

A VERY *Fala* HOLIDAY



NUN 

ABOUT THE ZINE

A new leaf turns, there is a chill in the air and a little spice in your latte to signal the holiday cheer. This special edition of **NUN** is about the diverse things we celebrate at the close of a challenging year – a year of waiting and anticipating, of scrambling to find crumbs of content and behind the scenes photos. It has been 365 days of holding on to hope that in an editing software somewhere, a new season of our show is brewing – even BOILING! – to warm our freezing bones. Next year, we will collect our Warrior Nun season 2. For now, we feast.

In this volume or the next.

MEET THE TEAM!

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Leo, Lu, Seas

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Lu, Leo, Nahrain, Seas, Giselle

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Social media

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Event

Kal, Z, Seas, Giselle, Nahrain, Thamy, Chi, Lu, Leo

ABOUT THE COVER

Brought to life by **Mari (@schereeer, Twitter)**, the sisters rest their cudgels and put down their weapons to share a moment in the light, to bask in green and red sparks at the end of a dark, wearisome tunnel. The weather is chillier, but no one shivers, for they now have their arms around one another. On a table somewhere, a feast will have to wait, for they still have their bellies full of laughter. There were angels all around, not to fight, but the ones they taught Ava how to make on the snow.

The halo is glowing, yet the heat it gives off is nothing compared to the warmth in their hearts.

ABOUT THE CENTERFOLD

A messianic figure, a few characters seated on one side of a long table, and a traitor – the centerfold of **NUN: A Very Halo Holiday** pays homage to one of Leonardo da Vinci's most popular paintings, by no means a small feat for **@babyhellboy (Twitter)**. However, we doubt that this supper will be Ava's last. Decked in their best animal onesies because someone forgot to invite Chanel (she gatecrashed), the Warrior Nun gang tries to celebrate every end of the year holiday they can think of in one dinner party to get them over with and out of the way of their busy demon-fighting schedule.

We wonder... who will be given a kiss?

WHAT'S INSIDE...

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Bread of God

WRITTEN BY @ANALOGOOSE (TWITTER)

“Do you believe in ghosts?”

The question catches her by surprise. Here, in this space carved between the hours that blur night from day, exists a private moment that Beatrice has accidentally stumbled upon. Ava stands over a wooden table, bathed in low yellow light, head bowed in mourning and arms stationary at her sides as she stares at the items laid out in front of her.

Beatrice shifts her feet, debating whether she should murmur an apology for her disturbance and make a quick exit. Then, at Ava’s slightly amused look addressing the prolonged silence, she remembers that a question was asked. “Scripture—”

The corner of Ava’s mouth twitches in a smile, almost expectant as if she had already predicted Beatrice’s deferral. She gently shakes her head, leading Beatrice to trail off into an uneasy silence.

She purses her lips and tries again. “When you’ve been in our line of work for long enough, you quickly become accustomed to fearing other, more malicious entities.”

Ava hums in quiet consideration, gaze still focused on the odd collection of ingredients. Her index finger taps on the wood restlessly. “I see my mom sometimes,” she confesses softly, her tone deliberately light despite the immediate curl of a fist.

Beatrice opens her mouth to speak but finds it empty. An uncomfortable feeling grows in her chest as Ava’s sentence hangs in the air, suspended in its dying moment as gravity ceases to exist.

She helplessly watches as Ava’s chest slowly rises and falls before she exhales a half-laugh like she’s admonishing herself for oversharing. Beatrice recognizes it for what it is - Ava’s attempt to tread them back into safer waters. “I forgot coconut shavings,” she mumbles halfheartedly, tugging off her apron and throwing it on the back of the chair. Her exit is swift, brushing past Beatrice with a tight smile as she leaves her behind in the empty kitchen.

They’re settled in a small town nestled in the heart of Portugal, aimlessly wandering the cobbled streets, using the moment as a reprieve from all the constant traveling they’ve had to endure in the last month.

The streets are lined with color; decorative paper lanterns and multicolored garlands intertwined with string lights are hanging from corner to corner, all in preparation for Día de Todos los Santos. Bouquets of yellow, pink, and white chrysanthemums are being sold at almost every stall, the air thick with the smell of dried fruit and traditional sweetbreads. The celebratory atmosphere is doing wonders for group morale - even Lilith, who is known for her prickliness, has tucked in her quills today as she good-naturedly lets Camila drag them to whatever catches her eye.

All except for Ava, who trails behind them, unexpectedly somber.

It’s an unusual state, one that Beatrice is at a severe loss on how to address. She feels all kinds of wrong-footed as she silently observes their Halo Bearer, mind running through the list of ingredients she had seen scattered on the table, two nights ago.

Flour, eggs, butter, yeast, sugar, vanilla extract. Some type of cake, perhaps? Not plain, the mention of coconut shavings suggested something more.

Ava’s solemn gaze flutters at the sight of baked goods, her steps faltering as they pass by the *padaria* window. Beatrice’s eyes narrow as she runs through the ingredient list again, replaying their short conversation, and analyzing Ava’s lingering looks at the festive decorations.

Oh. The realization dawns on her, like the sun breaking through the horizon. She understands the recipe - the gravity of the moment that they shared in the quiet of the night. Beatrice eyes the trio from the corner of her eye, watching as Mary pokes fun at Lilith’s unusual agreeableness to everything Camila is saying before focusing back on Ava, who still looks a little lost. Beatrice’s forehead relaxes, frown disappearing as a plan already starts to form in her mind.

She’ll have to remember to stop by the market for some coconut.



Pão de Deus

When Ava steps into the kitchen that night, Beatrice is already there, waiting for her. The Halo Bearer looks surprised, hesitantly hovering at the entryway before Beatrice beckons her in with a welcoming smile. Her back is turned towards the stove, blocking it from view. “My family was never one for any traditions - holidays, or otherwise,” she shares, fingers loosely clasped in front of her dirty apron as she tries not to spook her jumpy neighbor.

Beatrice huffs a laugh, gaze unfocused as she recounts the fond memories, “Shannon did this thing - every month, she would take an important item from Mother Superior’s office and leave it in one of the girls’ rooms. That person had the rest of the day to return the item without Mother finding out who it was. If you were caught, you had to be the one to take the next item.” She pauses, eyes twinkling mischievously, “I think you remember Lilith’s outburst about her missing collection of duck stamps last week.” Ava’s mouth drops in realization, releasing a laugh of disbelief.

Beatrice softly steps aside from the stove to reveal a batch

of freshly baked sweetbread resting behind her. Ava gasps, eyes reverently drinking in the sight of the pão de Deus and its cracked coconut crust. “What I’m saying is,” Beatrice continues, “Not all traditions have to be lost, even if the people we celebrated them with aren’t here anymore.”

Ava’s gaze is watery when she turns to face Beatrice. “She would make them every year for the neighborhood kids.” She releases a choked laugh, phantom memories playing out behind her eyes, “I’d always sneak in and eat most of them before she even got around to passing them out.”

Beatrice’s smile is teasing, “I won’t begrudge you if you decide to eat all of these before the others wake.”

Ava replies with a half-hearted snort, eying the mess of ingredients with a curious gleam. “Maybe we can make more... together?” she asks in a hopeful tone.

“Of course,” Beatrice whispers, already reaching for the mixing bowl.

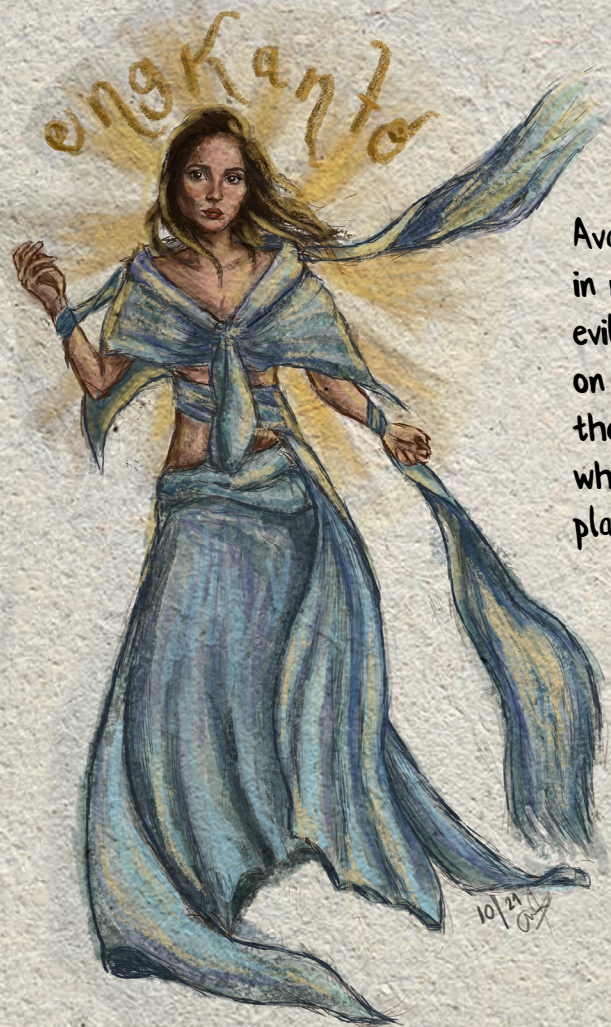
Today is 21st October 2021, so not long until Halloween now! The OCS forbade us from celebrating it but those days are behind us and Ava beyond excited. It's the first time she is going to be able to celebrate Halloween outside of the orphanage, so we want to make it special even if the times are- Well. Let's not get into that. Anyway, I found a book on Filipino mythology the other day. It's fascinating! I couldn't help but imagine the others as figures from the stories I read and I may have gotten a bit carried away with my sketches...

All of this has also got me thinking; we live in a world with demons and devils, so maybe other myths and legends are real too. Who knows what else we may end up facing in the future?

