

*Elijah is there. Elijah is standing there in the airport and he's holding you, but he pulls back and there are tears streaming down his cheeks and you try to reach him but there's a giant wall of Plexiglas.*

Aletheia startled awake. She glanced over at Edgar, on the futon next to her. He was sound asleep. She got up and out of bed, grabbing her tarot cards and diary as she walked into the living room. She didn't know why she grabbed her tarot cards. There wasn't a point. Not really.

Aletheia walked over to the large window in their small apartment and pushed back the curtains. It was dark out, dark and quiet, but the tram that went into Tokyo, it was still running. It went racing by and then the night was still again. Amazing that it ran this late, especially this far out, and even after being in Tokyo for nearly two years, the extent of the mass transit still awed her.

Aletheia sighed. She wrote down her question: *How will Elijah respond if I email him?* But even after she wrote it, she sat and stared at it. What she really wanted to know was if it were safe to go back yet, but first things first. She didn't even know if Elijah would want anything to do with her, it had been so long, and after that email—God, he so clearly missed her. He so clearly wanted her back there. That email made her wonder about the flashes all over again, but that wasn't why she didn't respond. No, it was his wonder at her new life, his oozing enthusiasm for the amazing experiences she was embarking upon that left her frozen. She told herself she'd write the next day and then the day after that and then the day after that. A week passed, then two, and after three she wondered what kind of excuse she could provide, and before she knew it, it had been a couple of months, and she certainly didn't dare then, and now it had been almost a year.

She still didn't have a suitable reply for her former mentor.

She'd met Elijah through Edgar, shortly after she accepted Edgar's wedding proposal. Edgar was an initiate into Children of the Voice, C.V., a magickal order blending the Rosicrucian tradition with the writings of Aleister Crowley and the esoteric belief system known as Thelema. Edgar's participation was spotty; he'd got involved back when he was in Tucson and abusing meth and when his addiction degenerated into severe, he dropped out. Elijah brought him back, and then Edgar dropped out again but Elijah just wouldn't give up on him. Elijah welcomed Aletheia instantly and introduced her to Mae, who was also welcoming, in her own way.

It was only when she became priestess that everything got weird.

Aletheia shook the thought out.

Okay, she was going to ask this. She was going to pick up her cards and ask.

Come on, you can do this.

No, I can't.

Yes, you can. It's fine. It will be fine. It's been nearly two years, and anyhow, for how long did you read cards before that and nothing ever happened? Don't be a coward.

Seriously, what's wrong with you?

Right. Yes. Something was wrong with her.

The only thing wrong with you is that you're a coward.

Aletheia picked up the cards. They still felt so smooth in her hands, so nice. She shuffled.

*Heidi's back. She never died, and the demon took hold again and now she's come all the way to Japan to get you.*

Stop that.

*Edgar's crossing the street and he's laughing and talking and then out of nowhere, it's a gunshot. He looks too much like someone that somebody wanted to kill, and now he's laying on the ground, bloody and breathing his last breath.*

I mean it. Stop that.

*Arturo is here. It's his ghost. He wants to know why you couldn't just come in the rain and meet him and now he's walking for all eternity, unable to find rest.*

SHUT UP!

*Elijah got your email. He responds saying, "You have a lot of nerve contacting me after all of this time, and after everything I did for you, too."*

Aletheia tossed the deck down. She scratched out her question and closed her diary.

It was the next night, and again it was another night of bad dreams.

*She's back on stage, and she's priestess and just as she takes off her robe, the stage starts falling apart. Not even falling apart, but melting, and everyone and everything around her is melting. She turns up the air conditioning and turns on the fans, doing everything she can. Edgar turns to her and says, "I told you that you shouldn't be priestess," and she looks down at her naked body, but it's covered with soot.*

Aletheia startled awake again, but it came earlier tonight, and Edgar hadn't come to bed yet. She sighed. She wouldn't bring her tarot cards with her this time. No, she'd watch footage from her show.

Oh yeah, that.

Things were bad when Sachi approached her table. Edgar was so skinny by then, and Mae was right, Edgar's promise to keep his promise, to go back to keeping his promise was for naught. He was on one of his trips for his side business when Sachi sat down at Aletheia's table. The woman was an up and coming director, working for a major network in Tokyo. She looked so glamorous, with her dark sunglasses and braid slung over her shoulder.

"You're very good at this and you have quite the stage presence about you," Sachi said. "And I like the aura of elitism that you project. It's just the look we're going for."

"We?"

"The network, for a reality show in Japan about an American occultist that hunts yokai and yurei—I believe you call them poltergeists and ghosts? I'd like for you to star on the show."

"It's in Japan?"

"Tokyo, but the show will give you the chance to travel all over the country. It's an excellent opportunity. We'll pay you extremely well."

"I don't speak Japanese."

"You'll pick it up and the entire cast is fluent in English. Are you interested?"

"I'd have to talk to my husband. Oh, and we have a cat."

"Cats are very popular in Japan."

"Can I think about it?"

Sachi opened her bag and pulled out a manila envelope. "This is the contract. Look over it. I can give you 48 hours, after that I have to scout for other candidates. I don't want this trip to go to waste."

