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Great. I groaned down in my pull before I jumped up. Wrapping the blanket around me, I did the awkward penguin walk to the bathroom-like area with my clothes under one arm. I muttered all the animal-related curses I could think of as I heard People walk by, chucking down the hall.

This scenario would once have been my dirty little dream, a fantasy enough to make my cheeks heat up at any moment. It's a dream scene where I'm trapped on a ship with only incredibly handsome and well-trained men. But I felt more like a version of Wendy from Peter Pan. An. It was an imaginary story where I had been tasked with the impossible mission of babysitting a handful of kids with a beard, bad humor, and over 2 meters tall. All that was missing was that I would be tasked to wash their dirty underwear and their stiff and sticky single socks. The only reason for it must be that these overgrown kids don't have socks. A doomed Wendy figure that has to walk around model-like giants, alluring, dark, and with no clue about personal space. The hench wad they as saw her as a little sister.

I rolled my eyes at myself and realized I was still a little sulky after last night. Not only did Hades reject my advances, even if his cock was indeed tempted. He acted like something unheard of happened between us that left his hands dirty and tainted his innocent little soul. I scoffed. As if

Splashing water in my face from a wide bowl was the closest thing to washing up here: there were no sinks, running water, showers, or bathtubs. Drying off, I just hoped I didn't look like a half-dead animal as I dragged my feet out of the room.

I haven't seen a mirror in weeks, and I haven't shampooed or cared for

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my hair, and I haven't worn makeup, either. I always felt naked without some mascara and little help on my uneven brows. I mean, what is the point of having I never used my long, curved lashes if they are as good as invisible?

Luckily, the kitchen area was as good as empty, and I could eat peacefully. Looking down at my plate with two boiled eggs and some kind of lump with meat, I got a little nostalgic. The food tasted fine; there was way too little seasoning, but it was fine either way. But, after I came to this place, even when I found myself in the clutches of those psycho fay People, I always got fed. I never starved, and I was always offered water, fruit, or tea of some kind. Even when I felt like a bother or a torn in their side, I had never been refused food. Never did anyone withhold anything from me if we looked past these men's strange need to make decisions for me and decide which room I should stay in.

I knew it wasn't fair that my mom could not help it. That she had reached a point in her addiction, it had become an incurable disease. But I couldn't help but feel worthless. There had always been something more important than me. Parties, men, friends, a gig, a concert, or a meeting. She called them meetings, but I learned as I got older that it was just a bunch of people getting high on whatever they had managed to get their hands on together. It was a weird little support group of some kind where they helped each other get a fix.

Abandoned houses, warehouses, and old fabrics are about to fall apart. They had a nose for places like that after they stopped being in Mom's house. A cold shiver went down my spine thinking of it; what could have happened that last day she did so? Just that memory made me think that maybe she had cared in a way. She had made sure never to put me in that kind of situation again, alone and helpless. Well, at least she waited to invite them back into her home again until I was old enough to jump out

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the window, run away, or call for help on my own.

The food began to grow in my throat, and my vision blurred. Food, it was just food. It is so simple and easy, yet it could mean so much and trigger so much. It was a gesture of care most people don't even think about. Not one day in that cabin or on this ship had I made my own food. There was always an extra plate for me or leftovers put aside for me.

Have I been too harsh on these people? Am I acting like a spoiled brat? This time, I questioned myself without that heavy guilt completely overtaking me. But it left a sour taste in my mouth. For, in one way, yes, yes, I was. This was a different world; luxuries here were having a roof over your head, food in your belly, and the ability to rely on the people around you.

On the other hand, I didn't feel like I was wrong. I didn't feel it should give them the right, anyone for that matter, the right to treat me as an object. Act like I was something they owned and turn to raw muscle powers and force if I didn't obediently bow my head and agree.

The kitchenette door slammed open, and I quickly wiped my face off with my sleeve. I washed down the food that felt like it had expanded in my throat and mentally put on my old mask. I turned around to face the person waiting at the door with a smile and playfully arched a brow. My heart beat harder, and I struggled to keep my smile normal and don't let it be too stiff. Arcane eyes looked over me with caution, taking me in and threatening to rip my smiling mask off. And for a second, I feared that he would manage it. So, like nothing happened, I turned back to my food but decided to grab my water instead. I'm not sure I'll be able to swallow another bite right now. Everything inside me is fighting it, fighting me and my mask.

"What's up, Arcane?"

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He didn't answer at first, and I did my best to fill my lungs slowly. I didn't want him to hear my desperate need to hide my nerves and raging heart and not want him to know my broken mind and soul. This is not a world for weakness. I focused on my glass and built up my mental walls, my fake calm and stoic personality.

No matter how close I feel we are right now, this is a part I'm unwilling to share. A part they can't know, fearing it can be used against me at my weakest point at a crucial moment. I knew I could be cold; I knew most people back where I used to belong thought of me as a cold and emotionless person. I was not far from it, but it was my way of coping. The way I learned to protect myself and give myself time to think ahead, I got good at it. I was controlling my emotions, putting them away.

Despite this, and despite the fact that I know it doesn't show on my face, my heart clenched when I heard how worried his voice was when he asked how I was. But I had to push it aside; I could not dwell on that or let it sink; it would ruin everything. So again, that smile, accompanied by a burst of dry, unamused laughter—one I, strangely enough, did not have to fake.

"Oh, you mean do I like being forced on a ship? Like being attacked and bit by the man who claimed I was his mate? Or did you refer to the fact that I am currently living in a world I didn't know existed before I suddenly woke up here? Do I feel weak and helpless as a human surrounded by monsters with fangs and claws? Arcane, you need to be more specific."

Again, that nerve-racking silence followed, but then he sighed. Deeply and clearly frustrated, but he let it go, and my mood did a 180-degree turn at his following words,

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“Fine. A conversation for later. But they are here now; their ship just sailed up next to us, and they are boarding as we speak. Do you want to meet them?”

“Yes!”

I breathed out, the thud of my heart beating between my lips. Because I wanted to meet these people. I wanted to know what all this was about, but I was also nervous. What would it mean if I'm not the one they're looking for? And what would it mean if I were?

I couldn't believe my eyes as I took in the man slowly turning in my direction as I stepped out on the deck. A beaming smile lit up his whole face, and I felt even more confused than before.


Comments

AD is coming


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