

Tidbits

by athens7 and mazaher
November 24th, 2012

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Prompt by mazaher in a comment to Trickster on athens7's LJ: "J&P sharing a meal. (Not a snack.) It may be lunch, dinner, or proper tea. At the limit, breakfast. Either at home or out. Your choice of mood and place in timeline."

Patrick in Verdana.
Jack in Cambria.

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1. (Patrick's pov)

by athens7

"Is that seat taken?"

I start, almost dropping my fork. I raise my eyes to find Waszowski grinning at me, one hand propped on the table and the other vaguely gesturing at the empty chair on my left.

How long exactly has he been standing there, without me even remotely noticing him?

And, even more importantly: how does one reply to a question that has never been asked before?

My social ineptitude, however, doesn't seem to be causing him any bother; he just stands there, his eyes expectantly focused on mine, without ever wavering. For reasons to me unknown, the longer I keep silent, the wider his smile grows. A maniac staring stupidly at an outcast. It sounds like an excellent title for some grotesque Bosch-inspired painting.

At last, my brain remembers again how to impart orders to my lips.

"I, ..." Oh Lord, but apparently the tongue and the vocal chords are still malfunctioning.

"Thank you!" Waszowski exclaims then, and sits down, although with a wariness of movement that is in stark contradiction with his overall exuberant attitude. I can see he is paying much attention to keeping his spine as straight as possible, in a very unnatural way. Well, perhaps the observation comes to me so easily because it is exactly what I am also doing. It was only two days ago that we were in Waters' office, after all.

"Does it still hurt?" I whisper. What an excellent moment for me to regain the power of speech.

"Does it?" he replies promptly, and just as low, his black, black eyes boring into me with a very strange combination of concern and sympathy that makes me feel like I'm not wearing any clothes at all.

It is so tender that I want to crush it with my foot.

And yet, "...Yes," I can't help answering.

A pause. Something shifts in him, goes to hide somewhere.

"You don't have to worry about me, though", he says, raising his voice again and puffing his chest. "My skin is tough and strong."

"So is mine," I retort, in a tone that has nothing to do with petulance, thank you very much.

"Of course it is", and why does he just keep *smiling*?

Silence again. My eyes roam around the refectory, that is just now beginning to empty. There is not much left to have, aside from bread and water. I glance down to my half-eaten mashed parsnips and potatoes, then back to him.

"You can finish it, if you like" I say abruptly, pushing the plate in his general direction. "I don't want it anymore."

He studies me for a moment, his eyes bright with something I don't know how to name.

"Are you sure?"

I pretend to think about it.

"Yes. You'll find a way to repay me."

Another infuriating (stunning, beautiful, bright like the sun as seen from the bottom of a well) smile. This time, I allow myself to snuggle in its warmth, even if only for a moment.

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2. (Jack's pov)

by athens7

Two days after we come back from our own personal journey to Purgatory, Patrick sends me an invitation to a Twelfth Night's matinée at Daly's and dinner at Verrey's. A cab specifically sent already awaits me when I close my front door, and escorts me to the place of our appointment.

We are both wearing our most elegant tuxedos. To prevent ourselves from committing indecent acts on the dark green carpeted floor of Verrey's entranceway, I momentarily lose myself in the study of my silk cravat, while Patrick finds an excuse to argue with the waiter in the fact that the napkins are not the exact shade of pearl white he had expressly ordered; but I can hear that his heart is really not in the debate.

The choice of courses is impeccable, as is the food itself. Patrick doesn't leave one single plate untouched, from the OEuifs à la Russe down to the last bite of the Aiguillettes de caneton à l'Orange, and not even once does he ask me to finish his portion.

After a final taste of the much-praised entremet ices and a sip of liqueur, we leave. We forego the cab, and decide to walk instead. It takes us almost one hour and a half to reach home.

As soon as the key is turning into the latch of his front door, I push him inside, embracing him completely. I can feel his ribs poking at me even through all the layers of clothing. My hands envelop his neck, while his sink into my hair, and finally -finally- we are kissing.

"Thank you," I whisper against his lips, when we finally part. We both know that I'm not talking about the invitation.

"Hmm. You are very welcome. But you'd better not get too used to it. I'm a man of exceptions."

"No risk for that, I think I know you by now. But that you will try, every now and then... That is far more than enough for me. It's everything."

"Oh, stop being so self-sacrificing. I'll do it because I want to. Because you are worth it."

There are no more words after that, for a long while.

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3. (Jack's pov)

by athens7

"Excuse me, but what on Earth are you doing?"

Patrick jumps with a gasp, almost dropping the pan he was just a moment ago contemplating with a kind of suspicious interest that reminded me of an archaeologist faced with a just-unearthed fossil of a yet-unknown species.

