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XXX - Waiting for Godot

Miriam was bolting down a hallway towards a lecture. She was certain she wouldn't make it there in time and if she arrived late, Professor Nicholson was going to throw a fit in front of the class. She ducked around a group of students and sped up, clutching her papers and books to her chest.

"You'd think history would wait. It has so far," she muttered and looked at a hallway clock. There was no way to avoid it. She was definitely going to be late. She turned a corner and saw a familiar face.

"Hey Jean. It's been a few days. How're you doing?" she asked and slowed down. There was no sense in running. She'd miss the beginning of class anyway, and the professors were at least aware that Jean couldn't run so they went easier on her. If she arrived with the gray vixen, they wouldn't give her any grief.

Jean smiled, but kept walking, letting Miriam fall into step next to her. "Yeah, I know. I'm sorry. I've done a good deal of work on that manuscript rewrite the last few days. And Esteban has more or less become a regular piece of furniture in our apartment," she said.

Miriam giggled. "Heh, I gotta meet that wolf sooner or later. If he can get you to go all googoo eyed like that just mentioning his name, he's got to be something else."

"You have no idea."

"Anyway, what's the lecture about today?" Miriam asked.

Jean checked a piece of paper she carried. "Let's see. Thursday morning... '20th century fascism, from Gabriele D'Annunzio to Adolf Hitler'."

"Hitler was a fascist? I thought he founded Nazism, and who was this Gabrielle-fur?" Miriam asked.

"Tsk tsk tsk. And you want to be a historian," Jean mock-chided. "No, Hitler didn't found the National Socialist party. He and another fur called Gregor Strasser just took control of it while it was still very small, and then Hitler got rid of Strasser later on. Nazism was a byproduct of fascism that just grew out of all proportion. Why do you think the Russian propaganda consistently from that time consistently speaks of 'defeating the fascists'? And It's Gabriele. Single L. He was male. Wanted to extend Italy across the Adriatic to Albania, and he even went with a mercenary company of soldiers to take a city there, to start the expansion. He was stopped, but he was Mussolini's greatest inspiration, and the fur that turned 'Il Duce' from socialism to fascism."

Miriam shook her head. "And you didn't even have to think before remembering that. Anyway, talk about a major jump in ideologies. I didn't know you were going to be a 20th century politics expert," she chuckled.

"I don't plan to be," Jean said and chuckled.

"You've got a brain like flypaper, Jean. It's scary sometimes. Does *anything* ever get lost in there?"

"Oh yes, all the time in fact. Ask me about something not related to history and I have the worst memory imaginable. I just store what I think is interesting."

Miriam sniggered and shook her head again. "Jean LeBrun, has anyone EVER told you that you're a geek?"

Jean couldn't help laughing. "Frequently. I'm proud of it."

They turned around the last corner. The lecture hall was straight ahead and they entered. Professor Moose Nicholson looked at them as they entered and seemed just about to lay into them for being late. He stopped himself and nodded.

Jean smiled apologetically. "Sorry, Professor, I can't run yet, and the bus was running late."

"It's all right, Miss LeBrun. Have a seat and we'll get started."

They did, taking a seat in the back as the moose picked up the chalk and started writing on the blackboard.

###

"Hey...Yohni, are you awake?" Gabrielle called out.

The mongoose looked up from her thinking. "Huh? Yeah, hey Gabby. I was just thinking..."

"Don't brag," Gabrielle said and smiled, sitting down next to her friend.

"Hah hah...very funny. Anyway, I was, actually," Yohni chuckled.

Gabrielle put her hoofs up and nodded. There was very little to do, except hang out with the other furs. The filming was done for the last project, and the cutting-room furs were busy getting it put together right. And the sets for the next one wouldn't arrive until Monday. All she could do was proofread when Zig Zag called on her for it, and talk about parts with the other furs at the studio. She looked at the mongoose and smiled.

"So, gorgeous...what role did Zig Zag give you?" she asked.

"You, actually. I'll need to get my fur dyed. But she figured that Michael would play your father and I'd be the daughter. There isn't that much difference between a mongoose and a ferret, when it comes down to it. I just need my markings to look right."

"Sounds like a good choice. Are you sure you're up to copying my attitude?" Gabrielle said with a grin, sipping from her cup of coffee.

