

With every step Rosario took in the spirit world her surroundings became more and more dreamlike. She could recognise the edges, or the memory of what was still very much Central Park, but it was bigger and wilder. The Trees were huge and bountiful and most of them had faces if you looked at them the right way. The forest was abuzz with the sounds of critters that should not be in the middle of Manhattan. And beyond, the sound of raucous conversation, an argument. Far enough still that she could not make sense of the words.

Suddenly the world went dark and she felt herself fall. She didn't scream, to her credit, but she made a loud enough noise that Bren took notice and went back for her.

"Everything ok?" fae said

"I just, tripped on my hair and my feet."

Rosario brushed her suddenly incredibly long hair aside and noticed her legs were backwards, she had reverted to her Ciguapa form.

"Oh fuck I knew I forgot to tell you something." Bren said, helping her up. "You're not going to be able to hold human form here, glamours won't work on yourself or anyone."

It was then that Rosario noticed Bren looked different too. Fae had long ears, and eyes that were a dark deep purple all around. Faer fingers were long and ended in very long very sharp nails.

"You're, that's what you look like then."

"Yup" Bren said "What, why are you looking at me like that?"

"You're beautiful"

Bren blushed

"First of all," fae said "thank you! Second of all, we need to keep going. Can you walk?"

"Yeah I think so, I haven't exactly been practising walking with backwards feet, but I think I'll be fine once I get into a rhythm. So there's no way to hold human form here?"

"Not unless you can separate, and that takes a lot of practice to master."

"I didn't even realise that was possible. Can you do it?"

"Yeah, but, shouldn't do it right now. Come on we need to keep going."

"Ok ok."

Rosario took a few uncertain steps.

"Here, hold my hand." Bren said. With her hand in faers she had a much easier time staying up and soon had gotten into a rhythm. They walked this way until they came to the edge of the treeline and peered out the side of a huge trunk.

In the middle, all around a huge bonfire, hundreds of creatures were involved in a heated debate. Rosario could see Satyrs, and Deer with huge tree branches for antlers, and big hairy men and women. She could see little people with long ears, little people with short ears, little people with fox ears, little people with no ears at all. She could see a group of beautiful people with long

white hair, keeping to themselves. She could see a small hairy person in an expensive suit hugging a small hairy person dressed in furs and leather.

Currently the floor was held by a centaur making an impassioned speech.

"I think it's time we reconsider the changeling question altogether."

Loud cries of hear hear!

"I think we should go back to the way we did it before, just replace them, and kill the human children!"

There were more shouts of hear hear! but a lot of boos too!

A man with the head of a rabbit and deer antlers stood in the middle

"Are we forgetting the strides hybrid Changelings have made. They're by and large the reason humans leave us alone. Subtle tactics. Going medieval on humans doesn't make them leave us alone any more, and we were on the verge of extinction if it weren't for the work of the changeling ambassadors."

More cheers for the crowd.

One of the beautiful people stepped up now.

"This discussion is unnecessary. The changeling practice has one purpose that must come before all else, it is a treatment for the disease. "

The crowd was silent.

"Our priority" the beautiful person continued "should be maximising the chances that it works and continues to work, for our preservation."

"A very good point from my sister from overseas" the rabbit man said

"And again, we see the right of the new way. Both the human and the person benefit from a cooperative upbringing, and humans don't stick nails in their children's toes any more"

Several noises of disgust and grimaces from the crowd

"And if we can reap other benefits from the cooperation, all the better."

"Bah!" said the centaur " I think my dear Mr Wolp has perhaps spent too much time amongst humans, he's starting to talk like, what do they call it, a businessman"

Laughter from the crowd

"Humans" the centaur spit "they're not worth the dirt they're made out of. Every union of a human and a person devalues the person greatly, and counting them amongst our ranks dilutes our essence. They are tools to be used, livestock. And now their way of life is threatening our existence. Culling them would be the responsible thing to do, not your half thought out diplomacy. My people, for one, are tired of this humiliation."

"And you speak for all of our people then, brother?" A different centaur stepped into the circle.

"And your little tirade has nothing to do with the situation you find yourself in amongst our own people."

"How dare you?! You have no right to bring that up outside of our house"

"You and your dangerous rhetoric give me the right and the obligation. You would doom us all!"

Shouts from every side of the circle now.

"Order ORDER" Mr Wolp shouted. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves"

The crowd calmed

"Tomorrow, a select committee of us will meet with the changeling ambassador for New York and inform them of the discussion. A decision need not be made right now. Every viewpoint will be respected, yes, even the gentleman's position that we should start killing human children, which I will remind you some of us never did."

"Don't think your mockery of me goes unnoticed rabbit man" the big centaur said.