Camila's Journal

WRITTEN BY @WARRIORNUNPROMO (TWITTER)

ART BY @ARIELLEYSABELE (INSTAGRAM)



Ava as an **engkanto** or a **diwata**, a spirit that dwells in rivers and the woods. An engkanto can be good or evil, and is often known to be playful. They pull pranks on humans, making them forgetful and rearranging their things. It is good advice to ask permission whenever passing by an unknown area in a remote place, lest you disturb their dwelling.



From the root word "tanggal" which means to remove, Lilith as a **manananggal**, a mythical monster that splits in half crosswise from the torso up. The upper up flies off to prey on humans for their organs. Their particular favorites to hunt are pregnant people. Using their long tongues as a proboscis, they suck the unborn fetus right out of their victim's stomach for a satisfying meal.

Beatrice as a **tikbalang**, a centaur. They are said to be as tall as five coconut trees and invisible, often dwelling in old forests and big,



Shotgun Mary as a **mambabaring**, a sorcerer who employs dark magic. Typical of a mambabaring, she uses insects to inflict pain against those who have wronged her.



OF A TALKING HEAD IN A BAG

WRITTEN BY @WN_UNPARALLELED (TWITTER)

Ava sat in the middle of the tub in the white bathing suit that Beatrice insisted she wear. The Halo Bearer had no qualms about getting naked in front of the nun, not when she already had made her feelings known to the other woman, by accident, of course.

"Well, what do you want?" Beatrice asked. They were standing in line at a McDonald's because Ava remarked that she did not remember ever having an American cheeseburger. It was just one of those one-liners that she threw around, not really expecting any of her friends to catch on. But Sister Photographic Memory always remembers, and she asked Camila to drop them off at a McDonald's that was on the way to the Cat's Cradle.

Beatrice was so busy looking up at the illuminated menu board that she did not notice Ava was just staring at her.

"Ava, what do you want? We're holding up the line," Beatrice repeated.

"I want to kiss you," the Halo Bearer replied. Both the nun and the kid at the cash register stared at her in surprise. A shade of red crept up Beatrice's neck all the way up to her cheeks. Good thing she was wearing civilian clothes that day.

"Did I say that out loud?" Ava asked both the nun and the kid.

"By all means, just make it quick, you're holding up the line," he replied.

"Make w-what q-quick?" Beatrice asked, stammering. The nun never stammered. She blinked her eyes rapidly, her long eyelashes fluttering, trying to look everywhere but where Ava stood.

"Kiss her, it's what your girlfriend wants," the kid replied.

Beatrice cleared her throat and straightened her back. "We're having two tuna Mediterranean salads," she said.

"Tuna? We're here for a burger," Ava pouted.

"I asked and you did not tell me what you wanted."

The Halo Bearer groaned. When their order arrived, Beatrice grabbed the bags

and headed for the door without another word.

The pair never spoke about what happened, but since then, Beatrice had been more generous to Ava in many ways. The nun spent more time with the Halo Bearer to the point that when their friends were looking for one, they would surely find her with the other.

"Hey, have you seen Ava?" Lilith asked, popping her head in her friend's room. "I was supposed to help her with her costume for later."

"No idea. Have you tried Beatrice? She's never without her pet Halo Bearer," Mary replied, looking up from the journal of the Warrior Nun in order to throw Lilith a knowing look.

Beatrice sat on a stool next to the tub and turned on the tap. There was no central water heating system in the Cat's Cradle and the nuns had to chop up wood for fire as part of their training. Good thing Ava could spare Beatrice all that manual labor. The nun always reprimanded her for using the Halo to do her chores, but she did not want her favorite person to get tired.

Once the tub has filled up to her chest, Ava proceeded to activate the Halo in order to heat the water up. It cast a faint yellow light that illuminated the dark bathroom stall, its soft glow shining on Beatrice's brown eyes.

"Ava, normally I would disapprove of this..." Beatrice started.

"But it's so late in the night and you are tired," Ava said, beaming at the nun. Beatrice took the Halo Bearer's hand gently, inspecting the damage on her arms. Her bare skin was riddled with angry red spots, each center oozing with a yellow substance.

"Ow! Beatrice, careful, please," Ava pleaded. It was really not that painful. If it were Mary or Lilith with her now, she would just probably suck it up. But the Halo Bearer felt the intense need to be cared for when it was Beatrice doing the caring.

"Sorry, this paint is difficult to remove. Why did you have to go as someone riddled with blisters?" Beatrice sighed. There were more marks on Ava's skin than she anticipated.

"These are not blisters," Ava said defensively. "You really have no idea what I went as tonight?"

The nun shook her head. "You should have worn a costume that's easier to take off. We are attending two Halloween events in a row."

A few hours ago, the Cat's Cradle hosted its very first Halloween dinner. Nothing fancy, just a simple feast with the nuns dressed up in costumes. Mother Superior prohibited any occult imagery so they dressed up as fictional characters. Mary, Lilith, Camila and another nun called Teresa went as the Teletubbies. Beatrice went as Tinkerbell.

Tomorrow, the sisters of the OCS would be chaperoning the orphans from St. Michael's to go treat or treating in their neighborhood. It was Ava's project, one that Beatrice was only too happy to see into fruition.

"How about I give you a clue?" Ava said, making tiny splashes on the bathwater in front of her as Beatrice continued to scrub her skin. "I went as someone you will never leave."

"What does that even mean?"

"Come on, Sister Photographic Memory, you got this," the Halo Bearer said, teasing.

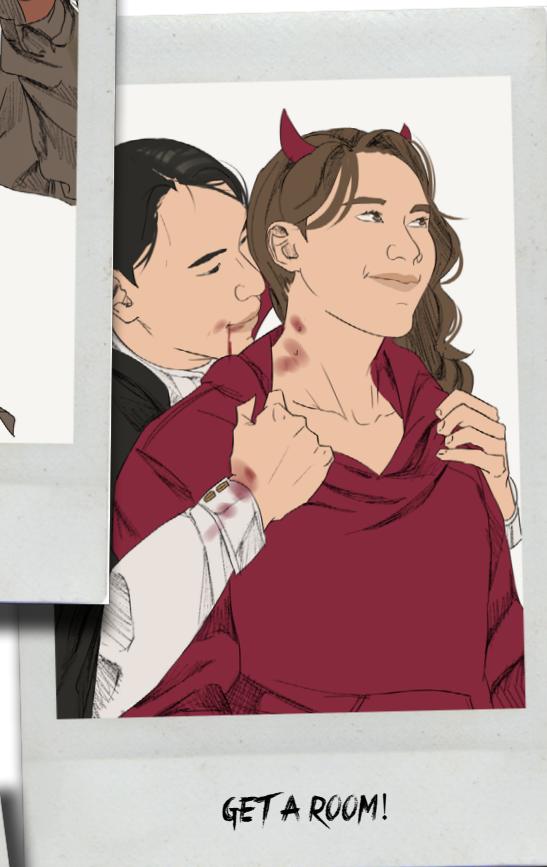
"Don't tell me you went as someone festooned with boils," Beatrice replied, almost as a joke, but the somber turn of the other woman's face told her that she was right.

"Halloween is about the things you fear, and what I fear most is being alone, but you said -" Ava no longer finished her sentence, instead taking Beatrice's hand in her own. The nun dropped her sponge in the bathwater, splashing soapy suds all over her front but she didn't seem to mind.

"I hope you don't go as a talking head in a bag tomorrow night."

"Why not?" Ava asked, withdrawing the hand that Beatrice held, thinking she was being rejected. Much to her surprise, the nun held on tighter, pulling her soapy palm close to her own chest. Ava noticed how her beautiful brown eyes suddenly looked heavily lidded and her voice sounded drunk.

"Because if you wear a bag over your head, how can I kiss you?"



ART BY @BRUNMZZ (INSTAGRAM)

It's 5 am and I can still think back to the night when I saw you leaving the church. It appeared that it was also the night you got that halo. I wasn't aware that you came back from the dead because of it— which is why I didn't warn everyone. The chamber walls here know every single detail about you, for I was talking about you before I slept. And now, I don't think I will ever sleep peacefully. I can barely see the countless wine bottles that are scattered in front of me.

You were the deadly vice that was keeping me alive.

When September began, all of my faith turned to ashes— it's gone. The day they removed the halo from your back was also the day they took you away from me.

In this life and even in my next, I'd still want to fight demons by your side.

Perhaps, you were not one of those warriors who died in a war, but you were the warrior who guarded me against any pain.

— from the **Journal of Beatrice's Undying Love for Ava**

WRITTEN BY @ELLIEJSULLIVAN (TWITTER)

when the sun has set for me

WRITTEN BY LU @AVATRICEFEELS (TWITTER)

Cut flowers, although beautiful, are transient; already dying themselves when they are laid beside the dead. But young blooms planted in the earth are cradled come rain or shine, the cycle of life nurturing the new while the old is laid to rest. And so, on All Souls' Day after the war, it was not a bouquet of flowers that Mary brought to Shannon's grave, but a cluster of forget-me-nots that Camila had grown and a candle.

Before the war, All Souls' Day was one of the few days of the year that the Order of the Cruciform Sword allowed its soldiers to rest. To mourn. To remember those they had lost. This year was no different, except that the number of new graves and names of the departed were greater than they had ever been. Mary waited until the end of the day before she stepped over the threshold into the cemetery, wanting to be alone. The sun, now more forgiving than during the summer months, slowly began its descent towards the horizon, casting a pale sheen over every surface its soft rays touched.

Mary pulled a lighter from her pocket and lit the candle, placing it carefully on the ground just in front of the headstone. With the day dimming, the single oscillating flame provided just a little bit of warmth and light for Mary to work in. She was silent at first, not because she did not have any words to say but because too many words fought against each other to be said. The slow methodical digging helped quieten the clamouring on the tip of her tongue, only to be replaced by an acute throbbing between her ribs as she began to cry. The words stumbled out between sobs in stops and starts, sentences cut short and left incomplete just as Shannon's life had been. Vincent had paid dearly for what he had done, Mary had made sure of that, but the taste of vengeance did little to quell her grief. Mary knew that this would only come with time, but that did not make those early days any easier. After all, if nothing else, grief is how love perseveres. And Mary knew that she would never stop loving Shannon.

