

Rendezvous No. 2

Vignettes from Azuaveria — Episode 12

@dressupgeekout

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Waterwheel Turn 102, Day 89. The fox Julius Marlsay and the border collie Alondra Stafferet conducted their second rendezvous, once again at the performing arts plaza, at the edge of downtown and the Cargo District. The Cargo District's border was far fuzzier than it is today, a combination of strict zoning laws which had not yet come into effect and the fact there simply was less cargo altogether. In the Waterwheel Era, all cargo could fit close to the water's edge, rather than sprawling into its own town as it does currently. Furthermore, Port Sokuit had only two crank-cranes in those days, rather than today's eight engine-powered behemoths.

Yet another performance was scheduled at the symphony. Alondra's grandfather was indeed working, and she did originally have plans to attend the performance with her mother, as was becoming their Seventhday (the Waterwheel name for "Saturday") tradition. But this time, Alondra had managed yet again to successfully convince her mother to leave her alone with the "agreeable" and "charming" gentlebeast.

Julius was already waiting. He looked smart in the dressiest shirt he owned. He had arrived far earlier than usual — early enough to have his own seat at one of the public tables on the far end of the plaza. It was also early enough such that the low sun shone directly into his face. He alternately squinted and shielded his eyes with a paw as he waited.

In the pocket of his corduroy trousers rested his week's wages from delivering newspapers. The very first day after Julius' ice cream date, he hunted for jobs, and found one very quickly. Marlsay Senior was pleasantly surprised to see his pupper *volunteer* to work, to contribute to the family. He was not going to force his son to find a job, or even suggest it to him, until at least one year later. The bricklaying gig was still enough to support the family, at least for the time being.

It was only a couple dollars and some shells, but Julius earned it. He pawed the coins between thumb and forefinger. And it was all for that preppy collie.

Speaking of whom. Between squints, he saw her and her mother exchange a few words. Alondra pointed in the fox's direction, and Mother waved politely. Julius smiled, tilted his head and flicked his wrist in acknowledgement, the nonchalance of the gesture as conspicuous as the morning headlines. Alondra's mother kissed her daughter on the forehead, turned, and headed inside the concert hall. Alondra skipped to Julius' table. She wore a sun-dress, a wide-brimmed hat beribboned with a chain of zinnia, and the taffeta scarf again.

Like Julius, she was not wearing shoes. By the Maker, she was pretty even without shoes. There's something about bare digitigrade hindpaws which instantly makes teenage pups froth at the mouth.

"Again, just lettin' ya off the leash!" Julius observed. He stood.

"Mother has granted me a surprising degree of liberty. I believe she is starting to treat me like the independent woman I am."

"What about yer dad?"

"He always works."

"Right shame."

"I agree, Mister Julius. Although, I do suppose he approves of our meeting after all. He did not object when I told him I had met a young fox in town."

Julius smiled knowingly, like a fox knows.

"What did you want to do this evening, Julius?"

"Actually, 'londra, I was wonderin' if we could go to the symphony."

Alondra was taken aback. "Ah, well..." She tucked a lock of black hair behind her ear in contemplation. "I had given up my symphony date to spend time with you."

"Don't ya've tickets?"

"Yes, *I* do, but I am afraid *you* do not."

"Oh, don't worry, I'll buy a ticket. I've got some money!" In a flash, Julius produced the dollar-coins and the leftover shell-coins from his pocket. He displayed them proudly in his paw. Alondra stifled a laugh, her mouth a crooked line of embarrassment.

"Mister Julius, that is certainly insufficient funds. I learned that is a better

way of saying ‘you do not have enough money!’”

Julius’ pride melted like iced cream on the sidewalk.

“Forget it,” he mumbled, thrusting the money back into his trousers.

“Do not be indignant,” Alondra tried to say soothingly. “I might be able to let you borrow Mother’s season pass next week!” She actually had no idea whether that’d be possible.

“You’d do that fer me?” Julius asked with an exaggerated pupper’s wonderment.

“I know that you are a fox of modest means. But you love music so very much. It is a shame they do not let anybeast listen to the music out here in the plaza.”

“Now *that’d* be cool,” Julius stated.

“What shall we do in the meantime?”

If Julius wasn’t going to taste honey tonight, then he might as well have some fun. “Wanna have some fun?” he asked blatantly.

The black spots on Alondra’s face turned white.

“Naw, naw! I mean, amusement.”

“What could you possibly mean, Mister Marlsay?”

“This is the most money I’ve ever had in my life. Let’s go to the Boardwalk! D’ya like pinball?”

“P-p-pinball?” Alondra sputtered. She never sputtered.

The cable-trolley ride took longer than anticipated, which worried Alondra slightly. It occurred to her she’d need to account for the time to make the trip back to the plaza, or at least closer to her house. Mother would surely be worried... but how could a teenage girl resist Julius’ *bare digitigrade hindpaws?! She dared not swoon at the sight, for it was not ladylike nor proper. She forced herself to not look down as Julius verbally and relentlessly stewed over his recent discovery of a pup who never played pinball before.*

The popular destination to which they were headed caused the trolley to become increasingly cramped, which coerced the two animals to huddle closer together than ever before. Up until this point, they had barely shook paws. But as a large brown bear boarded the already-crowded trolley, their four hindpaws were suddenly piled on top of one another to make room.

Julius abruptly interrupted himself in the middle of his pinball monologue with a stunned “Woah.” Alondra gasped a little too loudly.

It was not an unfamiliar sight, even in the Waterwheel Era. Bare hindpaws were practical, and common. The standards of beauty favoring digitigrade over plantigrade were already firmly in place, too. And animals frequently found themselves in compromising positions in the diminutive cable-trolleys. The two pups knew all this. But for the first time, they learned that touching hindpaws feels good, too. A most novel sensation. The sort of sensation which zips a shiver through a fox’s spine and out their tail, or which makes a border collie’s abdomen crunch and their heart twitch.

“Julius...”

Julius shook his head. Back into reality. “Alondra.”

She looked *straight down*, eyes wide open. Again, the black spots on her face had blanched. “Your hindpaws and my hindpaws are intermingled.”

He looked down, too. “Yeah, thassright.”

“I learned the word ‘intermingle’ the other day. I also learned the word ‘conglomerate’ but I am not sure if that applies to the current predicament...”

“What’s conglom’rate?”

“Conglomerate, verb, to form or gather into a mass or whole. But they use it to describe certain kinds of rocks.”

“We’re not rocks.”

“No, but I *am* petrified.”