

New Rules

“Jack, what are you doing here?” I asked, giving the man a quick hello hug.

“I went and got myself killed,” he acknowledged, with a frown. “When I was disposing of your body, I saw a man. Turned out he was a Hunter. Came after us during the daytime. So, I locked Alex in the secret room, and went out and killed him. He managed to kill me back.”

A pale, blonde-haired woman walked out of the ether and put a hand on Jack’s shoulder. “Jack,” she began with a French accent. “Who is this?”

“Allice,” Jack said with a smile. “This is Marion Flanders. Marion, meet Allice Beauregard.”

“Pleasure,” I replied as she muttered, “Charmed.”

“Marion’s a relatively new friend from America. She and Alex were... very good friends,” he finish diplomatically. Allice seemed to warm up to me immediately. This rather strongly suggested to me that she had intentions towards Mister Cosgrove.

“So... how’s Alex doing?” I asked him quietly, strongly suspecting that I wasn’t going to like the answer I received.

“About as well as could be expected,” he sighed, verifying my suspicions. “Sadly, that’s not particularly well.”

“I wish I could help him. Comfort him,” I told him, some of my exasperation bleeding through my words.

“I’m not sure but I think we might be able to do something,” he answered, surprising me considerably. “However, I’m not honestly sure just what we can and can’t do. It seems we’re operating under a new set of rules.”

“Now that’s an understatement,” I muttered. Both of them smiled and I just had to join them.

“So, where exactly are we?” I asked after a moment. “I take it this isn’t heaven... so where is it?”

“I believe we’re in the land of the dead. A woman Allice and I spoke with earlier called this the Spirit World. Not heaven and certainly not hell. It’s supposed to be more of a starting off point for this next stage in our existence.”

“Next stage in our existence,” I echoed. “What an interesting turn of phrase.”

“I’m afraid I can’t take credit for it,” Jack informed me. “Allice came up with the phrase.” Allice gave a quick smile but didn’t seem to truly be paying attention to our conversation.

“I don’t suppose you two have found a rule book or something by any chance?”

“I wish. A guide would be handy as well,” Jack mused aloud. Or as close to aloud as being dead and without a body to generate sounds came.

“Hey?” I asked. “If we’re dead. How come I can see the two of you? You look like you have bodies and so do I. Shouldn’t we be appearing as incorporeal spirits or something?”

“That’s a good question,” Jack mused, nodding as he looked his arms and hands over. Reaching out, he took Allice’s hand, which caused her to look up and smile at him. “Feels like a body to me. Feels like *my* body to me.”

“I can’t tell any difference from this body and the one I had in life,” I admitted.

“The difference,” a new voice declared. “Is that this body is temporary.”

“Temporary?” I asked, turning to the Hispanic-looking woman who walked towards us.

“Indeed,” she confirmed. “Soon you’ll find that you can become spectral just as you were

speculating about. You'll also find that when you are around other spirits, you can create a body pretty much at will. It's more of an illusion than anything else. But it's a useful illusion, especially for purposes of communicating. At least until you get used to working in a larger world."

"And you are...?" Alice asked.

"You can call me Maria if you wish," she answered with a smile.

After quick introductions were made, I asked, "Maria? How did you find us? Was it an accident, good luck on our parts, or were you looking for us?"

"Oh, it was a combination of me wanting to help someone and you needing help," she explained with another smile. "Basically, your need touched upon my desire. I felt the connection and followed it back to you."

"Just how does that work?" Jack asked, apparently fascinated.

"Exactly as it sounds. Once you begin heightening your psychic sensitivity, you'll find that pretty much everything here in the Spirit World is reactive to psychic energy. It doesn't grant wishes by any means, but there is a lot that you can do. For instance, you can use it move yourself about, call friends, and ask a stranger for help. And that's just for starters," she explained.

"So, are you an angel?" I asked.

"Not really," she replied a bit more seriously. "The four of us are spirits. Angels are spirits who receive special training and who are dedicated to a purpose. What that specific purpose is depends on the particular host to which the angel belongs.

"Sadly," she continued, quite serious now, "Demons are the mirror of that. Special training and a dark purpose. And as you move on, you may find recruiters for both sides. Thankfully, there's not many here to be sure. It's mostly in Purgatory that you'll find the recruiters. That's a place where spirits go to find out which way they truly lean. It's an eye opening place to be sure. However, I would advise you against going there until you know much more about how everything works. And how to defend yourself."

"What do the people do who die and are so certain that they're going straight to Heaven and instead wind up here?" I asked. I happened to know a few holy rollers who'd died in a house fire a few years ago. I had been curious as to their... final disposition at the time. Evidently, I still was.

"That's a good question, Marion," Maria informed me. "I'll tell you what, why don't I answer it as we start exercising your abilities?" The three of us quickly agreed.

"Alright," she smiled. "First off, Alice? Please form us a table and a set of chairs."

"I don't know how to do that," the French woman replied with a frustrated frown.

"Concentrate on what you want to see," Maria explained quietly. "Picture it clearly in your mind and then project your desire. In the Spirit World that's usually enough to create what you want. Keeping it around will require continued concentration on your part, but as each person interacts with your table and chairs, they will help you to keep them around. Go ahead and give it a try."

Alice's brow furrowed a bit as she concentrated and before us a polished table and four chairs shimmered into existence.

"Oh Alice, that's wonderful!" I declared before impulsively giving her a hug. Strangely enough, I received the sudden impression that she was trying to make a new beginning and had a most peculiar fear of being alone. I realized that these feelings were actually coming from Alice. I knew how being lonely felt and didn't care for it any more than this woman did. I did my best to send thoughts of friendship and happiness to her... just in case she was getting similarly odd feelings from me.

