

Come Back

EtoOch MurGagee was sitting at the edge of a cliff over the sea. There were several paintings on the ground around him and he was holding one with a mauve lily. He was gently stroking it between his fingers while looking at the sunset when he heard footsteps behind him.

“Aren’t you a bit close to the rift, professor MurGagee?” a powerful soprano’s voice asked.

He did not answer.

She got closer, put some paintings away, sat next to him and said “I’m sorry for your loss. She was a fine person, your wife.”

“MaunDy was my whole life,” EtoOch said. “It has already been one week, but when I come back home and open the door I still hope to see her, working in her study, her fingers covered in paint.

“What pains me is that I was not with her when... when it happened. I was at the market to buy her a daisy—an orange one. When I came back home, she... she was on the floor, near the entryway. If... If I had been there... perhaps I could have helped her... she could be with me now.” He turned to look at her. “What are you doing here Suh-Tin-Vas? Mistress Ganeth will be in quite a state if she does not find you with the other girls!” *Of course it’s her,* he thought, *only she could have found me here.*

“I... I like walking near the sea, looking at the birds,” she answered. “I saw an albatros once. They’re huge — like me—but they can fly.”

“The other children still make fun of you?”

“At first, they called me ‘green Suh’, but since I started growing up, it became ‘big Suh’.”

“You should understand that they surely never saw a young lady troll like yourself before. They will stop soon, you will see.”

“Ah, but they stopped; when they saw that I was getting taller than Miss Ganeth. Now, they just avoid me. I can feel their hatred. I...”

She stopped and they both stared at the sunset, far, far over the sea. He could only hear the rhythmic sound of the waves crashing below.

“I... I’m a freak,” Suh-Tin-Vas finally said. “It happened again. First last week, and then this afternoon. I was upset because Stegin had put thistle in my bed. I was yelling at her... I don’t know what happened... but she started gagging and fell on the floor. The others were afraid, some were saying that I had killed her, so I ran. She’s ok, I saw her getting up when I looked back from afar.”

“You are not a freak Suh-Tin-Vas,” EtoOch said. “You are a doubler, like my wife was.”

“What’s a doubler?” she asked.

“In this region, they avoid speaking about it due to foolish superstitions,” he sighed. “A doubler is a person dotted with a unique ability.” He showed her the paintings and continued, “For example, my wife could preserve things by making a painting out of it. And then anyone can see it, or touch it, or even smell it—forever.” He put the painting closer to his face. The fresh smell of lily made him remember when he had first met MaunDy, in her little flower shop. Tears appeared behind his glasses.

“That sounds wonderful. And, I can do that too?” asked Suh-Tin-Vas.

“No,” he answered, “like I said, each second-life is unique.”

“Oh... Mine doesn't seem to be as beautiful.”

“You just need to learn how to make it be so. They teach that at the University.” He paused. *I will help her, that's what MaunDy would have wanted*, he thought, then continued, “And I will help you get there. If this is what you want.”

“Of course, I want that!”

“Perfect,” EtoOch said.

They continued to admire the sunset till the light disappeared in a last green flash.

“We should come back to Boatwright, my dear Suh-Tin-Vas. We will settle this tomorrow.”

“Yes, it's getting chilly,” she said, getting up.

He gathered the paintings, put them away in his knapsack, seized her arm and got up too. And just like that, they both started walking toward the town with a regain of purpose. He was glad because he had gone to the cliff without the intention to come back.