After several false starts, Mary lifted the little blue flowers from their pot and tucked their roots into the newly exposed soil, before covering them again with care. As her breathing evened out, the words came a little easier. They still sounded ragged and hoarse and would not have always made sense to anyone else listening, but they didn't need to. It was just Mary and Shannon, and Mary knew that the woman she loved would always understand.

As the years wore on, Mary visited Shannon's grave on that day every year without fail, and with each visit she planted more forget-me-nots and lit countless candles. After some time, her resting place was awash with blue, the bed of flowers a bloom of colour amongst the rows of aging gravestones. It was fitting then that even in death Shannon brought life to a place otherwise dreary and grey; the words carved beneath her name ringing true.

In this life or next.

Camila had not been this excited since their mission to Greece. She'd gone wildly obsessed with collecting the things for her current mission.

"Butter, eggs, cinnamon, hazelnuts, flour..." Camila continued on checking her bag. "Where did I put those... oh here." She moved the candies and chocolates on top of the pile. "All set."

Camila started to head home with a pep in her step. Arriving at her apartment, she smelled a buttery-like pastry from her neighbor.

"Beatrice is on to something. And it smells... creamy... hmm," Camila said under her breath as she opened the door to her apartment.

She started taking out her groceries when the power went out.

"Really? Right now? Ughh..." she said as she walked towards her candle drawer and lit up several candles. Then she proceeded to the door to check on her neighbors.

"It's a good thing I can bypass my own door locks. I wish I could walk through walls, like Ava."

Camila started with the manual override of her door. But it wouldn't budge. She tried again but the door was still locked.

"That's weird." She tried for the third time. The lock did not make any sound whatsoever.

Camila started to panic.

"Okay, relax. Think, Camila. This is your door. You created a manual override. You are a tech genius. Think!"

The hallway lights started to flicker. Her Roomba came out of the living room towards her. Her state-of-the-art door started to show random numbers in the display.

"Okaaaayyy, wait a minute... what's happening? Who's there?!" Camila shouted inside her apartment.

She turned around and faced the hallway, her back away from her front door. Taking out her small pistol from her back, she pointed the gun in front of her.

"Ava! If you are playing tricks on me, stop it!" Camila started to step forward. "Ava!! This is not cool!" Her voice echoed inside the apartment,

Camila's Trick

WRITTEN BY @MUGZIENIC (TWITTER)

ART BY @SCHEREER (TWITTER)



taking another step forward.

The living room lights stopped flickering. Then she saw her oven start to light up in the kitchen. Her window blinds opened and closed. There was no electricity and yet her electronic devices seemed... alive.

"Please stop this, Ava, just stop!" she said with a very stern voice she could muster.

"Why do you think it's always, Ava?" Camila heard a soft whisper in her right ear. She shivered and then swiftly turned around and fired a shot to whoever was in front of her.

"Hey! Not cool, Camila!" Lilith exclaimed as she recovered from being shot, the blank bullet dropping from her arm.

"Ohhh I am so sorry, Lilith!" she said with utmost care, moving towards Lilith.

Camila then proceeded to slap Lilith on the arm where she shot her, muttering several curses.

"DO NOT DO THIS AGAIN!!! Understood?!!" Camila slapped Lilith's arm one last time.

"To be fair, you held out for quite some time before getting scared." Lilith smirked and sat on the couch.

"What do you think you're doing?" Camila raised her eyebrow at Lilith. "You are making the pastries, cleaning the entire kitchen, and you're on trick or treat duty by the door."

"I'm sorry, Camila," Lilith said with sincerity in her voice.

The electricity returned and Lilith was still sitting on the couch.

"Are you going to move or do you want to sleep in Ava and Beatrice's apartment?" Camila towered over Lilith with a serious face.

"Oh no no no, I'm up. What should I start first?" Lilith asked, sprinting to the kitchen.

Ava walked through Camila's apartment wall in a sexy F1 driver costume.

"What did I miss?" Ava smiled from ear to ear.

"Nothing much," Camila smiled looking at Ava from head to toe.

"Good call, Lilith!" Camila shouted to Lilith.



ART BY @ANCO_CO413 (TWITTER)



ART BY @YOM0322 (TWITTER),
@YOMU.ART (INSTAGRAM)



ART BY @PESHOPBOVS (TWITTER)



ART BY @SYDYKATARTS
(INSTAGRAM)

How Much I Miss You

WRITTEN BY @THAMYNION (TWITTER)



chrysanthemums to remember her by

Ava was in a van with Mother Superior, Beatrice behind the wheel. Where were they going? She didn't know, but Superior assured it was nothing related to Adriel and no one was in danger. Hard to believe, when you have the shit scared out of you with a loud knock on your door at 4 pm, right after the training

They had been on the way for at least 45 minutes now, the silence was only broken by Ava asking questions, trying creative ways to make one of the nuns talk, but all Superior would say was "we're meeting someone" while Beatrice just watched her through the rearview.

Some minutes later, the van stopped in front of a cemetery, and Ava was confused. As they walked in, Ava felt shivers down her spine. Beatrice excused herself, taking another way.

"I'm starting to get worried about who we're supposed to meet here..." Ava said, looking around suspiciously.

"Don't worry, we're almost there." Superior answered.

Minutes later, they stop in front of a grave. At first, Ava was confused but her breath was instantly caught in her throat after reading the name engraved.

"That's... my mom."

"Yes." Superior agreed. "Camila informed Beatrice

about what happened at the market. Beatrice spent the day researching where your mother was buried after the accident. Beatrice filled me in and it's why we came. You should have the opportunity to properly grieve your loss even though we're living in rough times.

Everything clicked together, what happened in the morning vivid in her mind.

Ava had talked Camila and Lilith into going to a street market, to take a break from all the work they've been doing. Mary thought it was bullshit. It was decided to let Beatrice sleep since she stayed up researching until 4 am the night before. They could have invited the other sisters, of course, but it just wasn't the same.

As Camila walked peacefully, her eyes shone like a child seeing everything for the first time. Lilith rolled her eyes and pretended not to enjoy the moment; Ava and Camila knew better.

Something colorful caught Ava's eyes, and soon she was standing in front of countless flowers of all sizes and shapes, marveled by the diversity, elegance and all the life that emanated from them. It was the middle of autumn, and they were still alive and beautiful in the cold weather. An old lady, apparently the owner, handed a bouquet full of bright yellow flowers to another woman.

"Wow, those are beautiful!" Ava couldn't help but comment.

"Thank you," said the woman with the bouquet in hand. "They're for my mother."

"I'm sure she'll love it," Camila said with cheer.

As it turned out, the woman's mother had passed away years ago from a heart attack, and Ava and Camila were quick to apologize and wish her condolences. The woman just laughed, explaining she died peacefully after living her life to the fullest, and she took her time to grieve properly and had loving people around to support her - now there were just good memories she reached to when she missed her mother.

"We'll make sure to pray for her," Lilith said, and it was the first time that morning that her eyes weren't hard, but comforting instead.

"Where we come from, today is the All Souls' Day, November 2nd. The day we pray for our loved ones who've passed. That's very kind, thank you."

The woman said her goodbyes and went on her way, and they did the same. For the rest of their visit to the market Ava remained silent, even with Camila and Lilith chatting. It wasn't hard to realize something was wrong.

"Okay, enough with those lost puppy eyes, Ava," Lilith grunted. "What is happening?"

"You can tell us anything, Ava." Camila said, holding her hand.

Ava hesitated, suddenly self-conscious.

"You know how the woman with the flowers talked about her mother? I realized that I didn't properly grieve her death, no memories to hold on to. One day I just stopped crying... It just made Sister Frances even more of a bitch."

Camila and Lilith had no words to say, not even a reminder for Ava to watch her language.

They spent all the way home in silence.

Ava stood there with nothing to say, she just couldn't. She was too busy feeling the pain, a pain that had always been there, but never allowed to surface. Ava registered that she had forgotten her name after always calling her mom, just recognizing because of the surname - Silva. She couldn't remember her face, either. However, Ava could feel warm, comforting arms around, bright smiles and unruly brown hair.

The pain of her loss has always been there. The breath caught in her throat turned into a sob and she could no longer hold back her tears anymore as her knees fell to the ground, allowing herself to feel all of it for the first time since waking up calling for her mother, just to find out she could never see her again.

Ava didn't know how much time had passed, but when she calmed herself and took the time to say out loud how much she missed her mom, Beatrice was at her side, an arm around her shoulders and a hand caressing her hair.

Back on her feet, Superior handed her a bouquet of white chrysanthemums. With a shaky sigh, the halo bearer took it and laid it on the ground, under her mom's name, followed by a quick and sincere prayer to anyone who was listening.

"We can go home when you're ready. The other sisters didn't come, we thought it'd be best if you had an intimate moment, but I believe there will be hot chocolate and cookies ready for you." Superior sighed as if resigned, but Ava could spot the fondness in her eyes.

"Never forget you have a family with us, Ava. You always will." Beatrice smiled and took Ava's hand in hers, as they made their way back home, to her family.



the stranger's yellow flowers

baked goods

WRITTEN BY @LENNAPO (TWITTER)

The whole place is in deep silence. It's a big house, stone-cold on the last night of October, but Ava thinks that she'll be able to find the kitchen without much trouble. Sleep has been elusive since Adriel showed up, and not even having Beatrice resting right next to her seems to soothe her mind. In fact, their newfound closeness is one of the reasons why she's restless tonight.

The other might be that it's her first Halloween outside the orphanage. It's not like they were going to do anything festive; after all, her friends have been part of the Church until recently and they were more inclined to honor the dead on All Saints' Day than celebrate a pagan festivity. But the fact that they know, for sure, that monsters exist and demons roam the Earth makes the old Celtic belief about the veil between worlds being thinner tonight more plausible.

