Old Habits Die Hard

by im_fairly_witty

Summary

The Dead Riveras sneak into the Sunrise Spectacular with the help of one Hector's more questionable talents.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

“Now approaching the De la Cruz Sunrise Spectacular, please make sure all tickets have been purchased well in advance.”

Miguel looked up at the box where the sky trolley’s recorded voice had come from, a sinking feeling in his stomach.

“Tickets?” Imelda asked, shooting a hard look at Hector, “we’re in the land of the dead and that serpiente is still charging people to hear him caterwaul into a microphone?”

Hector shrugged with an uncomfortable smile, making a non-committal noise.

It hurt Miguel to see how wounded yet eager he was every time Imelda gave him any attention at all, regardless of how barbed it was. It was like watching a stray cat be kicked every time it hesitantly tried to rub against someone’s ankles.

“Hector, we don’t have tickets, how are we going to get backstage?” Miguel whispered.

He was the only Rivera who had dared to sit close to him the entire trolley ride. No one else was brave enough to tempt Imelda’s confused irritation, having been so recently disengaged from Hector.
her rage was loose and fast, hitting anyone who got too close.

“If we can get to Frida we’re gold, chamaco.” Hector said, but Miguel could see he was gripping the edge of the straw hat in his lap just a little too tightly. “She already hates Ernesto for being a lazy performer, I can guarantee that once she knows he’s a murderer she’ll come up with some crazy idea of how to get us close to him no problem.”

“But how do we get to Frida then? Through Ceci’s window?” Miguel asked, thinking of how they’d gotten into the rehearsal a few hours earlier. Wow. Had it really only been a few hours?

“Through who’s window?” Imelda snapped from the other side of the trolley.

“Oh, Imelda, you remember Ceci Rodriguez?” Hector said, perking up with an unbearable bit of hope in his eyes, “She’s a seamstress for the production crew at the Spectacular, she finally got her dream job as a costume designer. Well, after death anyway. She’s helped me a few times over the years.”

For the first time during the trolley ride Imelda’s face softened, just a bit.

“Oh my, Ceci?” she said, an old memory lighting her eyes, “I haven’t thought about Ceci in years, she died so long before I did. Is she still as-” But imelda shook her head, swatting her hand in front of her face as if to push the memory aside. “No, that doesn’t matter right now, can she get us in or not?”

Hector scratched his goatee, “No, I think we’ll have to find a different way past security. I don’t think she’ll be at all happy to see me right before the show starts. Besides, I’ve already lost one of her dresses today.”

“You lost one of her what?” Imelda asked, somehow folding her arms even tighter.

Hector snapped his boney finger with a click, his face brightening. “That does give me an idea though.” He paused, looking at Imelda as a sheepish grin slid onto his face. “I, uh, Imelda, do you happen to remember the time I got us into that Mexico City fiesta for our second anniversary?”

Imelda’s face was stoney for a moment, but then something far back in her memory seemed to click into place and her eyes got very wide. For some reason Tio Oscar and Felipe suddenly looked very uncomfortable too.

“No.” Imelda said sternly, “You are not pulling that again, we are both far too old for that kind of thing.”

“What kind of thing?” Miguel asked.

Hector’s grin only got wider as the trolley shuddered to a halt at their stop.

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“Imelda, please,” Tio Oscar whispered desperately, “we’re not sixteen anymore.”

“Don’t make us do this.” Tio Felipe finished.

The Riveras were all crowded into a back alley behind the Spectacular arena. Just around the corner from them was their target, a lone security guard standing watch at a back entrance.

Imelda pressed her boney palms to her eye sockets, either trying to ward off a migraine or simply
doing anything to avoid seeing Hector beside her.

“Stop being cowards.” Hector whispered back in a mischievous falsetto, snapping open a fan in front of his face and hitching his orange purse higher onto his boney shoulder.

“Just hurry and do it before my good sense comes back to me.” Imelda hissed, still not looking at her estranged husband, who in Miguel’s opinion was rocking a strapless dress and high-heels uncomfortably well.