"I'll manage. It's just lines after all. Will you help if I need some advice?"

"Naturally. Anyway, I'll be in the movie myself as well. Playing the brave policefemme, believe it or not," Gabrielle giggled.

"Lucky you. I think you and I have the only two parts in there that don't get made fun of," Yohni sniggered.

"Sounds about right."

"So what're you going to do, Gabby? I mean, with the rest of the day?" Yohni said, smiling.

"I'm not sure. I'm going to talk to Mark about a photo-session. Zig Zag said it'd be a good idea. I think she's right. And then I'm going to find the janitor and get her to fix my locker. It's wobbly."

"Darke? Be prepared for a temper as fierce as your own," Yohni chuckled.

"So I hear," the bronco said with a smile. "It'll be fun."

"So...apart from that, you've got nothing planned?" Yohni asked and smiled.

"Not really."

"Well, I'm going shopping later. Want to tag along? I've got some ideas for later in the afternoon too, if you're not too busy."

Gabrielle looked at the mongoose with amusement all over her face. "You really never get enough, do you?"

"I just have a fascination with strong femmes," Yohni answered, truthfully.

Gabrielle was about to answer when the door opened and Marvin came in. He looked rather smug as he went to get some coffee. He nodded to the two femmes and took a seat. putting his feet up with a content sigh.

"You look like the proverbial monkey who just found the keys to the banana plantation, Marv. What's the occasion?" Gabrielle asked, curiously.

Marvin's smile just grew wider. "I just got some good news."

"Really. And what might that be?" Yohni asked.

"The first two sets will arrive late this afternoon. They've been working overtime for four days straight and hired extra help. Zig Zag is going to do the first shooting on Saturday. We've got a *long* day ahead of us tomorrow with on-set rehearsals but we're actually running ahead of schedule for the second film in a row. I can't remember when that happened last."

Gabrielle felt a deep sense of relief. Time was in short enough supply as it was.

Yohni smiled widely and nodded. "Well, there goes the shopping trip," she said.

"Yup. You need to get to work, rehearsing your lines," Marvin said.

Both femmes nodded and got up.

"I'll see you in the studio in five, Yohni. I need to drop by Zig Zag's office first," Gabrielle said and smiled.

Marvin spoke up again; "Actually, Gabby, you don't need to get to work on your lines just yet. Zig Zag said she wanted to take you somewhere for lunch. She wanted to go over the last details before we start filming."

"Wow...lunch with the boss. You really must be on her good side. What did you do?" Yohni asked with a smile.

"I think I was born with rotten parents, Yohni, if you must know," Gabrielle answered and headed to Zig Zag's office.

###

Miranda was sitting at a bar, drumming her fingertips on the surface. She'd been in the Cayfur Islands for three days and she had very little to go by. Either ArseNick was really good at hiding, or the locals kept something from her. She was starting to feel frustrated.

"Hey, if it isn't the beautiful and very *married* squirrel from flight 534," a bass voice rumbled behind her.

Miranda turned and looked at Leo. "Ohhh...hey there. Come and have a seat."

Leo sat down and nodded. "Sure," he said and looked at the bartender. "Give me a Piña Colada please."

"Long drinks in the morning? Damned, you don't waste time do you, Leo?" Miranda chuckled.

"I don't see a point in wasting time. I'm here to have fun, to meet nice furs and do irreparable damage to my liver," the large feline chuckled. "So, what about you? You don't look too cheerful. Didn't business work out as planned?"

Miranda sighed and looked around the place. It was a typical beach bar. Furs in Hawaii shirts and sunglasses were lounging around various tables but it wasn't exactly full yet. She felt oddly out of place. Most of the furs present were dressed either extremely badly or extremely well. Hawaii shirts constituted the height of bad taste in Miranda's opinion, but there were those present who had made an effort to be well dressed. She was sitting in a pair of cutoff jeans and a halter top. The heat was mind-boggling. Finally, she looked back to the lion.

"No. No it hasn't. I'm looking for a fur called Nicholaus Babouin, but it's as if he dropped off the face of the planet. No one will tell me a thing. And I really need to find him. It could very easily be a matter of life or death," she said, quietly.