Behind the trees, Rosario was watching in rapt attention. It only dawned on her after a minute that she was one of those children. If things had been different in her time she would not be here, she would not be part faerie or part human she'd just be dead. She turned around to look at Bren and that's when she noticed that she was furious. She had a big scowl and was breathing heavily, and her eyes had gone from that deep purple to a deep red.

"Bren are you..." but before Rosario could finish asking Bren ran into the clearing

"I AM THE HUMAN AMBASSADOR FOR NEW YORK CITY! TALK TO ME!" fae shouted.

There were gasps, there were boos, and more than a few tsks from the assembled Audience. A tiny sylph flew down and said

"What are you doing here Brendan?" the winged creature asked.

"DO NOT CALL ME THAT"

"Child. what are you doing here?" The sylph repeated.

"I'm here because I am the CHANGELING" fae emphasised that word and looked right at the centaur as fae said it "ambassador for New York City. Now where are they?"

"They're not here. This meeting is off limits to humans, your parents knew that."

"But they're in the city."

"I will not say. You must leave child, you're in enough trouble as it is. And you are NOT the ambassador for New York City. Someone else was chosen 3 months ago. You would know this, if you ever bothered to call home."

"What?" Bren deflated.

"Go on, child, get out of here. I'll come find you tomorrow and we may talk. "

Bren stood motionless as the whole crowd stared at faer. Rosario had also walked out into the clearing but no one had noticed in the commotion. She now walked up to Bren and grabbed faer hand

"Come on hon let's get out of here." she said and then the crowd took notice of her.

"Oh another changeling." the centaur said. "You see how they flaunt our rules, how they place themselves above us. It's that wretched human arrogance. Uppity whelp."

"That's enough from you, asshole!" Rosario shouted. "I'm sorry we disrupted your meeting everyone. We will leave."

"Good riddance and be glad I do not kill you where you stand." The centaur said.

"You wouldn't." Mr Wolp said "You're all talk. Go on Children leave. We will decide how you shall be reprimanded at a later time.

Rosario nodded and started walking away with Bren in hand. Bren was moving quickly and she was having trouble keeping up with her backwards feet, but they made their way back out of the clearing and were almost to the opening when Rosario noticed they were being followed.

"Hold on a minute" she said and turned around.

"Hi!" said a beautiful person with blonde hair and grey eyes

"What do you want?" Bren said curtly.

"Well," the beautiful person said, "I just wanted to make sure you were ok. Awful awful people in that meeting. Cletus, that centaur guy, smells awful. I'm down with humans though, and queers, queer humans. Which I can smell you are."

"Uh-huh." Bren said, skeptical.

"Seriously, I spent a bunch of time out with humans, it's great, they're so funny and cute. Anyways, my name is Kevin."

"Kevin?" Rosario asked

"Well that's my human name, but it's good enough for now."

"Nice to meet you Kevin, my name is-"

"Hooold on. Remember, he's a faerie" Bren interrupted "don't go giving your name so readily"

"But he told me his."

"He told you his human name. That's different, that's probably his human name this week."

"No, Kevin I've had for a couple months" Kevin said "got it in Williamsburg from this cutie, oh you should have seen them! Hey why don't we keep talking outside, I can smell that this whole debacle has you more than a little agitated."

"Fine, fine." Bren said sounding exhausted "just come along then."

Once they had made it out through the gap, Rosario collapsed on the ground and Bren went and sat down next to her. They'd both returned to their glamoured human forms and behind them was Kevin, also in human form. A tiny blonde crusty twink. He had black piercings and a beanie and was wearing a black binder with a fishnet shirt, black jeans, and martins.

"Hey, you're kind of cute." Rosario said

"Why thanks!" Kevin replied as he squatted down next to them.

"So Kevin. Why did you follow us?" Rosario said, suddenly serious.

"I would also like to know" said Wren

"Well if you want the truth." Kevin said "You smelled like fun. Two obviously queer changelings busting into the middle of the meeting like that. That's some... what's the word? chutzpah? you know what I mean. Also you," he said pointing a long finger at Rosario "You my dear, stink of marijuana and I wanted to see if I could bum some."

"That's fair" Rosario said, suddenly at ease. Stoner recognise stoner.

"And there's something else." Kevin said whilst sniffing the air around her.

"I'm sure of it now, you smell of demon. That's definitely something I don't sniff every day, specially not from a changeling."

"You can smell demon?" Bren interjected.

"Well of course I can. Love demons. Used to date one, see. Plaz was his name, he was the cutest thing."

"Hold up hold up hold up!" Rosario said suddenly "You and Plaz? My Plaz? Plazhol?"

"You know him?" Kevin asked

Rosario erupted in raucous laughter.

"I am going to give him so much shit for this" she said.

To be continued.