Ceci had never pulled up her fire escape, making a quick raid of the rehearsal hall’s costume department an easy one. Miguel could tell Hector’s excitement was building, but he couldn’t forget that Hector had collapsed again just minutes ago in wave of shimmering gold sparks. Not the mention that Miguel had glimpsed his own collarbone becoming visible when they’d passed a mirror in the dressing rooms.

They were running out of time and they all knew it.

“But-” Oscar started.

“Now!” Imelda snapped, jolting Hector and the twins into action.

Hector patted his long haired wig into place a final time and strode out into the open, hips swaying confidently as he sauntered into full view of the security guard. One of the twins whimpered, but another glare from Imelda sent them both scampering after Hector.

“What are you doing! Let go of me!” Hector cried in his falsetto, struggling dramatically as Felipe half-heartedly grabbed the strap of his purse.

Oscar looked back at Imelda for a moment and then grabbed the bag as well, escalating the tug of war into something that looked halfway real.

“Hey! What’s going on here?” Came the security guard’s voice.

The twins looked up as they finally pried the purse from Hector and then took off down the street.

“My bag!” Hector howled, falling to the pavement with such despair that for a moment Miguel was afraid he’d been struck by the second death. But no, in a moment the security guard was at Hector’s side, looking panicked.

“What are you alright Señorita?” The guard asked uncertainty as Hector continued to sob hysterically.

“My-my-bag! It has my only photo of my son in it!” Hector cried, latching onto the guard’s leg in mock-grief, “It’s all I have, please! You have to get it back for me!”

Miguel look up at Mama Imelda beside him, who was now watching with a kind of fascinated horror.

“I, uh, of course Señorita.” The guard said, awkwardly trying to shake Hector off his leg. “I’ll get it for you, just, let me go por favor.”

“Bless you!” Hector cried, still holding onto the poor man’s leg. “A thousand blessing on you Señor, for helping a poor woman in need!”

By the time the guard successfully detached himself he looked only too happy for any excuse to get away. They all watched as he took off in the direction the twins had gone, just as Oscar and Felipe
crept back to their hidden group from behind, having circled the block in the time it took for the guard to escape Hector’s clutches.

“One doorway to Frida Kahlo,” Hector said in his normal voice, picking himself up and cheerfully brushing dirt off his hem, “as ordered, courtesy of the Hector drama institute.”

Miguel couldn’t hold it any longer and burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, leaning against the brick wall beside him, then collapsing into giggles. Hector walked over, one hand on his cocked pelvis as he looked down at Miguel with mock-feminine seriousness.

“I don’t know what you’re laughing at little boy,” Hector said in falsetto, grinning as he offered Miguel a hand, “purse-snatching is a serious crime.”

“You were amazing!” Miguel cried, taking Hector’s hand with his now equally bony one and letting himself be pulled to his feet.

“You were ridiculous.” Mamá Imelda said, but Miguel was pretty sure her expression was the same as his Abuelita’s was when she was trying very hard to be cross at something she’d rather laugh at.

“We’d better hurry.” Hector said, swapping his wig for his real hair and goatee, stepping out of his high heels and shrugging off the dress to reveal his tattered trousers underneath. He accepted his mess of a purple jacket from Tia Victoria and pulled it on. “We’ve still got to find Frida and I don’t know when the guard will be coming back.”

Miguel gasped as Hector groaned and doubled over, a flutter of shimmering gold running through his bones. Miguel and Imelda both jumped to catch him as he nearly fell, steadying him until the pain passed.

“We need to keep moving if we’re going to get your picture in time.” Imelda said, looking self-conscious as she let go of Hector the moment he could stand on his own again. “You two ridiculous performers lead the way.”

“Thank you.” Hector said to Imelda, looking like he wanted to add something else, but instead he braced himself on Miguel’s shoulder as he turned to lead the way to the now unguarded doorway.

Miguel bit his lip, wishing he knew what to say, but for now all he could do was try to make sure Hector wasn’t forgotten before he could maybe work things out with Mamá Imelda.

“Come on Papá Hector,” Miguel said, supporting him as they walked, “let’s go get that photo.”

It may have been Miguel’s imagination, but it felt like Hector stood a little taller at the sound of being called “Papá.”

End Notes

Hope you enjoyed this ridiculous one-shot. You can also find me on tumblr to get more of my Coco ramblings and art.

- Wit

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