Either way, surrounded by darkness, this old country house feels like a haunted place.

It gets eerier once she goes down to the main floor and sees light coming out of the kitchen.

And because she's curious, hungry, and still can't sleep, Ava walks right into the unknown.

There she finds an elderly woman; grey hair in a messy bun, a slim but slightly curved body, and a big, warm smile when she discovers Ava at the door.

"Oh! Una cara nueva!" the woman says enthusiastically, "Pero pasa, chiquilla, no te quedes ahí."

Ava's Spanish is a bit rusty but still enough to understand that the strange grandma is telling her to step into the kitchen.

"Perdón por... interrumpir," she says with hesitation, doubting if she's using the right words, "Y por mi español. No hablo mucho."

"Don't worry. English okay?"

"It's fine, yeah."

She doesn't even mention Portuguese because it's even rustier than her Spanish. At least, while she was with Diego they could exchange a few words and practice a little but, given that none of the nuns at Saint Michael's spoke Portuguese when little Ava arrived, they had to communicate in English with her because it was the only other language she could understand, so they got stuck with it.

"Sorry to ask but... who are you and what are you doing here at two a.m.?" Camila had said that this old family house near the Spanish border with France had been empty for a long time, that only a woman from the nearest village would come once a month to clean and make sure that everything was in place, so it was perfect for them to hide for a while.

It's not like she looked dangerous but better safe than sorry.

"It's okay. I'm Lola and I've been taking care of this house and its family for years," the woman starts explaining while roaming around the kitchen looking inside the cabinets. "It's kind of a tradition of mine to come here the night before Todos los Santos to prepare panellets."

That same morning, a display full of little pastries had drawn Ava's attention and Camila had explained why the panellets were a special tradition in Catalonia. They used to be an offering to departed family members on All

Saints' Day, made with nuts from the harvest, mostly almonds, and then blessed and taken to the tombs of the dead as a gift. But they were fairly common now for the whole month prior to the first of November.

"I could use an extra hand if you want to help."

And Ava, who never says no to learning something new, and because she really wants to taste those panellets, gets to work and starts following Lola's instructions while they chat.

The elderly woman explains how she learned English from some British soldiers she met when she was younger, and that she's also fluent in German and French, but that she never has the opportunity to practice them anymore. Ava tells her about being an orphan and finding a new family after twelve years of being alone. She doesn't say a word about the Halo but has time to speak at length about Beatrice, catching Lola's attention enough for the older woman to ask the question that Ava seems to have been avoiding in her head for days.

In the end, the lovely grandma tells her to just be honest with herself and with Beatrice, and that everything else will come later.

They put the pastries in the oven and exhaustion seems to finally catch up with Ava, who leans over the kitchen's wooden table and decides to close her eyes while they wait for the panellets to cook.

"Ava?"

"Uhhh?"

"Did you fall asleep here?"

"What?" She starts to wake up from her slumber and stares at a confused Beatrice.

"Did you bake last night?" Camila goes straight towards the cooling tray, "You know how to make panellets?" she asks excitedly.

"Not really, I just helped Lola."

"Lola?"

"The caretaker?" Ava replies, to which Camila frowns. "She said it was kind of a tradition of hers."

Cam takes one of the pastries, gives it a questioning look, and finally puts it in her mouth, while the others stare at her without knowing what's going on. After a few seconds, her eyes open comically.

"Ava?" She says with her mouth half full, "This is my family's recipe. Only two people know how to make these and they live in Menorca. She said that her name was Lola?"

"Yeah, nice lady. She even knew how to speak English, which was super helpful."

"That's probably because she was a spy during World War II."

"Cool." Suddenly, the math doesn't make sense on Ava's head, "Wait... she didn't look that old."

"Ava... she died in 1987." Camila deadpans. "I think you baked pastries with my dead great-grandmother."

In the end, they decide to not question whatever happened last night and just enjoy the panellets together by Lola's tombstone.

She rejoices at finally having some company again.



The Nightmares of Sister Frances

By surpanakha (AO3), @PlsSister (Twitter)

It was the night before All Souls' Day and Sister Frances went to bed earlier than usual. The old nun had been having nightmares for the past three nights, of ghosts visiting her in bed threatening to kill her. She had a similar dream months ago. That menace Ava somehow came back from hell to try and strangle her. The next morning, one of the orphans found her unconscious in the hallway of St. Michael's. She must have been sleepwalking.

The old woman made the sign of the cross. She knew the dead would not rise from their graves unless it was the second coming of Christ. Even then, she knew He would not save Ava. Her soul was already burning in hell.

The ghosts were young women, all dressed in all-black habits. From the light of the moon outside her window, she even thought she saw a cross emblem fastened on their clothes. Sister Frances shook the thought from her mind. *What member of the clergy would visit a sister of the cloth in the middle of the night and come wielding a weapon?*

The first ghost bore a young, pretty face. The old nun heard her dragging her feet across the hall and calling her name in a sing-song manner before she let herself in her room with ease.

Sister Frances, where are you? Sister Frances, what have you done?

The young woman held a crossbow to her head and told her to ask forgiveness from

Ava. Sister Frances forced herself to wake up. *Why would the dead want absolution?*

It was heavy footsteps she heard the following night. Sister Frances did not even have time to turn her lamp on when she felt the muzzle of a shotgun against her temple. This ghost asked her to confess to her sins. There were none to avow.

The third ghost was sitting by her bedside when she appeared to her. A demon. She held a dark claw against her bare throat and told her to never come near Ava ever again. Not that she could. She had no idea which public, unmarked grave her body was buried in.

Sister Frances slithered underneath her gray blanket on the bed. It was the first All Souls' Eve without Ava in many years. She spent in prayer the time she used to waste chasing the little girl and Diego around as they wheeled all over the orphanage, hanging occultic decorations to celebrate the Satanic holiday. Now that she recited more than her usual set of prayers, she was sure to have a dreamless sleep. No imaginary ghost would visit her and try to avenge Ava's death – *for what person would dare commit unspeakable crimes in that vermin's name?* The girl had no friends. *And what need was there to avenge her death?* She was only trying to save her.

Yet the fourth ghost came in the middle of the night. She entered through an open window and landed by the side of her bed soundlessly – like a cat. The old nun could

not see her face, it was hidden behind a metal veil. When the ghost spoke, her voice was deep, and it sent a chill down Sister Frances' spine.

"Do you have an inkling of what this is?" the ghost whispered in the dark. The gleam of the metal in her hand against the moonlight was unmistakable. It was a syringe.

"Have you come to poison me?" Sister Frances replied. The ghost shook her head.

"I will not poison you like you did with Ava," the ghost said as she drew the syringe. "For that, I would have to falsify your medical report to escape liability. Too many procedures just for an insignificant death."

"No. I will inject your veins with an empty syringe, do you know what will happen then?" the ghost continued, now sitting beside Sister Frances on the bed. She gripped the base of one of her hands and positioned the needle near a vein. The old nun did not dare move as she felt a bead of sweat line her temple.

"Air embolism. The air bubble mimics a block that can travel to your brain or your heart, cause a stroke or a heart attack. At your age, no one would suspect," the ghost replied. Her voice was steely. Calculated. "They'd think you died of natural causes. As I said, insignificant. Routine."

Sister Frances shuddered.

"Isn't that what you fear the most? To be seen as ordinary. You did not flinch even when my sisters threatened you with cold-

blooded murder. You secretly wish people would view you as important enough to be assassinated. But you are not. When you die tonight from a heart attack, people will forget you and move on, because you did nothing significant in this life worth remembering you by."

"What do you want?" Sister Frances replied, breathless and wide eyed. The face of the ghost approached her ear, so close that the nun could feel the cold metal veil shielding her identity.

"What I want is for you to know that Ava is happy and thriving. She has friends who love her. She has a family worth living for. I want you to know that you failed, and that Ava won in the end."

"Did that rascal send all of you to terrorise me?!"

"No. Her heart is too pure for that, despite what you think. Goodnight, Sister Frances. I thought killing you would give me pleasure, but it seems letting you live the rest of your life knowing that Ava is happier than ever is a worse punishment."

The ghost let go of her forearm and disappeared soundlessly out of the open window and into the night, leaving a bewildered nun in her wake. Sister Frances kept telling herself that it was all a dream, yet the red marks on her forearm where she was held were still visible in the morning, and the syringe the ghost left behind on the floor was gleaming. It was not a nightmare at all.



ART BY @CHAKIGUNART (INSTAGRAM)



ART BY @BABYHELLLBOY (TWITTER)* COMMISSIONED BY @WARRIORNUNPROMO

HAPPY HOLIDAYS, HALO BEARERS!

FIRST SNOW

WRITTEN BY @THIS_ISTHE_END_ (TWITTER)

They spent the night in a convent nestled on the outskirts of Amsterdam. When Ava and her sisters stumbled in, weary and shivering, the nuns were nothing but hospitable. A snowstorm was coming from the north, and the convent offered shelter until the worst of it passed. They didn't ask too many questions; that was the best part. Mary insisted that they should count their blessings, settle in for the night, and get as much rest as they could.

Ava followed her advice. She leaned against dark stone, taking refuge under the cathedral's eaves. Camila's singsong voice drifted in from the kitchens. It came with the smell of bread baking, the clattering of kitchenware, and a fragrance of spices that made Ava's mouth water. But she didn't join Camila in the festivities, not yet.

Snowflakes fell slowly, swirling bright against the growing dark. The sight left Ava speechless with wonder. Flecks brushed against Ava's face, even as she stood under the cathedral's protection. The bitter cold left her trembling, but it never occurred to her to head back inside. She marveled at the sting on her cheeks and numbness of her ears. For the first time, she felt the way her eyelashes grew heavy with ice.

Snow accumulated in the square; concrete was swiftly concealed by a blanket of white. Ava sat in an eerie silence—it was something that she was familiar with. She heard it often in the orphanage on winter nights, when Diego was fast asleep. Only now, it wasn't so suppressive. The cutting wind in her lungs instantly woke her, and every breath was made visible in the cold. Ava found herself grinning, almost chuckling, despite how the air chilled her teeth.

