

Wednesday, October 10th, 2068. Tracy Island

For once Anna was not sitting next to the pool, reading. The day had been rainy and dreary, and after dinner she holed up in the Library with a book she had found there. John found her sitting by the window, deep in Diplomatic Immunity.

"I always liked Bujold. Have you read her fantasy books as well?"

Anna looked up, and put the book down. "Yes, I love her Chalion series. I wrote a paper on the theology in it when I was considering seminary. I practically have Paladin of Souls memorized. And, of course, I've read all the 'Miles Vorkosigan' books." She gestured at the chair next to her. "Sit down. I was about to get up for a refill on my coffee. Do you want some? I have a pot of decaf made."

John smiled. "Since I'm already standing, let me get it." He put the book he was holding down and took her cup over to the coffee maker in the back of the room. "You take cream?"

In a minute, he returned with two cups. Handing hers to Anna, he sat in the armchair next to her and sipped his coffee.

Anna watched him. Do I want to wait for him to start? Or should I say something? He sat there, lost in thought. Finally Anna broke the silence.

"Do you miss her?"

John looked up from his coffee. "I'm not sure. I miss having someone to talk to about books. I miss having someone special waiting for me when I get back from Thunderbird five. Someone my own age, that is."

"Tyler doesn't exactly count as a romantic interest. But do you miss having someone waiting for you or do you miss her specifically?"

John thought for a second. "I think I miss the idea of having someone more than I miss her. I liked her, but I was never sure how I felt. I enjoyed her company but in the same way I liked Tyler's or Tin-Tin's. I liked her as a friend, not romantically." He looked up from his coffee and added, "I miss having her here, but I don't think I miss her, if that makes sense."

"A great deal of sense, I think. What did you do together?"

John smiled. "We talked about books. She introduced me to a couple of new authors." He gestured at the book he had put on the table. "I was showing her the stars and teaching her the constellations. She was learning Spanish. She's a good student; she learned fast."

"Sound like a lot of adult mentoring. John, how old is Kat?"

"Oh, about..." John froze for a second. Then he continued, slowly. "I was about to say 16. But I know she's 25."

Anna nodded. "She is a very nice young lady. And she's going to be a very nice woman -- when she gets out of childhood. Physically, she's 25. But, emotionally, she's still 16."

John sat there for a minute looking down at his cup of coffee. When he finally looked up at Anna, his eyes were more thoughtful than troubled. "I always wanted to protect her, take care of her. I liked having her as a friend, but she seemed to want, well, all of me at all times. Tyler got mad at her for taking me away from him. But Tyler's nine years old. Kat acted the same way."

"Exactly. Wait five years, and she'll be a different person. But she's not really an adult now. She still has a child's romantic view of life. Not an adult understanding of romance and love."

"I think she took things a lot more seriously than I did. She was thinking romance; I was thinking friendship."

Anna nodded. "When I talked to her, I got the impression she'd never had male friends before. A boyfriend, yes, but not guys as friends, just to do things with. Maybe romance was the only way she could imagine having a male friend."

John's mouth quirked up in a wry grin. "And I wasn't interested in romance just yet. Much less marriage."

"John, if you had married her, you would have been bored out of your skull within a year - probably sooner. You're not the type who wants a pretty wife who cooks and cleans and gives you kids. You need someone who's your intellectual equal -- someone you can talk about ideas, concepts and dreams with." Anna looked down at the book next to John. "Did you talk about the Brother Cadfael books with her?" At John's nod, she went on. "I like Ellis Peters. I like her understanding of the beliefs of the 12th century and she writes a good mystery. But could you imagine trying to explain the theology of Chalion to Kat? Or talking about anything of Heinlein's with her? Not the plots of the books -- but the ideas behind them? You may not want someone who loves the stars like you do, or who can discuss physics with you, but you need someone you can talk as an equal to. And you couldn't do that with Kat."

John's face had a distant, sad look on it as he said, "And the worst thing is: she never would have understood why she couldn't make me happy."

Posted by SusanMartha on November 7, 2007

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