

Living After the Starlight

by Bryan Schuder

It was Silvia's and my 2nd anniversary dating together. Despite a really rocky start and some strange moments, things seemed to be going really well. Our interests, temperments, and even our crazy sides matched. We met at an anime convention. She was looking over the latest re-releases of Battle Princess Mintaka. I don't know why, but I felt compelled to strike up a conversation. Well, it was probably the fact she was a fiery red-haired, piercing green eyed, freckled, glasses wearing, anime-interested young woman with a figure that my baser instincts had only theorized could exist. I may have been a goofy, tall and bulky dork... But... I have a near encyclopedic knowledge of Battle Princess Mintaka on my side. Fate may have been throwing me a pity softball on this one, but damned if I wasn't going to swing for the fences on it.

So... Two years, a whole host of convention going, and a lot of learning experiences... We were still together and I didn't see anything stopping us. She got her dissertation together and defended it. With the Ph. D. in hand and some noted papers published, the university couldn't wait for her to apply for some open positions they'd been dying to fill. I was able to pull a few strings to get into the IT department with the help of an old friend who managed to find himself there after a big career change. So... The next big step I figured was seeing if she wanted to move in with me. I managed to get a ridiculous price on a foreclosure property, and I had been living there for some time. Silvia is practically here all the time and the rent for anything nicer than a single bedroom apartment around this town is ridiculous. So, 2nd anniversary, I figured... Why not ask?

We decided to keep it simple this anniversary. Giving some craziness that happened during the first one, that Silvia still doesn't feel comfortable talking about... Simpler is better. A nice day trip to some parts of the state we hadn't seen before, lunch at some place we found on the web, going over to the theatre to see the new Deadpool movie (Her suggestion, I love this woman), and dinner at the usual nice place we go to when we need a little fancy dining to bring up our spirits. We are hanging out on the couch. She's curled up with a blanket in my arms. She looks happy and content. Seems like a successful anniversary so far. I was tempted to put off asking her about moving in. I really didn't want to give Murphy's Law a chance to throw everything for a loop. But, hell... You gotta know sometime right?

"Hey, Silvia?"

"Yes?"

"I was thinking... You are over here a lot anyway, you need a place to stay in the future, and well... We've been together for two years. If you are comfortable with it, I'd really like to see how we are together, living in the same place."

Okay. Logical reasoning presented, reason for the question revealed, and option to gracefully back out allowed. Worst case probably, "No, let's give it some more time". Best case: "Hell yes!" The sudden slight shudder of Silvia snapping to full consciousness and the odd feeling of the room's energy changing was not in any of the predicted outcomes. Oh shit, I'd somehow hit a critical snag.

Silvia slowly pushes herself up and sits upright on the couch. The blanket slips away and she

just sits there in uncomfortable contemplation. This is not good. She's normally a very confident and expressive woman. Seeing her this subdued and nervous... This was shades of the last anniversary right here. I'm not going to allow that to happen again.

"Hey, there's no pressure or anything. I just figured it might be something to think about. I think everything is going great between you and me. I've got a place, you are looking for a place. And there's no one else who I could think of that'd make this place more of a home for the both of us. If it's too much to ask, just say so. And we'll think about it later and-"

A meek and saddened voice creeps from Silvia, "I want to. *sniff* I really do. I just- I just- I just don't know if you'd accept me."

Okay. I'm confused. "Accept you? Have I not accepted you before? I accept you as you are before me. There's nothing I can think of that-"

"I'm a demon."

"A what?"

"Demon."

"You get a bit difficult some times, but you're hardly a-"

Silvia shoots up from the couch, turns around to me, and holds her arms to the sides with tears in her eyes, "*sniff* I'll show you. It's best for the both of us to make it quick."

The facade fades away. Silvia's long red hair, turns a silvery white. Her skin goes from the freckled pale to a gray with darker gray markings. Two swept back horns anchored in the sides of her forehead appear. But as strange as what has changed is, she still has that same figure, that beautiful face, and the piercing green eyes that are more radiant than ever.

"You know me as Silvia Carter. I'm... I'm... I'm Silvianistria Nostromandeus of the 3rd Order of Orion... Former servant and advisor to the Battlemistress and Queen of the 3rd Order of Orion Lady Oriana Nox."