"Enjoying yourself?"

Ava turned towards the familiar voice. Beatrice walked down the path, leaving a trail of footprints in the snow. A bag of groceries hung from one arm. Ava hardly recognized her under the layers she wore—an extra sweater, gloves, and a white scarf to match.

"Yeah," Ava said, offering a smile. "Still getting used to the cold."

"Well, you hardly dressed properly." Beatrice nodded at Ava's t-shirt and jeans, which were already damp from melted snow. She approached the Halo Bearer, then motioned to the cathedral's entrance. "Come inside?"

Ava hummed in approval, pushing herself off the stone. Snowflakes graced her shoulders as she left the shelter of the eaves.

All it took was one step. Her sneakers fell through the snow, then landed flat on a slick spot of ice. The ground slipped beneath her—a dull ache ripped through her back, even before the panic set in. A flurry of snow flew up, taking her breath; Ava swore with what was left in her lungs. The cathedral's spire towered above her, slicing through storm clouds with stone.

A soft chuckle broke through the quiet. Footsteps crunched in the snow, inching closer to where Ava fell. The Halo Bearer groaned, and her hand sank deeper into the snowdrift.

"Sorry, sorry," Beatrice mumbled between laughs. The nun held her gloves to her face, trying to conceal a smile but failing miserably. "It's been a while since you've walked on the ice, hasn't it?"

Ava dusted off her knees, though it didn't prevent the cold from crawling through her jeans. She sat up in the snow, though her shoes slipped against her own weight.

"More than a while," Ava admitted. She tried to stand up again, rising to her knees with precarious balance. One wrong step would send her sprawling in the snow again. She grumbled to herself—she couldn't look Beatrice in the eye, or else she'd fall victim to the heat burning in her cheeks.

"This might, uh... be one of those new things for me."

At those words, the alarm in Beatrice's eyes melted away. Her scarf concealed part of her smile, but her delight was still obvious. The snow fell heavier, with large flakes swirling around her silhouette.

The nun leaned towards Ava and held out her hand.

"That's okay."

Beatrice's offer hung in the space between them, and Ava hesitated. Every breath was taken in steady balance, with a constant eye on the ground. But Beatrice made a sensible argument against the gnawing fear in her chest. After a heavy pause, she took Beatrice's hand in hers. As Beatrice pulled her up, Ava's feet scrambled for footing, slipping, sliding, and then catching solid ground. Firm hands grasped Ava's shoulders, making her let out a little yelp of surprise.

"Ava," Beatrice's voice rang through the chilling quiet. "It's alright. You're alright."

In an act of pure instinct, Ava's hands gripped Beatrice tight. Her fingers curled into her soft sweater to search for warmth inside. When Ava looked up from her feet, confident that they would stay stable, she lost her voice to what she saw. There was Beatrice, holding her fast to the world again. Round eyes reflected the brightness of the landscape, deeply attentive, all directed to the girl in her arms. Her face was flushed with color, desperate to fight the cold. It accentuated the freckles on her cheeks, obviously, almost painfully. Stray black hair poked out of her beanie where flecks of white began to settle.

"I'll help you the rest of the way," Beatrice said. Ava still couldn't speak—she just nodded without question. They took their first steps together, arms entwined. Beatrice instructed Ava to walk flat-footed, one step at a time, nice and slow. And they fell into the winter's silence after a while, each woman aware of the other's next movement.

"What'd you get?" Ava asked, nodding at the grocery bag on Beatrice's arm. She reached for the door, pulling it open while keeping her stance stable.

"The usual." Beatrice's voice fell into a whisper, even though they were alone. "But I may have bought hot chocolate, too."

Ava took Beatrice's hand, squeezing it tight. "I knew you were my favorite."

ART BY @HOEOFKRISTINATY (TWITTER)
@A.NUN.YMOUS (INSTAGRAM)



Mary, Perpetually Against the Patriarchy: A Womanist Mary For Advent

WRITTEN BY @THEDFORD98
(INSTAGRAM)

Mary, one of the greatest leaders in Warrior Nun... We love her and Toya Turner. I was so excited to see a Black Mary, a Mary that wasn't submissive and controlled. As a Black woman myself, it was like seeing myself as a complex person. Warrior Nun Mary fulfilled that representation for me. Mary in modern Christianity is valued for her virginity over her character. As Advent (the preparation of the birth of Jesus within Christianity) comes around, churches will honor Mary for not having sex, perpetuating the same harmful ideas that a true woman is a "pure" one. Throughout history she has been seen in multiple ways. There are multiple depictions of her as liberator, comforter, mother and our Mary in Warrior Nun. WN Mary reflects the Advent tradition of Womanist Mary that subverts the patriarchal Church while also being a role model of how we, the viewers, can subvert the patriarchal society. During this time of year, women in my country are to bear the brunt of the holiday decorating, cooking, shopping and taking care of kids. How can Mary be used for freedom?

Mary in the Bible

Mary was a teenage girl living in Nazareth engaged to Joseph. She was living in her parents house when the angel Gabriel appeared to her one night. He tells her that she is going to be impregnated and have the Messiah. Mary (by herself somehow) visits her relative

Elizabeth. There she says the Magnificat (Luke 1:26-45). The Magnificat is a revolutionary song, saying, "He [God] has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). Mary is acknowledging that she as a Palestinian Jewish girl is at the bottom of the system, yet she is still honored. She also says that, "He [God] has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52). She understands that the powerful will fall. She knows that despite her status, she is valued and no one, not even her society, can stop her from being honored.

Womanist Mary: Mary in Warrior Nun

Alice Walker coined the term womanist in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). Her definition, paraphrased below, explains WN Mary.

1. A Black feminist or feminist of color. [Acting] like a woman, opposite of girlish, interested in adult things: Mary never states that she is a feminist, she shows it. Her actions show her care for liberation for her sisters. When there is a possibility that Duretti is the antagonist, she fights for the preservation of her sisters, not the order. This is the mark of a Black feminist or feminist of color. Mary, like so many Black girls and women, was forced into adult things. Growing up in an abusive household she was put into foster care

at the age of 8 after her mother killed her abusive father in self-defense. Her innocence was lost, not by her choice, but because of society's...

2. A woman who loves women sexually and nonsexually. Committed to the survival of all people. Not a separatist except temporarily for health: Mary loves her sister warriors. During the flashback with Shannon, Mary tries to comfort her and shows love. Telling her that she is there for Shannon. It is hinted that she loves Shannon romantically. For example, when Mary is holding Shannon as she dies in her arms and Mary's dedication to finding the murderer. Mary shows platonic love for the fellow sister warriors by mourning with them at the end of episode 1, being truthful, like when Beatrice says (paraphrased), "I joined the Church to save my soul". Mary replies, "Is that what you tell yourself". The best way Mary shows platonic love is with Ava. She's honest with Ava, helping her to realize her selfishness...

3. Loves music, loves the struggle, loves herself. Regardless: Although Mary isn't a Warrior Nun, there is deep love for her life. For the fight against demons. When Beatrice questions if removing Adriel's remaining weakness is Catholicism, Mary replies, "That's the difference between us Beatrice. I care more about my sisters than my Church." Her struggle is the freedom for herself and her sisters. Despite the wicked life that she and so

many other Black women are given, she found a family and love.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (Walker, xi-ii): Mary stands with her fellow sisters in fighting for liberation from the demons, literally and metaphorically. Not all of her WN sisters are womanists, but they are feminists. Still she joins the movement, understanding that liberation is the goal.

While Mary does work for the Church, she is very bold in stating that her loyalty is to her sisters, mirroring Beatrice's loyalty to God over Duretti (the symbol of the Church). Mary choosing to live with a group of women and not marry already subverts the idea that every woman needs to marry. Also her willingness to fight for what's right over what the Church may like, shows that her faith is in people.

How can we be like Mary? I can't give you a definite answer. All I can say is when one that fights for liberation for all within their religious and secular circles they subvert the patriarchy. When a same-sex couple love each other (especially if they go to Church) they subvert the heteropatriarchy... When people lift up their voices to call out injustice. No matter if you celebrate Advent as the awaiting of Jesus or just the countdown to secular Christmas, I hope you remember that WN Mary is a reflection of us the viewers, willing to subvert the patriarchy.

Первое Рождество в Мадриде

WRITTEN BY @TF_LST (TWITTER). TFWARRIOR (AO3)

EDITED BY @SIEMPRE_ALADA (TWITTER)

Это их первое совместное Рождество после переезда в Мадрид. И несмотря на то, что в сочельник они торчат в квартире вдвоем, он ощущается гораздо менее одиноким, чем бесконечное количество семейных праздников, с тех пор как совсем юная Беатрис вместе с матерью присоединились к семье Мастерсов. Только рядом с Беатрис Шэннон ощущает эту наполняющую все ее нутро, каждую бессвязную мысль теплоту. И никакого напряжения или груза неоправданных ожиданий.

Сидя бок о бок за кухонным столом, они делают видеозвонок в Лондон, чтобы поздравить родителей с наступающим Рождеством. Их разговор стремительно скатывается в обмен взаимными упреками, центральной темой которых снова становится самовольный переезд Беатрис, полностью спланированный Шэннон.

В какой-то момент рука Шэннон, которую она положила на колено Беатрис в начале беседы в поисках невербальной поддержки, начинает беспокойно дрожать. Беатрис под столом сплетает их пальцы и тактично вмешивается в разговор, извиняясь перед родителями и поспешно прерывая затянувшийся звонок.

Шэннон выглядит подавленной, и Беатрис обнимает ее за плечи, целуя в левый висок. Она поднимается из-за стола и достает из шкафчика початую бутылку виски, плеская янтарную жидкость на дно прозрачных бокалов.

Шэннон удивленно поднимает брови. Беатрис не пьет даже пиво и никогда не была на студенческих вечеринках. Она не уверена, что Беатрис вообще когда-либо пробовала алкоголь.

