

(bear in mind that this story was written before the pandemic, so if you see characters going outside and being close to each other do not be alarmed, it is set in 2019)

A whole week without a reply from Bren and Rosario was getting a little antsy. Her last message had been:

"cool, I'd love to hang out again too. When's a good time for you?"

Rosario had been fighting the urge to send another text the last 6 days. She didn't want to appear desperate or to bug Bren in any way, but she wanted to see faer. Also she was curious about the faerie conclave. The light on the edge of the sea was gone, but there was a weird glow hanging over Manhattan and she'd wondered if they were related. She was pretty sure they were. Maybe she could message again asking about that, that's not desperate, that's just good sense.

"Hey"

She wrote and sent. *Well it's a start* she thought. She was about to type more when she got the reply

"Hii!! Sorry I never answered your last message, I thought for sure I had"

"lol, it's ok. Just wondering if you'd still wanted to hang and wanted also to ask about the thing

you know the thing

the thing with the faerie stuff

the thing"

"Oh, the gathering. Yes I wanted to ask you about that as well, you said you'd come with me"

"Totally, I'm still down if you're down."

"Yes absolutely!! So. It starts tomorrow. Do you want to meet at my place at 8 and we can ride there together."

*wow, that's soon* Rosario thought, but she answered

"Sounds good to me, I'll see you there."

"Awesome, looking forward to it hon, see you tomorrow <3 <#"

*she called me hon* Rosario sat there smiling like an idiot.

*shit, what should I do to prepare. Which talismans do I bring, do I bring any of them? do faeries care for astrological magic at all? Ok ok, I'll just bring them all and ask Bren if any of them would be useful*

In the end Bren didn't think any of them would be useful, but Rosario wasn't sure fae understood the concept and she didn't have time to explain it since fae seemed rather frantic when Rosario showed up and rushed her out the door to get on the train.

"So when does it start?" Rosario asked once they'd been sat on a Manhattan Bound D.

"Right at sunset"

"When's that"

"I think it's like 9:23 or something like that"

"that's gonna be close"

"yup. ugh, we should have left earlier."

"Will we get in trouble for being late."

"Not exactly. There's something I have to tell you, though." Bren said

"Oh?"

"So, we weren't exactly invited."

"Yeah, you mentioned that."

"Well, we're kind of going to have to break in."

"Ok."

"That's it, Ok?"

"Wouldn't be the first party I crash."

"You're an interesting one, Rosario"

"Hey, you're the one in a punk band."

"Folk-punk, but I take your meaning. This is different though, it's not like breaking into an abandoned building, it'll be... spiritually dangerous."

Rosario smiled

"You might recall the type of magic I excel at." she said

"Ah yes of course, I suppose faeries are all wimps compared to the awesome power of demons"

"I didn't mean it like that" Rosario said "I'm sorry. I just mean I'm aware of the risks and I'm willing to go through with it."

"Ok, well... thank you" Bren looked pained

"Look there's something I haven't told you. I'm... we..."

"77 street. Transfer's available to the 6th train. This is"

"Looks like this is our stop. I'll tell you later. Let's just go"

"Right behind you, faerie 1."

"What?"

"codenames?"

"you're having fun aren't you?"

"What's the point of magic if you can't have fun?"

They got off the train and walked into the park. Central park wasn't Rosario's favourite park in the city by far, but she'd been here plenty of times at all hours of the night and it'd never felt like this before. Never mind the fact that if you looked up into the sky you'd see what could only be described as the northern lights but more colourful. Sharp streaks of coloured light kept cutting across the sky in front of the light show.

"So I can tell by the unbothered joggers that not just anyone is getting the laser light show" Rosario said.

"Yes, they're just visible to the good people and people who've trained their vision. And Changelings of course. You see the narrower strips?"

"Yeah, what are those?"

"You'd call them Sylphs" Bren answered, of course every retinue has their own, they're sort of here to watch, make sure nothing suspicious is going on. And keep everyone else honest."

"what would you call them?"

"Huh?"

"You said I'd call them Sylphs, what would you call them"

"Well, it depends. Those there I would call Sylphs cause they're English, but there's others here that I can tell are from American territories and I'm sorry to say I never learned the name for them."

"what about the ones from where you're from?"

Bren said something that Rosario could not spell

"It means one who sings to the wind" Bren said after fae'd noticed Rosario's perplexed look.