It was not my intention to startle him so, but the words escaped my mouth before I could even think to stop them, such is my incredulity for the sight before me.

We are once again staying at the Bracknell Manor, a few miles outside Edinburgh; we make sure to spend at least two weeks here every summer. It's part of a ritual, I suppose, a yearly celebration to pay homage to the place whence one of the most important journeys in our lives first began.

It was here that Patrick finally realised that the Falls were calling his name from afar, and that he wanted to answer.

We arrived yesterday evening and immediately went to sleep, without a second thought for unpacking our suitcases. The building is completely empty but for the two of us.

That is why we are both standing dressed only in our trousers and shirts; on the other hand, the reason why Patrick should be in the kitchen -or in any kitchen, for that matter- is more impenetrable to me than the fog enveloping the Scottish countryside in the darkest hours of the night.

"I'd think it should be self-evident" Patrick answers at last, using the pan to indicate the room at large.

"I'm sorry?" For a moment, I can't remember my question. Then it comes back to me, and I feel shocked all over again.

"Wait... Are you actually telling me that you were going to... cook... our breakfast?"

"I'm making a valiant effort not to take your reaction as a not-so-veiled judgment against my usual disposition towards gastronomy."

"What are you planning to prepare?"

"I was... I was still contemplating the possibilities, when I was oh-so-rudely interrupted."

"You don't have the slightest idea, do you?"

"It's hardly my fault if the pantry is so poorly furnished!"

"Well, at least you managed to light the fire."

He drops the pan then, and stalks towards me, towards the corridor.

"I can perfectly tell when my presence is not appreciated--"

"Where do you think you're going?" I laugh, grabbing him by his belt and dragging him again inside the kitchen. "I'm starving. Come, let's see what we can arrange."

Together, we manage to recover four eggs, a small bag of Robusta coffee seeds, some tomatoes, and an envelope of still-edible looking cold ham.

In the end, the omelette is mostly all my doing, but Patrick does break and excellently stir the eggs, and adds the salt as well. He also serves us two exquisite cups of coffee. It doesn't take me long to find out that it tastes even better on his lips.

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4. (Patrick's pov)

by mazaher

I love watching him eat.

In Portora, I would be so fascinated by what I can only term his style in food intake that I would forget eating myself.

Of course, even back then, his manners were perfect. Sitting picture perfect on the uncomfortable bench as though on the plushiest of chairs. Always ready to pass the salt and offer the cream jug. It is a mystery to me how not a drop of grease would ever stain his fingers, pheasant or partridge that he may be eating. He dabbed his lips before every drink from his glass, the napkin obscuring his chin and mouth for a moment, then revealing them anew as they touched the smooth glass rim; I would stare, then start and lower my eyes. He used the cutlery with the same deadly precision with which he would later wield his scalpels, and not a shred of meat would remain on the bones of the chicken, not a pea would escape the tines of his fork, and although he never neglected making sure that no-one else wanted the last spoonful or scrap of a dish, he'd never allow a platter to return to the kitchen unless completely empty.

Perhaps he knew hunger at some point. Not the mild feeling teenagers all over the world call starving, and which is nothing more than a craving for more of a favourite food, but the actual cry for help by a body who can't get enough to thrive. I have never been brave enough to ask him. But this may be the key to the happiness food gives him...

I've known him to turn quite unusually irritable when he's hungry, snapping at me for much less than my customary level of provocation. But he's joyous when he eats. Whatever worry may be bothering him, or worse what grief, a full plate never fails to visibly touch the part of him that I myself want to hold and stroke and comfort. It is absurd to be jealous of a Christmas pudding, and yet I am jealous now exactly like I was on that first year in Portora, when a (rather unsatisfactory) Christmas pudding, shrouded in weak blue flames, was brought around after dinner on the 24th.

He is cutting a morsel right now from an almost perfect pudding as we're sitting at Marcini's, bringing it to his mouth without waiting for the brandy to burn out.

"A dangerous game, Doctor," I say. "Mind you, I won't treat your tongue burns on Christmas night."

He turns, his eyes so perfectly peaceful and contented, and so bright with joy as he looks at me, that it's all I can do not to cry.

"I have quite different plans for my tongue tonight."

"You unholy pagan."

"There's two of us if I'm not wrong... Here, try," he adds, and after quickly checking that nobody's watching us at our table in a corner, he offers me a flaming morsel. "It's children's play; don't tell me you never had snapdragons."¹

It turns out he's right, as usual. The starved child in him is now sated, safe, and loved. As for myself...

I love watching him eat.

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¹ Victorian children went into raptures when allowed snapdragon at Christmass, i.e. raisins floating in a bowl of flaming brandy. The game consisted in picking them out and eating them while still burning. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snap-dragon_\(game\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snap-dragon_(game))