– Давай выпьем за нашу свободу? – предлагает Беатрис. – Спасибо Богу, что привел тебя в мою жизнь.

– Мы не отмечаем День благодарения, сестренка, – дразнит Шэннон и тянется к бокалу.

– Я говорю тебе это недостаточно часто, и я благодарна не в какой-то определенный, а каждый день своей жизни.

Шэннон вдруг чувствует, как в горле образуется ком от того, с каким весом Беатрис произносит слово «каждый», и испытывает жизненную необходимость смыть его виски.

Беатрис следует примеру Шэннон, делая смелую попытку залпом выпить содержимое бокала, но закашливается, выплевывая половину на стол.

– Нет, это не твое.

– Ну и гадость! – морщится Беатрис, откручивая крышку бутылки с водой под фырканье сестры. – Я просто хотела, чтобы ты тоже считала меня крутой.

– Ты и так крутая, – смеет Шэннон сменяется мягкой



улыбкой. – Потому что ты моя самая любимая Мастерс.

Беатрис опускает бутылку и, утирая рот рукавом водолазки, сердечно улыбается.

– А ты моя.

Они украшают пушистую живую елку в центре гостиной, и Беатрис поневоле замечает, что коробки с игрушками выглядят нетронутыми: все бирки и наклейки на своих местах.

– Когда ты их купила? – хмурится Беатрис.

– В прошлом ноябре.

– Но все упаковки новые...

– В том году... у меня просто не было настроения, наверное, – неловко пожимает плечами Шэннон, откладывая в сторону ножницы. – Я была тут совершенно одна: ни тебя, ни новых друзей. Одиночество не совсем праздничное чувство, знаешь? Я позвонила тебе в ночь на Рождество, потом отрезала огромный кусок шоколадного торта и пошла спать, а весь следующий день разбирала бумаги в пустом офисе.

(First Christmas in Madrid)

CLICK THE TITLE FOR THE ENGLISH VERSION

Это звучит так меланхолично, что на глаза Беатрис немедленно наворачиваются непрошеные слезы. Она осторожно опускает коробку с игрушками на диван и заключает Шэннон в крепкие объятия, чувствуя, как старшая сестра податливо утыкается лбом в ее шею. Несколько минут они просто стоят вот так, разделяя комфортное молчание, пока огни гирлянды не начинают сходиться с ума.

Беатрис болезненно моргает и, прежде чем отступить, в последний раз гладит Шэннон по волосам.

– Почему ты соврала, что у тебя были планы? Родители продержались бы разок без меня, не умерли бы, – добродушно упрекает сестру Беатрис. – Мне очень жаль.

– Я не хотела лишней раз навлекать на тебя неодобрение моего отца. К тому же это было всего-навсего одно Рождество. Но теперь ты здесь, и мы проведем еще много праздников вместе. Можем заказать больше игрушек в следующем году, любых, каких захочешь.

Процесс совместного украшения елки оборачивается бесконечными спорами о том, где какая игрушка должна висеть, но все это не всерьез, и Беатрис в конце концов с усмешкой соглашается со всеми аргументами.

– Мне птичка на хвосте принесла новости о том, что ты на прошлой неделе посадила в лужу одного из научных сотрудников ARQ-Tech, – в какой-то момент Шэннон отвлекается от вырезания снежинок. – Джиллиан была готова тебя нанять только за то, что ты поставила Марко на место, никогда прежде не видела ее такой довольной.

– Откуда она вообще про это знает? Мы встречались всего раз.

Шэннон еще до приезда Беатрис решила немного злоупотребить своей дружбой с генеральным директором ARQ-Tech и устроить сестру на стажировку в хорошую компанию прямо с первого курса университета.

– У таких людей, как я и Джиллиан, есть свои источники.

– Звучит тщеславно. Без обид, но ты свой пост даже два года не занимаешь, а Джиллиан уже лет пятьдесят рулит парадом.

– Эй, Джиллиан не такая старая, ей всего... Кстати, сколько ей? Если бы они не были с Кристианом такой прекрасной парой, я бы с ней точно замутила.

– Боже, избавь меня от нежелательных образов. Мне работать на нее минимум до апреля.

– Представляешь, как бы взбесился отец? – мечтательно тянет Шэннон.

– Я бы на твоём месте не обольщалась. Если бизнес от вашего союза поймёт больше денег, то, думаю, он наступит себе на горло и даже выпьет после этого с Джиллиан на брудершафт.

– Мне всегда была интересна логика вселенной. Как у такого конченного гомофоба могла появиться я? Но судьба на этом решила не останавливаться, добавив на картину еще и тебя. Думаю, когда он о тебе узнает, мы станем разочарованием века.

Шэннон вешает последнюю игрушку, с довольным видом разглядывая елку. Беатрис испуганно подпрыгивает, когда за их спинами неожиданно раздаётся звонок.

Шэннон устремляется к двери и обнаруживает на пороге Камилу с весьма привлекательной незнакомкой за спиной.

– Я на всякий случай принесла кое-что, – без приветствий вваливается Камила, вытряхивая перед Беатрис содержимое сумки.

– Ты спаситель. У нас как раз гирлянда барахлит, – оживленно восклицает Беатрис.

– Это моя подруга Мэри, о которой я рассказывала, – Камила неопределенно машет рукой в сторону дверного проема, где все еще топчутся две фигуры.

– Я Шэн... – Шэннон замирает на полуслове, когда Мэри принимает ее протянутую ладонь. – Шэн... нон.

Внезапно огни на елке окончательно гаснут, и комната погружается в приятный полумрак.

– Видишь? Я же говорила, что с ней что-то не так.

– Мне кажется, или барахлит в этом доме не только гирлянда? – Камила с любопытством наблюдает за парой в коридоре.

Уголки губ Беатрис невольно приподнимаются, когда она замечает, как испаряется привычная уверенность, оставляя вместо себя неуклюжий беспорядок, который она называет сестрой.

– Тебе не кажется, – подытоживает Беатрис и поворачивается к Камиле. – Чаю?

holiday Flavours

WRITTEN BY @X7ION (TWITTER), LEET911 (AO3)

ART BY @YOM0322 (TWITTER), @YOMU.ART (INSTAGRAM)

Ava realizes she doesn't like Christmas. It reminds her too much of those days in the orphanage, where Christmas was played up to be a big deal, something of spiritual importance, but always felt like every other day to Ava. The only difference was that the sermons had a different tone, and they forced you to sit through one at midnight.

Nowadays, she's out and about, she can see what Christmas is like outside those walls, on the streets of the city, but she still doesn't get it. She doesn't feel connected to this holiday, can't remember any happy

times. She has people to buy gifts for, but she doesn't know how. Ava has never gone shopping for others before. She doesn't know how to wrap any presents. She doesn't even know what gifts are appropriate.

So it's Christmas Eve and she still hasn't bought a single gift. And she knows no one will begrudge her that, but she wants to buy something for Beatrice at least. She wants so much to get something touching, something meaningful, but this is all a little beyond her.

When she gets home that evening, the shops are closed, and Ava is still empty handed. She opens the door defeated and tired, upset with herself for having failed at something that should be so simple.

Beatrice is there to greet her with a smile though. Beatrice has a hot drink waiting, and their Christmas tree lights up the entire apartment. Their tree is ridiculous, with far too many lights for its small size, so much so that the branches are sagging. Beatrice had indulged Ava yesterday. There's no balance or elegance to the tree, but it was Ava's first time decorating a Christmas tree, so Beatrice had laughed and let Ava have her way.

But Ava sees the neatly wrapped present under the tree, a lone red box with a golden ribbon, and her heart falls. They had agreed that they didn't need to buy each other gifts, but Beatrice went and did it anyway. Ava feels even more useless now.

This gift is perfectly wrapped of course, all crisp edges and square corners. The ribbon is tied in an expert bow, the ends curled just the right amount to give it a little volume. And Ava has seen the gift wrapping counters in all the stores, but somehow she is sure Beatrice wrapped this herself. She is sure that Beatrice chose the perfect gift, something refined and tasteful, just like Beatrice, something poetic.

"I'm sorry," Ava says, avoiding Beatrice's eyes. "I didn't find you a gift."

"It's fine. I said we didn't need to

buy anything for each other. And I did that instead of making dinner, so we're going to have leftovers tonight."

"I like eating leftovers with you."

Beatrice smiles again, takes Ava's hand and squeezes lightly. "No one's ever said that to me before." But Beatrice sees Ava's hesitation, follows her gaze to the little box under the tree, and gestures. "Go, open it."

Ava does. Inside the box is a little glass figurine, a hamster with its mouth stuffed so full of food its cheeks are bulging. It's ridiculous, and cute, and hilarious. It's not the sort of thing she would have expected from Beatrice. "What is this?"

"It's a silly thing I saw in a shop window and it reminded me of you, so I bought it. You don't need to buy me anything, you don't have to try to be romantic or deep. You could buy me frog slippers and I would love them."

"I did buy you froggy slippers." Ava points down at the floor, where Beatrice's toes are hidden behind round eyes and smiling green faces.

"Yes, two weeks ago. Before Christmas. Because I said my feet were cold in the winter, and you thought of me when you saw them. I love the slippers, Ava. I love you."

Ava blinks away tears, pulls Beatrice into a hug. "I just want to make you happy."

Beatrice is close, whispers in her ear. "You do make me happy. I just want to spend Christmas with you, eat leftovers in front of our crooked tree, and watch cheesy movies together. After everything that happened, you could have gone anywhere, walked away, but you stayed. With me."



FROGS!!!