Leo nodded. The bartender brought him his drink and he accepted it, sipping from it. "I understand," he said, quietly.

Miranda shrugged. "Do you? I hate to say that, Leo...but do you? I'm looking for probably the only fur who's got the information I need to save a young lady in Ohio. If I fail, she'll lose at the very *least* her freedom and probably her life. And God only knows how many others will have to pay in the process too. Most likely both my boss and I will be killed as well if I fail."

"This sounds really *serious*, Miranda. Let me ask you two simple questions," Leo said. Miranda noticed that the perpetual beachfur attitude had melted off him.

"Go ahead," she said and looked at him.

"First of all...do you know the locals? Do you have any contacts here?" he asked.

Miranda shook her head. "I don't. I wish I did, it'd make it all easier, but I don't. It's my first visit to these islands. I wouldn't even be here if it wasn't about something this serious."

"I see. Well, you'll never get anywhere on your own. I've been here fifteen or sixteen times by now and I know the locals. I'll help you. I know where to get information, and how. But it'll be expensive."

Miranda nodded. She'd expected that. "Money is...a problem. I don't have all that much," she said with a sigh.

"I do. When we're all done with this, have dinner with me. Just dinner, nothing else. I'd like to get to know you. You seemed like a really nice fur when we flew down here, and I promise I'll behave. There's no cheating on your husband involved in this. Will you do that? I'll pay the expenses then," Leo said.

Miranda thought about it for a moment and nodded. "All right. Just dinner, then I'm okay with it. Peter wouldn't have a problem with that."

"All right. The second question then. How far are you prepared to go? If this is something as serious as that, I'm expecting that this Babouin-fur isn't very nice. Do you know how to defend yourself?"

"I'm with the Columbus Police Department," Miranda answered.

"I think that constitutes a 'Yes' to my question. Good. Meet me here in four hours. I'll get a hold of some of my contacts here and I'll see what I can do about getting you a gun."

Miranda smiled and nodded. "Thank you Leo. I owe you one."

"Yep...you do. But dinner will do nicely to repay me when we're done. And *that* will be your treat. Fair?" the lion said with a smile.

"Absolutely. Thank you."

Leo looked at his drink and shrugged. "So much for a Piña Colada to start the day. I'll be back in four hours," he said and got up and left.

Miranda smiled a little. She was finally getting somewhere.

###

Zig Zag looked across the table to Gabrielle. "I hope you like seafood?" she asked. The two femmes were sitting at a table in Zig Zag's favorite seafood restaurant. They had garnered a good deal of attention, coming in. None of them were formally dressed.

"Actually, I do. Very much, Boss. Thank you for taking me here," the bronco responded.

"Don't mention it. I'm starved and I need to talk to you anyway. The sets start arriving late today after all so we need to be ready to start filming on Saturday. We'll work over the weekend this time. Even if I normally don't do that, I'll make an exception this time," the skunk said and looked closely at Gabrielle.

"Is something the matter, Boss?"

"Oh, no. I just idly wondered when the waiters here saw a top like that last," Zig Zag grinned.

Gabrielle looked down herself. She hadn't expected a lunch-appointment with Zig Zag when she got dressed. She was just wearing a pair of nice jeans and a tight black T-shirt with pink writing, saying :

ATTITUDE??

*I ain't got no f*ckin' attitude!!*

"Then it's about high time, don't you think?" Gabrielle asked with a chuckle.

"Your T-shirts and tanktops are becoming your hallmark, Gabby," Zig Zag chuckled. "How many do you *have* with that kind of message?"

"I don't know. A good few I think. I like sending a message," the bronco answered and picked up her menu.

"I can recommend the shrimp," Zig Zag said, before smiling again. "And I'd say you're sending a message! The fact that you're hardly *under-endowed* doesn't exactly hurt either."

Gabrielle beamed. "If you got it, flaunt it, Boss."

Zig Zag smiled. "Good attitude in this line of work," she said and picked up her own menu.

"Good femmes go to heaven, bad femmes go everywhere," Gabrielle said, matter-of-factly.

Zig Zag sniggered. "You know...you're very hard not to like, Gabby. You've taken the studio by storm in record time. The fact that you come to work even on days when you have nothing to do there is really admirable. You help set a nice mood there."