But Sachi wanted Aletheia for the job more than she let on. When Aletheia ~~no, don't think about that~~ when it became clear she should take the job, she asked Sachi if she could have Edgar as her cameraman. Sachi, surprisingly, didn't even inquire as to Edgar's background, she just said, "I'll amend the contract. When did you want to meet to sign?"

After that, it was a matter of bringing it up to Edgar, seeing if he was on board.

“I can cancel our breakfast meeting if you really don’t want to do it. I just know you’re always talking about wanting to get out, and wanting to get back behind the camera. I thought it would be a great opportunity.”

She saw it in Edgar’s eyes. He knew why, or thought he did, but he knew that it was because he wouldn’t stop, because this was the only way she could think of to get him to stop. He didn’t know the half of it, and she didn’t even know how to begin to tell him, and she shook at the mere thought of trying, so she just said, “Really, we don’t have to do it. We have friends here and a good life here,” and then her own eyes flickered at that, “but it’s a good opportunity for both of us.”

“No,” Edgar feigned a smile. “No, let’s do it. Wow, Japan, huh? That will be an adventure and a half.”

“It will!” And then she walked into the bathroom, shut the door, locked it, slumped down on the floor and cried.

But what she wasn’t expecting to find was that the yokai were real.

It had only been one sighting, a couple of weeks after she started, in Tokyo’s red light district. It was an eight-foot, heavysset, green-tinted prostitute yokai wearing a teddy and Edgar spotted her first. Haruki, the lighting guy, he spotted her, too, but he didn’t dare admit to Sachi what he’d seen; Aletheia couldn’t quite figure out why he wasn’t backing up their story until Sachi presented Aletheia with the costume. Sachi had explained it to her, something about how they were changing the show’s focus to make her a sort of bungling Fox Mulder, and they needed the costumes so that the audience would understand it was supposed to be funny, how it would really help with attracting viewers and so forth. Aletheia didn’t understand, but she didn’t want to offend Sachi. She went with it, and Sachi was right. She became a celebrity overnight, but the shift in persona turned Aletheia’s stomach a bit.

Aletheia hadn’t seen a yokai since then, but it stuck with her, and while the comedic element was so far from who she was, she found herself increasingly becoming obsessed with yokai. She supposed she wanted Sachi to see one for herself, to rub her nose in that which Sachi made such light of, thought was such a big joke, but Aletheia was genuinely curious after the yokai sighting, too. She’d taken to reading up on it after the first sighting. She supposed, also, that she was homesick for her lessons with Elijah. He always gave her

such massive reading assignments, and she'd tie herself into a pretzel over them, worried sick that she'd come off stupid or lazy or anything else that might give him pause, but she also really enjoyed her occult studies. But unlike her lessons with Elijah, Aletheia had no one to bring her yokai questions to—Edgar knew less about it than Aletheia did and any mention of them caused a spate of jokes to circle around the cast, especially from Sachi and the producer Ayumu—and yet, despite that, she inhaled yokai and yurei until she'd learned everything she possibly could.

Wait, what was that?

Aletheia was yanked out of her ruminations by what seemed to be a glitch on the screen, a small piece of static, but no. She paused it. It wasn't a glitch. It was a disturbance. Oh my God! They'd missed that, but it was there. It was right there.

Tattooed arms wrapped around her. Oh yes, that was another change. Edgar was covered with tattoos now. "Hey, are you okay?"

"Aokigahara. I'd like to go back there. I think you almost caught a soul," Aletheia said.

"A sequel episode, you mean? Are you sure they'd go for that?"

"No, I mean us, just for a day, the next chance we get. I can't believe I didn't see it. I mean, it's Suicide Forest. Of course there would be a yurei around there. I guess it's just been so long. Finding another sighting is this thing in the back of my mind that I want to happen, but with all the jokes, and all the lame assignments, even I forget how real this is sometimes."

Edgar removed his arms and walked around to sit in front of Aletheia on the floor.

"Sure. Hey, what do you think of a little Aletheia?"

"What?"

"Or a little Edgar, I guess that part is up to nature, but a little Aletheia sounds better."

"Since when do you want kids?"

"I never wanted kids before but I guess now that our time for that is finite, it's starting to sound appealing, or maybe it's just your marvelous genes, I'm not sure."

Aletheia laughed. "God, the network would freak."

"Yeah, but we can't stay here forever."

"Are you getting sick of it already?"

“Nah, but it’s reality TV. That can change on a dime and anyhow, we could do all sorts of things back home. Maybe we could open an occult bookstore or even a ghost hunter business. Or, hey, maybe you could write a memoir about your time here. No need to put our lives on hold for something that could change at any time.”

Aletheia thought about her failed attempt to give herself a tarot reading the other night. “I’d kind of like to milk this for as long as I can. And, anyhow, I still need to prove to these people that yokai really exist.”

“Well, can we at least pretend?”

“Pretend what?”

Edgar gave a devilish grin. “That we’re trying?”

Aletheia smiled. She stood up, took a few steps towards the bedroom and then turned around. “Well? Are you coming?”

She didn’t have to ask him twice.

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