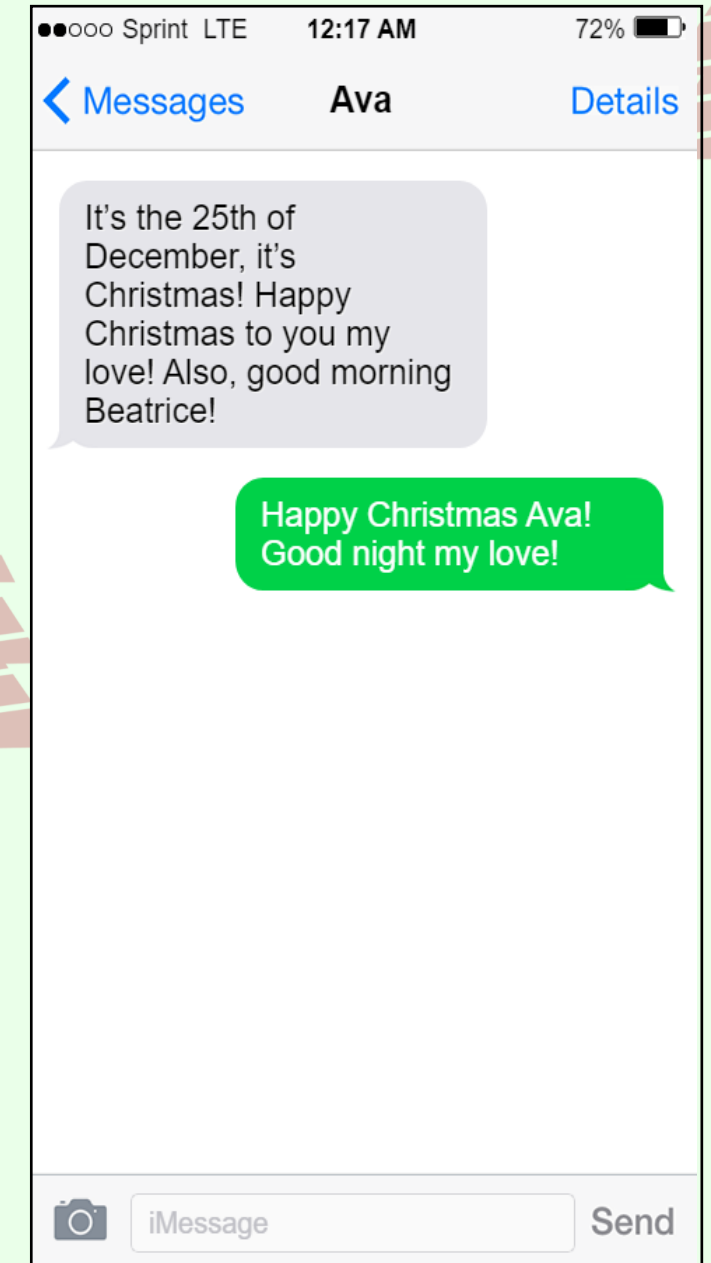
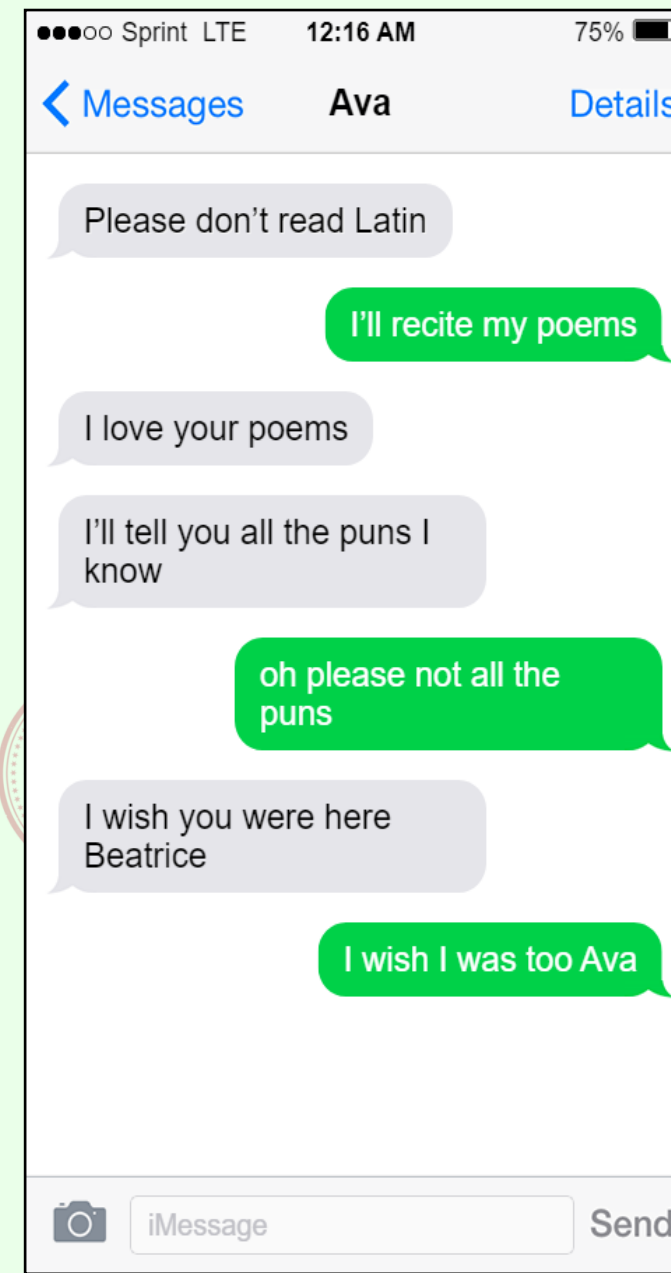
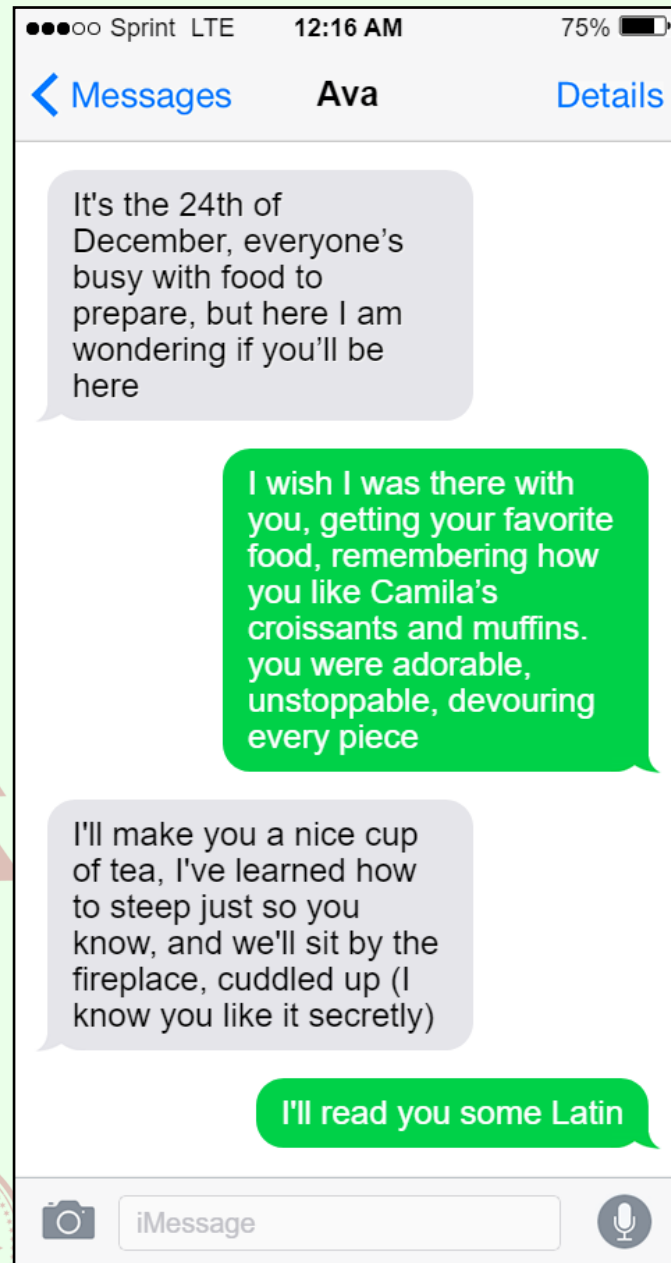
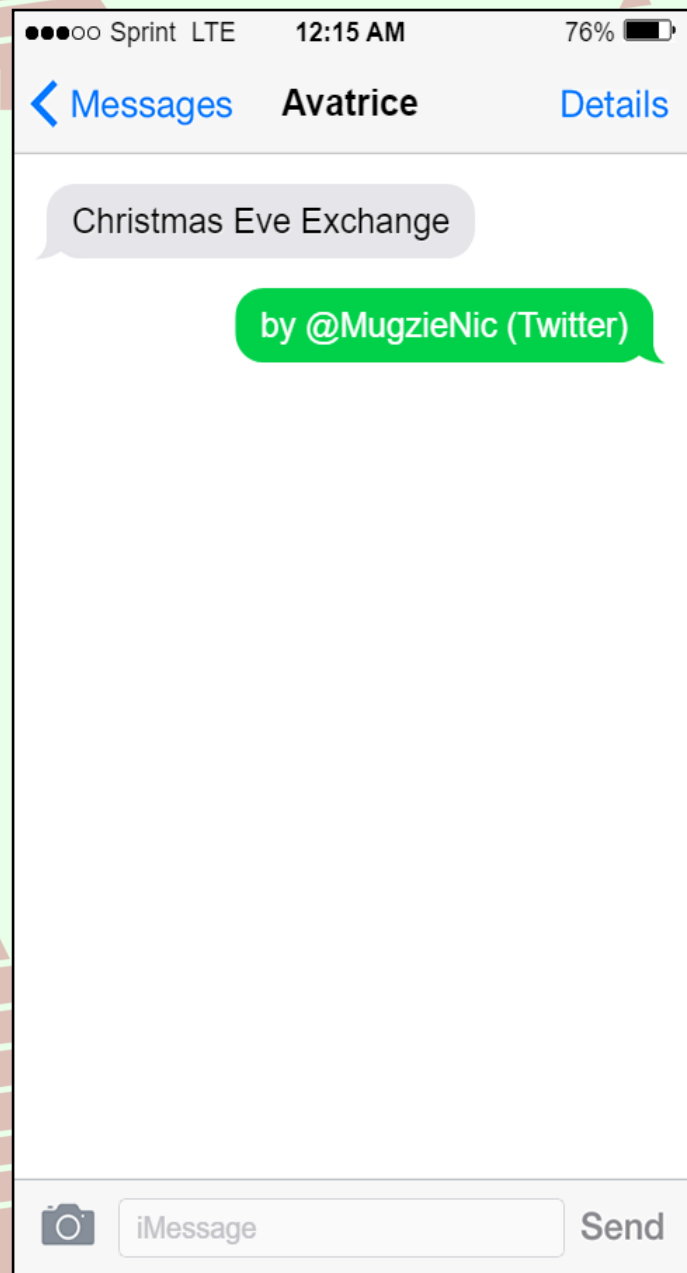
There's a hand on Ava's cheek, lips pressing against her temple, and Beatrice pulls away so they can look at each other. Ava is taken back to that time months ago, when she had stumbled through a wall and Beatrice had caught her. Beatrice had looked at her the same way then. And Ava's heart had been pounding in her chest without her understanding why. She'd read about love, seen it in television and movies, but never lived it. Never quite like that. But Ava had looked away, suddenly embarrassed, and then that moment was gone.