She looks at me, expecting a certain reaction. I gaze into those same eyes. She's scared. It actually all makes sense to me now. We got A LOT to talk about. And she's not the only one with a few secrets to tell, but first things first. I take her hands into mine and never breaking eye contact with hers. I crack that smirk that she hates to love, "If you are the same woman that was nearly late to her dissertation defense because of an argument with me about how there is no way that Battle Princess Mintaka could have used the Gauntlet of the Guardian to defeat Lord Izo... Then you are the same woman I've loved and will always love."

This isn't the reaction she expected. After a brief moment of confusion, I witness one of the few moments she's ever been delighted to be absolutely wrong. She gracefully collapses into an embrace around my neck, one of her horns glances me in forehead with a light thunk. That'll take some getting used to. We hold each other and eventually start airing out all our laundry.

A few hours later....

"So, that's me. Once an undisputed master advisor, mage, and alchemist to one of the Queens to the Dark Realms. Then Queen Nox decided to listen to that idiot Wester and got her aass royally kicked and banished to realms that even the darkest mages dare not even chart. Out of work and trapped on Earth. Thankfully, certain organizations offered me a

chance at a life here on this planet with giving them a bunch of insider info."

"I always wondered how they got all that info in those Battle Princess Mintaka books."

"Yah, I kind of got into them while trying to see how they portrayed all us on the Dark Realm side."

"They were pretty kind with your portrayal."

"They still cleaned up the rest of the group. Great gods, most of Queen Nox's crew were complete perverts. I was so glad that Lord Izo got absolutely annihilated by Mintaka. He ran back to the Dark Realms and I haven't heard a thing about him since."

"Grr... Fucker deserved it."

"You really don't like that guy. Every time that name gets brought up you ALWAYS emit this aura of spite and ire, that I never sense from you any other time."

Shit. Well... she's got me. Let's get all the laundry hanging out. "There's a reason. And as a bonus, it'll prove you right."

This has her attention now. I feel her leaning in and her eyes trying to decipher what I was going to say. "The Gauntlet of the Guardian didn't leave Lord Izo and jump to Mintaka."

"Yes. Because the Gauntlet will only jump on its own to someone trying to defend who they love and care for in their time of greatest need."

"Yes... Ah... Those scars on my body, those weren't from electrical arcs. They were-"

I don't get a chance to complete my sentence before Silvia is reaching under my shirt and feeling the various scarring I got a long time ago.

"Holy shit! These are magical blast burn scars! The residual magic is so weak I could never pick it up while maintaining my illusion and shape change spell. Now, I can sense it all... By the gods! How did you live through this-"

Silvia hands held my right arm. Her fingertips sweep around. She's finally sensing the residual magic of what was on there. "You wore the... THE... Gauntlet of the Guardian?!"

"Yes."

"The bystander that attempted to save Mintaka and friends in issue 126 where Mintaka finally confronts Lord Izo?"

"Me."

"The gauntlet went to?"

"Me."

"Because WHO were you defending?"

"My little sister."

"... .. !!!"

"Yes."

I think it'll be a LONG while before I see that degree of shock, confusion, and bewilderment in Silvia's face. And I really hope I'm not the one to cause it next time. I see her bite her lower lip

and flash a concerned look my way.

"Do you still want me to come over to your family's place this Thanksgiving? That might be REALLY awkward... and possibly dangerous."

"Don't worry. My sister wasn't good with the sensory powers before, and she hasn't used them in at least ten years. We should be fine."

"But, what about Horus her magical cat?!"

"Don't worry. Horus and I go back. I've helped him out a number of times. He'll keep it quiet."

Plus, the bastard owes me a big one after nearly getting caught by the magical equivalent of the FBI trying to move his stash of Star Hemp to a new safe place.

We both lay on the couch, back to that comfortable and content point again.

"So... you okay with moving in?"

"Ha. Yes. I'm actually looking forward to it now."

"Cool. Got to admit, it was nice getting everything out there."

"No kidding. Strange world we live in. I'm just glad I can finally drop the shape change spell around you."

"Speaking of which, you wouldn't happen to have THAT uniform still?"

All I am able to get from Silvia is that evil little grin.