

Joyce Darling

Vignettes from Azuaveria — Episode 13

@dressupgeekout

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The only reason Joyce was able to afford her place in the Windward Neighborhood was because she did not take care of the rent by herself. The financial burden was split down the middle as evenly as possible with her roommate, Twassin the rabbit, who usually went by “Twazz,” except when he was onstage, where he was properly addressed as *Miss* Trixxxie Bunns.

He opened the door of the ninth-floor apartment and saw a familiar sight. Joyce was seated as usual on the rightmost reclining chair on the concrete balcony, facing the grand nighttime city skyline with her booted hindpaws propped up against the railing, surrounded in a thin haze of pineapple-enriched smoke. Some music he couldn’t hear was softly coming out of the miniature stereochain on the balcony floor.

“Joyce, darling!” he sang as he hung his purse encrusted with faux diamonds on the brass hook beside the door. He also placed a small white box on the kitchen counter. Joyce slowly turned her head around, and nodded a casual “Sup?” in acknowledgement. She’d never show it, but she secretly envied how impossibly good-looking he could be. She took an extra long pull from the cigarette while contemplating the scathing irony of being a better-looking girl if and only if she were actually a boy. She laughed her gravelly non-laugh at the thought, which was simultaneously ridiculous and profound.

Miss Trixxxie opened the sliding glass door and stepped onto the balcony. The distant, busy sounds of the city suddenly came into the mix, as well as those from the stereochain. “Oo, pineapple!” he remarked with a fluttery, musical flair.

Joyce squinted slightly. “Hey, babe. New wig?”

“Why yes!” He bobbed the brunette curls gently with one paw, and smirked.

“I like it, and your dress,” Joyce confirmed. He beamed. She extended a paw. “Want one?”

“Yes, please!” *Miss Trixxxie* took a single Alondra. He sat in the left chair and placed the cigarette delicately into his mouth. He brushed his hair aside and leaned in as Joyce flicked the lighter. He took several dainty puffs, thickening the pineapple fog. “Tastes as good as it smells!”

“Yeah,” Joyce agreed. “How was the show?”

“Ah, same old, same old. Lots of regulars, tipping as much as they usually do. Maybe I need to step up my game!”

“Heh, what does that even mean?”

“Ah, I dunno... sing better songs, shake my ass harder than I already do, make my cleavage deeper, I dunno, lots of things!” He attempted to make smoke rings.

“What a weird business,” Joyce said primarily to herself.

“Oh, wait, Joyce, darling! I have some cake! Want some?”

“Yeah, sure.”

He let the Alondra burn in the ashtray as he stepped into the kitchen. He shortly returned with the small white box and some silverware. The music coming out of Joyce’s stereo chain was remarkably chill, even by her own standards. A relaxed, lo-fi beat pulsed through the hum of the not-so-faraway freeways of uptown Port Sokuit.

“Almond Hazelnut Delight!” the rabbit announced. Scrumptious.

Alternating bites of cake with drags of pineapple vapor, the roommates resumed their conversation.

“Is there a performance tomorrow?” Joyce wondered.

“Yes, but I don’t think very many animals go to cabarets during Marlsay Day. It’s not like Julius Marlsay was a queen!” he laughed.

“Ya never know... well, then, I can tell ya for sure they go to the cafe. School’s out and *everyone’s* in town. But I’ve managed to make it out alive every year for the past four years.”

“Here’s to five,” *Miss Trixxxie* cheered. “You’re fabulous, darling, you got this.” The roommates clinked Alondras and some ash fell to the ground. The rabbit laughed. The squirrel snorted.

Joyce focused on the feeling of the almond shavings in her mouth, on the act of mastication itself. She ate her slice slowly and deliberately. Her roommate on the other paw took showy, exaggerated bites as if to make it clear to the back of

the house what he was doing. Ever since meeting each other on listings.co.azv six months ago, each and every action he took was for an audience. He was indomitable. He was happy. She had been meaning to ask him if he knew a life where he was not allowed to have an audience. Not *quite* her place to inquire about such personal details. But she had known feelings of guilt, shame, apprehension, self-loathing, and hiding, and wondered if he could identify with those. Perhaps, at some point, they would have a conversation about it. A long one which would last all night and span entire biographies. But there never was enough time. And if magically there was enough time, then there certainly never was enough energy. The hustle was ceaseless. Animals needed coffee every day. And, evidently, animals also needed twiggy, vaudevillian bunny-boys every day, too. Joyce did not judge. How could she, even if she wanted to? She did not have the time nor the energy to judge.

“Hey, Joyce, darling. How come you don’t take your boots off?”

Joyce hadn’t thought of that before. She rocked her right hindpaw back and forth and studied its motion on the balcony railing. She wore sturdy, black boots which nearly prepared her for combat, though they did not hide how tiny her bare paws really were. The cuffs of her black denim jeans were tucked into them, too.

“Isn’t it time to kick back and relax? When you come home from work?” the rabbit continued.

“I *am* kicking back and relaxing. But, I dunno. They’re comfortable. I feel secure. I don’t *need* to take them off... and I can’t fling them off my paws like high heels.” She demonstrated the kicking action.

Miss Trixxxie chuckled. “Sandi Stormika did that one time during her routine and her sandal flew right offstage and hit some guy in the audience!”

“No way.”

“The only reason why it’s funny is because it wasn’t the stiletto heel which struck his muzzle. He kept the shoe. Sandi even signed it for him!”

“Heh, little souvenir... does anybeast in the audience have anything of yours?”

The rabbit struck a cartoonish pose of contemplation. “Hmm! Yes, actually!”

“What is it?”

“Guess!”

Joyce inhaled. “Your virginity.”

Miss Trixxxie laughed uproariously, nearly spitting out his cake. Joyce kept her deadpan demeanor intact.

“Okay, seriously though. Panties?”

“Ha, no.”

“Wig?”

“Guess again!”

“Bra?”

“Hehe, yup! Slingshotted it in the wolf’s face. He loves me now. You should’ve seen his tail wag!” He waved both paws furiously to illustrate. Joyce snorted.

“I hope it wasn’t an actually good bra you lost.”

“Nah, don’t worry about that. We have them in bulk in the dressing room.”

Joyce thought about the path which *Miss Trixxxie* took to arrive at femininity, and how it was from a completely different starting point than the one she herself had taken. His road must have been paved with makeovers, shopping bags, blended coffee with whipped cream, glitter, and maybe some bullying. But Joyce knew hers was paved with conventional beauty, stolen purses, black coffee straight up, antidepressants, and definitely bullying.

“That cake was delicious,” Joyce said earnestly.

“Wasn’t it?”

The rabbit extinguished the Alondra in the ashtray, and then took off the wig. *Miss Trixxie* suddenly transformed into Twazz. “Okay, I’m taking a shower,” he said plainly.

“Sounds good,” Joyce said as Twazz stepped back inside. She ought to have stepped inside herself, and go to sleep in a proper bed, in preparation for the morning shift of one of the top three busiest days in Carmen’s year.

But, no.

Just one more.

The chill beats playlist had run its course, and the stereo chain pumped no more, but she did not bother to switch it off. Joyce lit one more Alondra and unlaced her boots, leaving them on her hindpaws. The white noise of the freeway

complemented the gray, formless space inside the pineapple cloud-room surrounding her head, inducing a hypnosis.

She unintentionally tunked out in her chair on the balcony, the Alondra still incandescent. After his shower, Twazz dragged her to the couch because he did not have the physical strength to carry her all the way to her bed — and not for the first time, either.