"anyways I don't see any up there, but they must be flying around somewhere. I don't see Serena anyways. She's, um, my parents personal singer. And she would recognise me which I still haven't figured out if that's a good or bad thing. "

"You sure they're here? Did you ever talk to them?"

"No. Listen, Rosario, I think I might've given you the wrong impression. My parents and I, we're not, we're not super on speaking terms."

"Oh. Ok."

"Yeah, that's why this is so unorthodox and why I've been so unbelievably stressed out."

"Hey, it's ok."

"Ugh, I'm just so mad. They usually at least tell me the important things, and this is, huuge on a whole other level and they didn't tell me, and they didn't reply to me when I messaged them and I don't know if it's because they're mad at me for some reason or if they're... unable to reply."

"Hey, hey, look at me babe, you're getting a little worked up."

"Sorry sorry. Ok let me just, take some deep breaths."

"you want I should roll a joint?"

"No thank you."

"ok, do you mind if I do for me?"

"Go right ahead. We should sit down for a bit anyways, it will start soon and we should wait to come in after it's been going for a bit."

"oki"

Rosario got to work, pulling all her joint rolling supplies and sitting by a nearby tree. Bren sat down next to her.

"So," she said whilst grinding some herb "there's a lot you haven't told me that's coming out tonight. The stuff about the conclave, sure, but also this with your parents and the thing from the train?"

"What thing from the train?" Bren asked

"You said there was something you wanted to tell me, but then it was our stop and you never finished."

"wha--? oh, that. I'll tell you later."

Rosario looked at her sideways.

"I'm sorry ok, it's a very stressful night and I'm finding it... harder than usual to stay coherent."

"It's fine" Rosario lied "I'm just, I'm a little nervous. You know, I like you a lot. Like a lot a lot. And we had that conversation some weeks ago where you said you liked me too and I was so happy, but then, I don't know. I guess it's cause we haven't, you know. Kissed or anything."

Bren sighed.

"I do like you Rosario, but it's, tricky. There's more about me that you need to know and then maybe it'll be clearer, but we have to sneak into a faerie pocket dimension in a couple minutes and now is really not the time to define our relationship or whatever."

"Sure sure. I understand." Rosario lied again.

"I finished rolling my joint."

"Ok wait. Don't light it yet, I just got an idea. Come here!"

Bren got up and started walking deeper into the park. The sun had already disappeared in the west and the lights were starting to come up but there was a spot that was still, dark, and that seemed, wider than it should be. In the middle there was a rock and Bren started walking around it keeping faer gaze fixed on a spot just above the rock.

"aha!" fae finally said and "come here!"

Rosario joined her around the small rock. It looked like a perfectly normal rock to Rosario, not particularly smooth or jagged, jutting out of the ground.

"Look up, come stand where I'm standing"

They switched places and Rosario looked up and tried to match the angle Bren'd just had. Finally she caught a glimpse of it. As if looking through a slight crack in the doorway.

"I see it!! Barely, but I see it. I can't make out anything on the other side, though."

"Good, good" said Bren "now take a puff of your joint and look again."

Rosario did so, and as soon as the smoke entered her lungs and she started feeling the height she saw the crack widen, again as if an invisible door was opening. She took a couple more puffs until she could see, a much wilder version of central park on the other side. Busy thick with trees and wild growth, and in the distance, the glow of a fire and the clamour of people.

Bren stepped through the door easily, she grabbed Rosario's hands and pulled her through. The first thing Rosario noticed on the other side was the sky, so full of stars. She'd never seen a sky so starry or one quite this colour. Back in the city the sky was twilight, tones of orange and red, getting darker and darker into night. In here the sky had all the same relative hues but they were tones of purple.

"I've seen this place before" Rosario said "In out-of-body experiences and journeys. This, this is the spirit world."

"That's amazing" said Bren "I wasn't sure if people in your practice ever came to this place. We also usually come here only in our spirit selves. But when there's these many spirits gathered in one place it becomes possible to get your physical body through"

"Bren this is amazing" said Rosario looking around, yes stoned, but more than stoned, in true awe.

"Well, remember we came here with a purpose."

"Oh of course, of course." said Rosario. She put off her joint and stashed the rest in a little tube. No point wasting a perfect half joint.

"Hey do you think anyone here smokes weed also."

"Oh definitely. But I'm not sure we'll have much time to socialise. Let's get a move on."

They started making their way slowly towards the light of the fire.