Now though, Ava knows exactly what is happening. And Beatrice does too. This is not new to them anymore, even if sometimes it still feels that way. There's no pretense now, no need to hold anything back. Ava leans forward and kisses Beatrice.

Beatrice meets her halfway, pokes her tongue out to tangle with Ava's. There are hands on her waist, the scent of anticipation in the air. Beatrice tastes like tea, and cinnamon, and winter, and wonder and acceptance. And to Ava, burned into her mind, this will forever be the taste of Christmas.



Christmas 12.25.21



Зеленый чай и немного твитов

WRITTEN BY @TF_LST (TWITTER). TFWARRIOR (A03)

EDITED BY @SIEMPRE_ALADA (TWITTER)

Беатрис никогда не была особенно активна в социальных сетях, редко публикуя фотографии и предпочитая личное общение виртуальному. Но в свою первую учебную неделю она импульсивно завела аккаунт в Твиттере, найдя забавную страничку с мемами и довольно неуверенными набросками о щенке в Кембридже. Сама Беатрис при этом почти ничего не постила, несколько ретвитов тут и там, но каждое утро проверяла обновления @cambridgerpuppy. Спустя пару месяцев сорок семь подписчиков, питающих милую привязанность к собакам, превратились в тысячу. Сегодня, привычно серым поздним осенним днем, Беатрис спешила к профессору Гилроу, чьи лекции ей казались лучшей частью учебной недели, со стаканчиком чая из ближайшей кофейни и книгой Джона Норвича по истории Венецианской республики. Сжимая в ладони смартфон, она листала ленту и осторожно продвигалась к выходу сквозь непрерывно растущую толпу посетителей. Она едва успела зацепиться свободными пальцами за дверную ручку, как дверь распахнулась сама собой. Новоприбывший нетерпеливый клиент на полном ходу влетел в Беатрис, споткнувшись о невысокий порог и выбив из ее рук многострадальный старенький айфон. Беатрис отнюдь не была жонглером и в попытке не расплескать повсюду чай услышала, как телефон приземлился у ее ног, демонстрируя изображение последнего просматриваемого твита с мемом про щенка в очках, как у Гарри Поттера. Беззастановочно извиняясь, незнакомка потянулась за смартфоном Беатрис, который при поверхностном осмотре оказался невредим. Ее взгляд мимолетно задержался на горящем дисплее. – Моя вина. Пытаюсь избавиться от

зубов мудрости.

– Никто не пострадал, зубы целы, так что никаких проблем. Я немного тороплюсь. Позволишь?

Беатрис кивнула головой в сторону прохода, который все еще занимала девушка.

Запихнув телефон в задний карман джинсов, Беатрис в последний раз оглянулась на незнакомку, которая в этот самый момент снова запнулась о ковер у прилавка. Беатрис не смогла сдержать улыбку и со звоном колокольчика покинула переполненную кофейню.

Судьба – странная штука. Она всегда подкидывает множество необъяснимых, списанных на случайность, совпадений.

Поэтому не было ничего удивительного в том, что Беатрис довольно скоро снова увидела незнакомку. Девушка сидела на противоположном берегу озера и что-то зарисовывала в блокноте. Беатрис хотела набраться храбрости и подойти, но Лилит всегда выбирала «лучшее» время для звонков.

В начале декабря в ленте Твиттера наступило непривычно долгое затишье, однажды нарушенное единственным нехарактерным, несколько депрессивным твитом, содержащим всего пару слов.

@cambridgerpuppy: Рождество – отстой.

Беатрис загрустила.

А на следующий день страница бесследно растворилась, будто ее никогда и не существовало. Беатрис сначала показалось, что она ошиблась ссылкой, но снова и снова перед глазами возникало угнетающее и тревожное «не найдено».

Беатрис не испытывала ровным счетом никаких сожалений по поводу перспектив провести Рождество в одиночестве. С тех пор как она поступила в университет, она много

времени проводила в библиотеке наедине с собой. По обыкновению вымышленные персонажи могли быть гораздо более приятными собеседниками, чем живые люди, и обладали одним колоссальным преимуществом – они всегда могли промолчать.

Родители ясно дали понять, что в этом году не ждали ее появления на праздники. Лилит приглашала к себе, что на ее языке значило «практически умоляла», но Беатрис знала семью Лилит всю свою жизнь. Их родители могли посоревноваться друг с другом в снобизме, и Беатрис не была полностью уверена, что смогла бы предугадать победителя.

Беатрис перед выходом натянула на себя черные джинсы и единственную яркую вещь в гардеробе – красно-серый бомбер с буквой Б на груди, недавно подаренный Шэннон.

У нее совсем не было планов на 23 декабря, поэтому она бесцельно слонялась по улочкам и разглядывала витрины книжных и антикварных магазинов. Она перебралась несколькими словами с баристой Камиллой в своей любимой кофейне, пожелала ей приятного Рождества и вышла на морозный воздух.

Напротив на скамейке рядом с елкой сидела «знакомая» незнакомка. Так Беатрис повстречала ее в третий раз. Беатрис огляделась по сторонам и перешла через дорогу. Бесшумно приземлившись на противоположном конце лавки, Беатрис некоторое время разглядывала сгорбленный силуэт, а потом протянула нетронутый стаканчик с чаем.

– С Рождеством.

Незнакомка подняла голову, у нее были красные, будто от непролитых слез, глаза. Она молча приняла стаканчик из рук Беатрис и сделала первый шумный глоток.

– Уф, гадость.

– Это зеленый чай.

– Я сказала это вслух? Это должно было прозвучать как «спасибо».

Беатрис усмехнулась и, засунув руки

(Green Tea And Some Tweets)

CLICK THE TITLE FOR THE ENGLISH VERSION

в карманы, уставилась на мигающую вывеску кофейни. Они просидели в тишине некоторое время.

– Я Эва, кстати. Ты Беатрис? Видела первые несколько букв на стаканчике... В тот раз. Не сегодня, очевидно. Сегодня тут почему-то лягушка.

Эва покрутила стаканчик в руках, проведя большим пальцем по штрихам на картоне, и на ее губах заиграла неуверенная улыбка.

– Это пережиток дружеской школьной шуточки. Неважно.

Беатрис пожала плечами, и Эва решила не спрашивать.

Довольно быстро стемнело, с неба упало несколько снежинок.

– Спасибо за чай и компанию.

– Показалось, что тебе это было нужнее. Еще увидимся.

Беатрис поднялась со скамейки и, махнув рукой, завернула за угол. Она не могла перестать думать об этой встрече и уснула с мыслью о том, что Эва невероятно красива, когда грустит, но еще красивее, когда улыбается.

В утро сочельника Беатрис по привычке проверила Твиттер и с удивлением обнаружила, что ее любимый аккаунт вернулся, опубликовав пару новых твитов.

Первый был до боли меланхоличен. @cambridgerpuppy: Испытывая

огромную утрату, мы не готовы пожелать подобного даже своим врагам. Хотя я все еще не могу отпустить, желаю каждому найти утешение. Не могу поверить, что пишу это, но... С Рождеством, ребята! На втором Беатрис чуть не выронила телефон из рук, к нему был прикреплен цветной скетч с изображением щенка и лягушонка с картонным стаканчиком в руках. @cambridgerpuppy: Ты читаешь этот аккаунт, но я не знаю твой никнейм.

Надеюсь, ты увидишь это. Возможно, я ошибаюсь, но твое Рождество,



cambridge puppy
@cambridgepuppy

You are following this account, but I don't know your username. 😬 I hope you'll see this. I may be wrong, but your Christmas 🎄 seems to be just as lonely as mine. If you are somewhere in Cambridge, come to the same place today at 7pm. I'll bring a thermos of coffee. Green tea sucks. 😞



11:17 · Dec 24, 2021 · Twitter for Android

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кажется, будет не менее одиноким. И если ты где-то в Кембридже, приходи на то же место сегодня в семь вечера. Я принесу термос с кофе. Зеленый чай – отстой.

Беатрис не могла удержать себя от мысли, что это была в некотором смысле романтическая вещь. За окном было достаточно прохладно, чтобы делить один термос на двоих, поэтому она отыскала и наполнила свой «отстойным» зеленым чаем.

Когда Беатрис разглядела на условленном месте знакомую фигуру, освещенную тусклым светом фонаря и медленными переливами праздничной гирлянды, ее сердце на секунду замерло, пропустив несколько ударов. Эва отложила серый ластик на покатующую крышку термоса и, крепко сжимая в руке карандаш, подарила Беатрис широкую искреннюю улыбку.

SEE YOU IN 2022!

