of that list, he’s not the only one. There are thousands of children out there. I want to make sure none of them has as miserable a childhood as I endured. And if I can learn to help Alex, too... so much the better.”

“Some of the painful lessons learned in childhood are necessary. Many of them are required learning, in fact. However, it is quite alright to try and help those less fortunate than ourselves. Indeed, it is a most noble goal. If we accept you, we’ll teach you more than you ever imagined about the lessons we all must learn. And how to tell the difference between a necessary lesson and abuse. Sometimes the line between the two is very fine indeed.”

“And sometimes it’s not,” I declared.

“Indeed,” she agreed. “That is also very true. Now, while I like your spirit and your determination, this job requires a certain detachment as well as a fair amount of intuition. You understand that?” At my nod, she continued, “I’m going to test that now. A final test and potentially, the hardest you’re going to face. Are you ready?”

“Yes,” I whispered, looking her in the eyes.

“Very well, step over here.” She led the way into a small, but lovely garden that was suddenly there. In the center of the garden was a pond. “Sit, here at edge. Look into the water.” I did so and the pebbles at the bottom began wavering as the surface of the pool smoothed. Once the surface had become glass-like, it no longer showed any pebbles at all but rather Alex, sitting at a table with two other women. The three of them sat in a revolving restaurant, high above a large city. Listening in on their conversation, it seemed that all Alex was talking about was gaining the accouterments of his dead friend, Jack Cosgrove.

“This was a current scene that just occurred in Dallas. What is your judgement?” she asked.

“My judgement? About what?”

“About why you weren’t in his thoughts,” she declared.

“How should I know? You only showed me one little conversation.”

“Yes,” she smiled. “That’s exactly right. I haven’t shown you enough. So look. Tell me when you’ve seen enough. I cannot go forward beyond the restaurant scene, but I can go back as far as you’d like.”

“Then take me back. Back to when I met him. I don’t suppose there’s a way to actually

show his thoughts?"

"No, there is not. Within a person's thoughts, the direction their life follows is chosen. We cannot change that. Each must select their own way. To intrude on another's thoughts would be the greatest breach of privacy imaginable."

"It might also be the most intimate touch one could ever receive from a lover," I suggested.

"True. But that would be between consenting adults. And that would have nothing to do with spying. All I can show you is what he said and did."

"It will have to be enough," I agreed despite my disappointment. "And frankly, I can't wait to see what happened behind the scenes." So she showed me.

Once I was done looking into the pond, I sat and thought for a while. "Why did some of the scenes appear more real than others?" I asked.

"Some events are driven by fate. They seem more real because there are powerful forces focusing in on those events. The focusing of powers is what makes it seem more real than ordinary occurrences. Some of that was done by Gabriel's people. Some of it comes directly from the song of creation. And to be as truthful with you as you've been with me, some of it comes from somewhere we don't fully understand."

"Oh."

It had been a revealing look into the life of what had been a very lonely man on the night he'd surrounded me with coyotes. Alex had slowly changed as our lives became intertwined. In the beginning, he had walked around his house nervously for hours before he'd go out to meet me. In time, that had changed. He'd had long talks with Jack about how he was worried for me and how he was afraid he'd frighten me away. Jack had given him good, solid advice to be himself and had kept him from pacing too much or going overboard on any number of points. By the time I had become ready to join him in his world, Alex had reverted back to being a much more confident man. More like his old self as Jack had told him. Alex had been so excited about me joining him. So alive.

And yet at the restaurant with those other two women, he hadn't so much as mentioned me. He'd only shown an interest in getting Jack's knightly accouterments. Why? My thoughts drifted back to the image of him crying his eyes out, knowing that I wasn't coming back to him. I'd broken my promise to him. Something I regretted deeply but had no control over. And that helped fit the last piece into place for me.

"He couldn't bear to think about me," I whispered. "He'd started mourning my loss and then had to mourn Jack as well. While he'd known Jack for centuries, Jack was right in what he'd told him. That his best friend was fading away. And Alex had known that Jack was dwindling. Subconsciously at the very least, Alex had known his oldest friend was going to die a long time ago. It was easier for him to focus on building a shrine to Jack than it was for him to think about losing me."

Hugging me, she wrapped her wings around me as well. Relaxing against her, I felt warmed, comforted, and loved. "There is a strong strain of wisdom within you for one so young, Marion. I believe you are correct. And I believe you will make a most welcome addition to our host."