

VII.

The Painting

The week passed in misery. I was sore and aching and shaking with chills the whole weekend through, and by Monday I still didn't have the strength to get to class, or do more than plod between my bed and the couch. Salvador made a point of going to each of my professors on Monday to pick up any material that was handed out during class, and he even went so far as to do a good chunk of my homework for me, insisting it was all "dumb busy work" and that I should rest.

It must have been just as exhausting for him, but if it was, he didn't show it. He took a lot of time out of his day for me. He cooked meals for me, or brought fast food home after class. I hardly had an appetite, but he insisted I eat, to help me recover. He also kept me on a steady diet of vitamin C supplements and cold medicine, which admittedly helped. By Tuesday I was able to feed myself again, but Salvador brought home food anyways and insisted I ate it. My appetite was returning in force after a long weekend of unplanned fasting, and I gave in to his suggestion with little resistance.

By Wednesday, I was able to return to class, still feeling unwell, but for the most part recovered. The walk to class left me winded and wanting to sleep, but with the help of an embarrassing amount of coffee I managed to survive the day, and the day after that. Then came Friday, no classes. But, Salvador and I had plans. Our Art History class required that we go to an art museum just off campus and do some research on one of the pieces that was there. We had made plans to go Friday, and despite my still-not-quite recovered condition, I was well enough to insist on going.

The museum wasn't too busy, and most of the people there were college students about my age, likely all other art and history students. There were modern art sculptures and paintings in one section, and classical works in another, and ancient stuff in yet another. Salvador was enthralled by the works. I, not so much. But I tagged along behind him and kept my tired ears tuned into his voice, knowing that the knowledge he was spouting would be useful for the paper he had been helping me with.

After about half an hour of walking, I needed to sit down. I told Salvador to go ahead without me, and he left me on a bench with a nod. I sat back, and rubbed my thighs. My heart felt old and tired, and my legs were quivering with weakness. I gave myself a quick punch in the leg, and they stopped shaking. I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths to get rid of the feeling of being winded. I was still pretty messed up.

I hadn't noticed it before, but an old painting was hanging high up on the wall beside me. I looked over at the information placard that was on the wall. It was an oil painting from the 1700's that had recently been restored. It had only been on display for about a week. I looked up to it, but was too close to the wall to see it past the bulge of the frame it was in. With a languid sigh I got to my feet and stepped back to get a good look at it.

The painting was a bust of what I assumed was an old Slavic dignitary. It was a profile view of his face. His nose was turned up, and he looked down at me with disdain burning in his painted, ghostly-blue eyes. Dark fur wreathed his sockets, making it look like he had dark circles under them from sleeplessness. His hair merged with a back-mane that disappeared behind the collar of a pressed black coat.

I muttered a “whoa” to myself, and my eyes widened. I turned in place and scanned the crowd for my roommate. I saw him a couple exhibits away. My languor vanquished, I ran to him and grabbed him by the wrist and led him away. “Salvador, you have to see this!”

“O-oh, did you find a piece you like?” he asked, confused, as I pulled him through the crowd.

I stopped before the painting, and turned Salvador to the side and tapped his chin, making him turn up his nose. “Pretend you hate me,” I ordered.

“Why? What are we doing?”

“Just do it.”

He scowled at me with a huff. “Tell me what-”

“Oh my god it’s you.”

“What?”

I turned him around and pointed at the painting. Salvador and the striped hyena in the painting looked damn near identical. He looked at it, puzzled, then took out his phone and looked into his reflection on the black screen. He glanced up at the painting, and back at the screen, and back at the painting. He furrowed his brow for a moment, and then looked at me with bewilderment. “Holy... that is uncanny.”

“Who is that?” I asked, unable to keep myself from looking between his face and the face in the oil paint.

Salvador stepped up to the placard. “It says that it’s a portrait of Viscount Radoslav. And a date. That’s about it.”

“This three-hundred-year old dude looks exactly like you, that is so fucking cool.”

“I might be descended from him?” Salvador ventured in response to my statement. His first name and my last name are from the same language, as far as I can tell,” he said as he scrutinized the painting.

“You wouldn’t know if you’re descended from royalty?”

“Do you know your family any farther back than your great grandparents?” He put his hands on his hips and gave me a disappointed look.

“N-no...” I looked away from him, finally realizing how ridiculous I was being. “Sorry, augh.” I put a hand to my head and sat back down. “Guess it’s just a coincidence huh?”

“Guess so.” He looked down at me, and I couldn’t read the expression on his face. “Well, I’m flattered you think we look alike. He’s damn gorgeous,” Salvador said as he struck a pose and grinned at me.

I chuckled and shook my head. “Dork. Did you see everything you needed to? I think I need to head back to the apartment for a nap.”

“Mmh, yeah, I’m good for now. We can head back.” He offered me his hand, and I took it, and he pulled me to my feet. “Come on sleepyhead, let’s get you home.”