"Thank you, Marion. However, as you can see, I lost my concentration and they faded away

again.”

“I’ll help you then,” I declared with a smile, grabbing her hand. “We’ll do it together.”

“Oui,” she agreed with a timid little smile for me. Returning her attention to the matter at hand, she concentrated on the table and chairs and I concentrated on helping her. Instead of the shimmer that presaged the arrival of the first table and chairs, this set snapped into being with an almost audible pop.

“Well done ladies!” Jack congratulated us as he first felt the back of a chair and then pulled it out for Allice to sit in. Allice seemed most pleased by his praise, increasing my suspicions about her intentions towards him. From the warmth in his voice as well as his occasional lingering gaze, I was suspecting the attraction was mutual. He then did the same for myself and Maria. I was surprised by just how comfortable the large chairs were.

In subsequent exercises we formed plates and silverware, cups and glasses, and a beautiful spray of flowers that Allice added as a centerpiece to the table. So far, these new rules were turning out alright. While everything faded away when our concentration dropped, making something new was becoming easier and easier.

A bit later we took turns walking off into the ether and then finding each other again. That was a little scary at first as one was alone almost instantly when you walked away from the immediate vicinity of another spirit. However, finding each other again was simply a matter of focusing on what you wanted. When you felt a distant tug, that was your desire finding the person you sought. At that point it was simply a matter of walking towards the person. And here, that was frequently just a couple of steps. Distance was a bit strange in the Spirit World.

Having had enough for a while, we went our separate ways. At least Maria and I left. I rather strongly suspected that Jack and Allice stayed together. After resting for a while, I checked to see if the others felt like having some company. I got a positive sensation back and walked about twenty steps through the ether to them.

We spent a little while socializing and suddenly stopped and looked at each other at the same time. It would appear that we’d all sensed Maria’s inquiry. Sending out a positive feeling in response, we only had to wait a moment before she stepped out of the ether.

“Now,” Maria began as she sat down on a seat that hadn’t been there a moment before. “If it’s alright with you, I’d like to show you the edge of one of the worlds that borders the Spirit World?”

“Oh, that would be neat!” I declared enthusiastically. While the other two weren’t quite as excited by the prospect, they did seem eager to see something other than the grey clouds that seemed to make up the Spirit World.

So Maria led us through the ether for quite a while. Eventually, we stopped before the first feature I’d seen in the Spirit World that one of the four of us hadn’t created. It was a huge, white wall that seemed to span any horizons that might exist here. It rose as high as I could see, it went left and right for as far as I could see, and it went down as far as I could see as well.

“Umm, just what is this place Maria?” I asked after studying the featureless wall.

“This is the place where one of the Creator’s great seals separates the Realm of Dreams from the Spirit World,” she replied quietly. “It was added after the Fall to prevent angry fallen angels from attacking and destroying the earth. Since then, demons and devils and such have turned to more roundabout means of creating ruination. I suppose in my mind I always think of it as something akin to the protective hand of the Creator delivering us from evil.”

“So there’s another realm of existence on the other side of the seal?” Jack asked.

“Indeed there is,” Maria confirmed. “And while it is closed to us by the great seal, there are certain ways of going around the edges.”

“Oh?” I asked. “How does that work?”

“Well, you focus on one particular piece of the seal. Then you project to someone who’s dreaming on the other side. It’s not an exact art by any means... but it will sometimes allow you to communicate with the living. Sorta.” Hmm. That had some real potential. Sharing a quick look with Jack, I could see that he was thinking along the same lines.

“This,” Maria continued, “Is one of the few ‘real’ positions within the Spirit World. Most of this world is shapeless. It changes according to our desires. However, there are a few locations that do not change. You cannot wish a door to appear in the great seal. You cannot go around it and it never changes. Therefore, it can be used as a reference point. This is something that might come in handy at a later time.” That had a rather interesting ring to it but it was obvious that she didn’t want to go into detail about it now.

“I’ll leave you here to explore around a little. Get used to the feel of the great seal. Later, I’ll show you a communal garden, introduce you to some folks, and start teaching you how to defend yourselves against attack.” At Alice’s look, she explained a bit more. “Crazy people die too and there’s not a specific place they go to. Everyone starts in the Spirit World. Also, if you run into a demonic recruiter and tell them ‘no’, sometimes they get upset. On occasion, they have been known to express this upset in most unpleasant ways. Self-defense is as important here as it is on earth. Maybe more more so.” And with that she faded away.

“Did you notice that she never did tell you what happened to people who lived with a certainty of heaven in their lives and ended up here instead?” Alice asked as she walked up and touched the great seal.

“I did,” I replied, walking over next to her and running my hands over the surface. “However, she did say that everyone starts here. There may be exceptions, but it didn’t sound like it to me. So maybe she did answer my question. Maybe...” My thoughts finished slipping away from talking and focused entirely upon the wall before me. It felt smooth. Perfectly smooth. Neither hot nor cold. It almost seemed to have an energy to it. I realized that I’d rather faded out of the conversation. “Sorry, this is most impressive. If, on the other hand, she didn’t actually answer the question, then I suspect that she changed her mind about the timing and is saving the answer for later. Or perhaps she simply forgot about it. To be honest, I found learning how to create things here to be far more interesting than the answer to the question likely was. I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if Maria didn’t recognize that fact.”

“I rather strongly suspect that Maria can read us like a book,” Jack stated thoughtfully as his eyes traveled over the wall that was the great seal.

“There’s a lot more to being dead than finding a nice cloud and playing a harp,” I mused aloud.

“Oui,” Alice agreed with a serious nod.

“I suspect that under this little piece of ice is a very large iceberg,” Jack stated as we looked upon one of the works of the Creator and pondered everything we had learned and all that remained before us.