

## ***Exchange and Descent: Feasting on Scraps***

### **(My Sucky Valentine Mix)**

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The Friday before Halloween, my primary girlfriend Vash attended the Queer Open Mic for the first time in months, then came home with me. Most of her recent Friday nights had been spent with Dietrich, her new side dish. On Saturday morning, Vash and I engaged in our coffee-and-bagel ritual at the café in my neighborhood. We hadn't done it for some time, and it was a little thing I missed terribly.

She left after breakfast, citing work to do at home and play rehearsal that night. My own plan for that evening was The Feast of Souls, a big dance/fetish party being held at the Porn Palace.

When I learned about The Feast of Souls earlier in the week, Vash didn't know yet if she would have rehearsal on Saturday night, so I told her I'd love for us to go to the party together if possible. She replied that she already had plans to go out with Dietrich if the rehearsal fell through, but that she was intrigued by the party and wished she'd heard about it sooner.

I pointed out that The Feast of Souls was scheduled to go until three in the morning, so even if she did have rehearsal, there would be plenty of time for her and Dietrich to attend. I would just go to the Power Exchange instead. There was a good chance I'd end up there eventually.

Vash said that was sweet of me, but she would never take somebody else to a party I'd invited originally her to. Her and Dietrich would find other ways to occupy themselves, though Vash assured me she would have wanted to go to with me if it were another time.

To the best of my knowledge, there *was* no other time. Never had been, never would be. There was only now.

The Feast of Souls was essentially a goth club. The DJs were fond of Marilyn Manson, so I danced quite a lot, but by one in the morning I was bored and ready to relocate.

Typical for the Saturday before Halloween, the City was abuzz into the wee hours. Taking a detour into the Mission for a bloodsugar-replenishing burrito was an adventure in its own right.

It was Halloween Fetish Ball night at the Power Exchange, so admission for women and trannies was ten bucks. This offended my sense of personal entitlement, since it was free for us the rest of the time. I wasn't supposed to have to pay to get in, damnit! But I paid anyway. I was lonely, and my friends Marc and Rhonda would be there. Even better, the entire building would be open, so I'd finally get to see the top two floors.

Including the Dungeon in the basement, the Power Exchange was spread out over four floors. Above the ground floor was Level 3, which was only open on Fridays and Saturdays to couples and single women. Boy-girl couples primarily, though girl-girl couples were admitted as well.

The primary appeal of Level 3 was the relative lack of tourists and towelboys, so exhibitionist couples could do their thing without the bother of being watched. On this particular evening, Level 3 was as filled with tourists as the Dungeon tended to be on any given night, except they were mostly sitting around looking bored. There just wasn't as much to gawk at. A few hetero couples being tentatively affectionate to each other, but I suspected they were inhibited by the

wild-card element of the tourists. Wasn't this what they paid (slightly) extra for on other nights to avoid?

The truly undiscovered country was the all-male club on the fourth floor. It was the same square footage as the other floors, but felt larger because it wasn't divided into smaller rooms.

In the center was the Labyrinth, which resembled a men's room designed by a Cubist. The many niches and glory holes were empty, probably because of the evening's mostly straight clientele.

As I walked through the Labyrinth I developed a tail like a comet on its sun-bound arc: a streak of silent men, following to see what I was going to do, and if I would do it to them. Frequently I'd hit a dead end and have to double back through the trail. (There were no minotaurs around any corners, at least. They were in a line behind me.)

In the more familiar milieu of the Dungeon, it was the busiest night I'd ever seen. The space outside the Cage was packed with new faces enthused by the Halloween spirit, people wanting to see something *really out there*. To many, that defined the Power Exchange.

Rhonda was her usual sex-carny self, standing at the gate, trying to lure people into the Cage to play. Sometimes it worked, mostly it didn't, but she always made the effort. On this night there were a lot more people to try.

One who did enter the cage was Amphon, a tiny, beautiful Asian girl in a nurse's uniform who said she wanted to be a dominatrix.

Rhonda asked Amphon if she had ever tied anyone up. Amphon said she hadn't, but wanted to learn. Rhonda then reasoned that if Amphon was going to tie

people up, it was only right that Amphon herself first experience being tied up, yes?

Uncertain, Amphon pointed at me and said: "Why don't you tie *her* up?"

I brightened, raised my hand and said: "Oooh! Yes! Definitely, please!"

All eyes remained on her. Neither Rhonda nor anybody else acknowledged Amphon's suggestion, or even my presence. At that moment, I did not exist. It was obviously a ruse, after all. Besides, why would they want to tie up a six-foot sim-u-lay-crum of sexiness like me when they had a petite, genuinely sexy genetic girl like Amphon? They wouldn't, and didn't.

I drifted away and said nothing more.

Meanwhile, a woman in her late forties who looked like the Canadian actress Genevieve Bujold had been circling the Cage like so many others, looking alternately shocked and fascinated by the goings-on. She decided to take the leap, agreeing to a mild spanking and flogging by Marc on the St. Andrew's Cross.

Believing strongly in both consent and sharing, Marc asked her if it was all right if I spanked her. She said yes, so I spanked her a few times. It was okay, but what I really wanted was to kiss her. Sit down on the couch and make out a little, or even just cuddle. Did I suggest any of this? No. It still felt like too much to ask a stranger.

It was then that I realized how hungry I was, how starved for affection. Vash and I still hugged when we got together, held hands sometimes, and she would snuggle up against me in bed if my body wasn't *too* cold. But it was feeling rote, and there hadn't been much else for a while.

Though I was a regular at the Power Exchange, I wasn't engaging in The Big Secks. Marc would flog and spank and whomp me on the Cross, and sometimes I got a nice endorphin spike, but otherwise I was simply *there*.

What I craved was basic female tenderness. For me, the state of liberated, progressive San Francisco sex culture was that it was easier to find a man to hit me than a girl to kiss me. As a bulky m2f tranny, not credibly feminine and willfully rejecting the neo-masculinity which was in vogue, I slipped through the cracks of what the majority of dykes in town found attractive. There were countless opportunities to suck cock, but the hoped-for discovery of my bisexuality wasn't happening, and my options were dropping back to zero.

I reflected on the early days of my relationship with my ex-girlfriend Maddy. She was afraid to let me go to my favorite goth clubs, or most anywhere at all, for fear that I would get stolen away by Christina Aguilera look-alikes. It had happened once in a dream—her dream, not mine—and was convinced it might happen in real life if she let her guard down. When I tried to go out she would cry and pout and tantrum, so more often than not I just wouldn't leave.

So here I was six years later, free and available, and the Christina Aguilera look-alikes were not exactly lining up to claim me. Nor were the Genevieve Bujold look-alikes.

I decided not to tell Vash how hungry I was feeling. I knew this was probably a mistake, since my relationships with Kim and Maddy had been mortally wounded by poor communication and not being honest with my feelings. I'd promised myself that wouldn't happen again. I also promised myself I would never again stay in an unhealthy relationship.

But I also knew Vash's previous relationships tended to end when her partners got too clingy and demanding, and I didn't want her to feel burdened or pressured. That might scare her off entirely, and...no. That could not happen. I could not lose her. Having Vash in my life, even as she refocused her affections on Dietrich, was better than not having her in my life, period.

But there had to be more. Vash and Dietrich were off somewhere at that moment indulging and playing and getting drunk in the flesh, or, for all I knew, just enjoying the warmth of each others' companionship.

Who was there for me?

A week later, I met a tranny named Jezebel.



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