"Thank you. I appreciate you saying that."

"You're quite welcome," Zig Zag said and called over a waiter.

They placed their orders and put down the menus. The waiter stared a while at Gabrielle's T-shirt before leaving.

"Mind if I ask you a question of a private nature, Gabrielle?" the skunk said and put her elbows on the table, leaning forward a little.

Gabrielle smiled. "Not at all, Boss."

Zig Zag smiled, half-closing her eyes. "You're young. You are, and let me say this very plainly, extraordinarily beautiful. You come across in a way that any fur out there would have to be downright *dumb* to not like. You're caring in the extreme, you put your friends before your own needs and you are talented. Why are you single?"

Gabrielle blinked and looked at Zig Zag for a moment. "If I didn't know you were very well spoken for, I'd take that as a pickup line, Boss," she finally chuckled. "But to answer your question, I'm single because I've made a conscious choice to be. I haven't met the right fur yet. Simple as that. I like to live. I like to be *free*. This whole ordeal with my parents should show that clearly enough too. I love my freedom and being able to do what *I* want. I'm only 26 years old. I have *lots* of time left to settle down. And I'm sure it'll happen one day. But not until I think it's time."

Zig Zag nodded. It made perfect sense to her. She'd felt much the same at Gabrielle's age, so she could readily associate herself with that way of thinking. She looked up as the waiter returned with a bottle of good white wine. He poured a glass for both of them and Zig Zag took a sip. Then she looked back to the bronco.

"Don't get me wrong. I'm not trying to get you settled with someone. I'm just wondering. You must literally be *wading* in offers," she said.

"I get my share. Yohni seems incredibly interested but I think that's mostly for the sex. Mostly, though, males are scared off. I don't know, I think that attitude of mine that you so heartily endorse, is too much for many of them," Gabrielle answered, honestly. "Besides, I promised myself that I would see Jean through her process before I go looking."

"Do you have any idea how rare it is to find that kind of friendship and commitment in someone?" Zig Zag asked. Her voice was quiet and Gabrielle realized the skunk looked proud.

"I don't know about that, Boss. I have to be honest about that. I don't think much about it. Jean is my friend. She can't do this on her own. It'd crush her. I'm not going to say 'Oh well, tough. I have my own life to live. Get over it'. I know a lot of other furs would but I'm not like that."

"No. You're not. I know a lot of furs who will happily tell everyone how sanctimoniously *friendly* they are, while in fact being incredibly selfish. You don't even advertise being friendly. You just are. I have to admit, when you arrived at the studio and asked for a job, I had some real reservations because of your reason. And frankly, you're costing me a good deal of money at the moment. But that doesn't matter now."

Gabrielle winced anyway. "Cut my wages in half, Boss, I'd still make more than at the rubber factory. I can't stand the thought that I'm a liability at the moment. I promise I'll work *hard* and I'll do my best to help you make back what you're losing on me right now."

Zig Zag reached over and patted the broncos paw. "No chance. Don't even think about that again. You deserve this. I don't trust easily, Gabrielle. I don't even trust my friends with everything. Seeing someone like you, who is that selfless towards a friend...someone who's quite simply a good fur...that's very reassuring."

"Don't put yourself down, Boss. Your friends are *very* lucky. I don't think you realize just how altruistic you are. Right now, I'm costing you a bucketful of money and you run a *business*. Any normal, rational fur would tell me that it wasn't their concern. Perhaps wish me the best of luck but otherwise do nothing. I haven't even been at the studio for two months, and you still do this for me. I'm amazed at times. When I tell those I meet where I work and most of them react by looking at me either with pity or disgust all over their faces. And you know what? It's *worth* it. To work for someone like you? They have no idea what they're missing. No idea at all. I don't know if I'm a good fur, Boss. But I know *you* are," Gabrielle said, quietly. "I've never met anyone like you before. And if I were to have had an older sister, I would've loved for her to be *just* like you. Stripes, hairstyle and all."

Zig Zag found herself staring. Her jaw felt slack. "I can't remember the last time anyone except James gave me a compliment that deep and heartfelt," she finally said. "I won't even say 'thank you' because it won't do that justice."

"I don't want you to thank me for saying that. I just hope you understand what I mean. You're putting yourself out on a limb for me. This could be dangerous for you and the others. And you still do it. You don't even doubt if it's right. You just do it. If you had any idea how beautiful that makes you...inside as well as out..." Gabrielle said and smiled a little, shrugging.

"I'm speechless..." came Zig Zag's response after a very long moment.

Gabrielle didn't say anything else at first. It took several minutes before she spoke up again. "Let's talk about the movie, Boss," she finally said, softly. She smiled reassuringly and sipped her wine.

Zig Zag nodded. Her head was swimming. She felt like she'd just seen what hid behind a very carefully constructed facade, giving her a glimpse of an incredibly complex femme...and she realized it was something very few furs probably ever got the chance to experience. Normally she balked furiously when someone called her beautiful. James had slowly gotten her used to it. At least to hearing it from him. But she still reacted badly when anyone else said so. The way Gabrielle had gone about it, though, had left her warm inside. It had felt so completely unselfish. Normally, when anyone said that sort of

thing, they were trying to gain something. They always wanted something in return. And her stripes and mixed heritage had always been a source of torment for her, making it difficult to see any kind of beauty in herself.

During her earliest years in the adult entertainment business, she had severely doubted anyone would *want* to buy such material with her in it, for that reason. She had been constantly stumped by the fact that she was so popular. Slowly she'd come to some kind of private compromise. She could accept that she was popular, but that wasn't because she was beautiful, she'd told herself. It was for all sorts of other reasons. Most of them triple X-rated. Then Gabrielle had come walking into the studio one day, and now they were sitting here, only a month and a few days later, having lunch. Talking about deeply serious and private issues. Realization struck Zig Zag like a hammer between the eyes.

To Gabrielle...she wasn't Zig Zag, porn producer and sex-symbol extraordinaire. She was just Zig Zag.

And a friend.

###

There were only a few furs in the library. Jean had been very uncertain about going back there, and Miriam had promised to come with her. Jean had explained what had happened the last time she was there. It had angered the red vixen.

"You should've taken a look to see who they were, Jean," she said, quietly.

"Why? It'd be my word against theirs and I don't want to get into any more trouble. I just want to be left alone by the bigots," Jean said and shrugged.

"Still. I'd have made their lives miserable, I assure you. I think there are three or four femmes in the entire university who aren't on your side and those few are frozen out socially by the rest of us. Those two would've been unable to find a date for as long as they are here."

Jean smiled slightly. "It's okay. But thank you for letting me know that. It's comforting. It really is."

Miriam opened a book and skimmed over the page. "Here we go. The section on Caligula's distributions of meat to the poor after each 'Venatio'."

Jean scooted over and looked. "You're right. Thanks. Can you see if you can find the topographical maps of the Forum Romanum for me?" she asked.

"Certainly," Miriam said and finished reading the sentence she had gotten started on. "You know, beast fights were barbaric in the extreme. A gladiator 'Munera' is probably worse by today's standards, but the killing of wild beasts? Reptiles like crocodiles from Egypt? Ostriches from Africa? I mean, how did starving Romans know that the meat they got was from wild game and not fallen gladiators?"

"I think, Miriam, that that is the entire point. They *didn't* have a way of knowing," Jean said while reading.

"If you're suggesting what I think you're suggesting, Jean, I think I'm going to be sick."

"Oh I'm very much suggesting that. Caligula was deeply insane. I wouldn't put something like that past him. This is the same fur who had his sister go through a very violent abortion which killed her, to remove the incestuous fetus from her that he had sired himself and who closed the public granaries at a whim just to see how the inhabitants of Rome behaved when they were starving."

"But Jean, distributing the meat of dead gladiators to the poor, telling them it's wild game? That's just way too disgusting to contemplate."

"I know. The Romans thought so too. Touching the dead was unclean. Eating them was a crime against the Gods. There was no tradition of cannibalism in Rome. It's just a theory, but I think it's a big part of the reason why he got killed by his own Praetorians in the end."

Miriam shuddered. "Good grief."

"We can't see things through the glasses of hindsight, Miriam. We've got to look at this the way they did back *then*. First duty of any historian."

"I know that! No need to remind me but you have to admit, by today's standards it's so grotesque it boggles the mind," the red vixen said.

"No argument there."

Miriam shuddered again and went to find the topographical maps of ancient Rome. It turned out to be a very large book. Four feet by two and a half feet and very thick. She groaned but hauled it back to the table.

"I can see why you wanted me to get this. You knew in advance, didn't you?" she teased.

Jean raised her broken arm and smiled widely. "Of course I knew. I've used it before."

"Why am I not surprised, Miss Geeky," Miriam chuckled and sat back down, starting to look for the pages with the Forum Romanum.

"You say the nicest things, Miriam," Jean giggled. "I'll go take some photocopies of this. Be right back."

Miriam nodded and continued skimming the book of maps.

Jean passed through the aisles, quietly. Furs were reading all around her. She noticed a few of the femmes sending her a friendly smile and a nod. It felt good. It brought a smile to her face. No one was using the Xerox machine and Jean put the book on the glass plate, starting.

That was when she heard the voices. Two voices. The same ones that had caused so much heartache last time she was here. They were on the other side of the screen. She could feel a sinking sensation in her stomach. This time the two furs were talking about something else. Something related to their studies, it seemed. But the sounds of their voices brought back memories of what they had said last time. Jean felt her knees shake. Then she felt a calming paw on her shoulder.

"Hey Jean," Susan said, quietly. "You don't look too good. What's wrong?"

Jean pulled the librarian aside a bit, swallowing. "Those two furs on the other side of the screen are the ones who gave me a hard time last time I came to the library. Remember? You're the one who found me in the corner after all."

The ermines face darkened. "Them? You're sure? Completely?" she asked.

"I'm sure. Trust me on this one."

"I trust you. I know who they are too. They've given *me* grief for being lesbian in the past."

Jean sighed. "They get away with too much."

"Oh, I agree. But what do you say we get *even*?" Susan said and smiled, grimly.

"What do you have in mind?"

"Go back and take your photocopies. When I call for you, come over. Whatever I do, *play along*. Trust me on this one."

"All right," Jean said and went back to the Xerox machine.

Susan headed over on the other side of the screen with a few books in her arms. It took a few moments before Susan's voice called out.

"JEAN? Can you come over here?"

A few protests from reading furs went up. Jean closed the lid to the Xerox machine and took her copies as well as the book and headed over on the other side of the screen. Out of the corner of her eye she saw a badly overweight canid of dubious species, and a small, sinister looking Egyptian hairless cat. The feline had the nastiest eyes Jean had ever seen, and she only caught a glimpse. In the dark recesses of her soul, she heard herself laughing. No wonder they were looking for someone to throw hatred at. One had no fur and looked like a pale prune, the other was so obese he had to wear suspenders for lack of a belt long enough. The cat was wearing a crucifix around his neck. Atypical species for a bible beating moralist, Jean thought, but to each their own.

She nodded to Susan and smiled. "Yes Susan?" she asked.

"I don't remember where these are supposed to go," she said and held two books out.

"Well, that one is on the Viking age, but since we don't have a section on that, it belongs in the section on the Germanic Iron Age. The other one is medieval history. Not theology, where you'd expect to find it. It's about the great schism. It's a historical discourse."

"Thank you dear," Susan said and winked, "I'll see you tonight then?" she asked and suddenly leaned up, kissing Jean hotly.

For a split second, Jean felt her eyes go wide, then she responded. Esteban would understand, she knew that much. It wasn't as if he didn't kiss other femmes, after all, and this was for a good reason.

Susan smiled and let go. She ran the back of her paw over Jean's cheek and left.

The vixen smiled, still with her back turned to the canid and the hairless feline. Then she turned around and went over to their table. She couldn't help herself as she leaned over and smiled very sweetly at them both. They were *gawking*.

"No, I don't undress males with my eyes, as you can clearly see," she purred.

None of them had a good response. The feline's mouth was hanging open.

Jean winked at the canid and smiled. "Oh, and if I were you, I'd put a book in front of your lap for a minute or two. Take your mind out of the gutter, will you?" she said and walked back towards the table where Miriam was waiting.

She felt like calling it a day. She had a distinct feeling there was a drink with her name on it waiting at 'Spirit'.