Observation
by Azure_Lynx

Summary

Things get awful lonely in the In-Between places. Sometimes, the only thing to do is watch the life you left behind.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The most surprising thing about Clarice’s observations from the void - in her opinion, anyway - was the fact that John and Erg shared an apartment now.

They’d moved past the anger and the jealousy, the contempt and the judgment. Now they shared solidarity in loss, and perhaps a little something else, too.

She’d spent a lot of time watching them. The In-Between places were awfully lonely, and she needed some entertainment. What better than two of the people she cared about most?

Perhaps even loved.

It was so easy to say she loved John. That hadn’t been a question, at first, and then he’d hurt her and tested her and accused her and she’d loved him a little less but the fact she loved him at all made it hurt.

It was harder to say she loved Erg. She did, she was pretty sure, but she felt like she ought to be
ashamed of it. Every time she thought about it, all she could do was flash back to the sickened feeling in her stomach when she asked John if he thought she was cheating on her.

She didn’t think things would be the same now.

“What is unsafe to have in this apartment?” Erg had asked one day over breakfast.

John had startled, looking up from his too-strong coffee. “What?”

“You have a history of self harm.” Erg had replied so matter-of-factly that John hadn’t been able to argue. Clarice had wondered idly why she’d never bothered to confront John about the fact that all the things he was doing amounted to self harm. “What is there in this apartment that you can hurt yourself with?”

“Nothing,” John had replied, looking back down sheepishly. “Nothing in here can hurt me.”

“Except me.” Erg had stared at him pointedly. It was the closest they’d come to discussing the moments after Clarice was shot, moments she barely remembered of screaming and violence and raw pain so palpable it hurt even her, trapped in the space between worlds.

John had shaken his coffee mug just once, making the briefest vortex. “I won’t try that again,” he’d promised, and he’d stayed true to his word.

When Clarice was extra bored and lonely, she’d call out to them. She’d see the way John’s head would turn, the imperceptible twitch of Erg’s mouth as he whispered, “Blink?”, so full of hope and longing.

John slept in a new bed at the new apartment they’d been forced to move to, since they couldn’t really go back to the old one after Jace Turner and his friends fucked that up. It looked so wrong without anyone beside him, a body where Clarice would’ve been if she could just figure out how to get back there. Zingo sprawled out on the bed sometimes and whined for Clarice, and she wanted to hold the dog and her lovers, but there just…wasn’t the right amount of force for it.

Erg slept on the couch, and he always looked so out of place in flannel pajama pants or draped under a blanket. It was clearly messing up his back. He was too young to have the kind of aches and pains he did, but they were there anyway. He was too young for a lot of things; when he’d told Clarice he was only 30, she’d been startled. There was the haunted look of old men in his eyes, and she would’ve guessed he’d lived almost twice that long.

Sometimes, without discussing it, Erg would crawl into bed with John. At first, they would start out with space between them, so careful not to touch, but eventually, something drew them together and they would end up nestled against each other, drawing comfort in their shared space. It looked cozy, and every molecule in Clarice’s barely-corporeal form ached to join them.

That was what she’d wanted, what she’d known deep down she couldn’t have. Not because polyamory was off the table or anything like that - she and John had always had fun talking about other people they found attractive - but because lately John had been too much a wreck to even handle talking about something like that.

“I don’t know what I believe anymore.”

It still stung, even after the bullets. He’d never even given her a proper apology, just some halfway words and explanations. It’d had to be enough for the time they had.

But she understood, even if that didn’t make it okay. John didn’t love himself. How could he believe
someone else could really love him?

In the end, it was never about Erg at all. Deep down, Erg seemed to know that too.

The two men had the most calm, quiet companionship, a peaceful domesticity that gave no indication of the way the two of them had started off. Erg was a better cook than John, so he did most of the meals, and he seemed delighted at the array of spices they were able to purchase that he hadn’t had access to in the tunnels. John would eat with a small smile - he preferred spicy food, since his senses weren’t particularly balanced most of the time - and then clean the dishes. He kept the whole apartment tidy, and picked up after Erg almost without thought.

Some evenings, Erg and Caitlin played chess. She had a tired look in her eyes, always, and Erg had taken to her quite well after she’d saved Glow’s life. She was the Best Human, in his eyes, and he’d decided he’d care for her the way she cared for them. He made her meals and kept her company. John commented on it, once, and Erg simply said that he knew the pain of losing a piece of one’s heart.

Clarice wasn’t sure if he was talking about her, or someone else.

One day, out of nowhere, John kissed Erg. It was probably the most interesting thing Clarice had witnessed since she passed into the In-Between. There was obvious tension between the two of them, sure, but Clarice had placed a mental bet with herself that Erg would be the one who tried it first. He was...surer, it seemed.

John didn’t particularly seem sure of anything these days.

So they started kissing each other, and, to Clarice’s annoyance, never fucking talked about it. There was so much left unsaid, always threatening to burst through the seams of their poorly stitched silences. If she were there, she’d make them say something. Anything. She tried to, even from beyond, reaching out with her arms and her words.

“Tell him you love him, dumbass,” she tried one time, trailing her fingers through the purple sparks of the fabric that divided them. It had almost seemed like John had heard her, the way his head turned and his lips parted.

Almost.

The men continued their dance, kisses and companionship and never saying how they felt, sometimes filling the silences with “I miss Clarice” and the responding “Me too.” There was love and there was solidarity tying them together, an understanding of each other no one else seemed to have.

And then, one day, when the bullet wounds were nothing more than a memory, she fell backwards, and hit hard ground, and she couldn’t see her boys anymore.

“Ow. What the fuck?”

She had looked around, and found herself somewhere on Earth, but a Different Earth. The air felt...different, and the energy fields were all wrong.

Everything was redder, too, and brighter. Her eyes hurt after the purple, inky darkness of the In-Between.

She realized she could still open portals to her own world, see through and watch John and Erg, and the rest of them too. Poor Lauren really needed a hug these days. But Clarice found people on this
other side, people that needed her, and she started watching less frequently. She would still see the hugs, the shared moments, but she also saw a new world in front of her, too, one she could hold in her hands.

And then she was strong enough to go back, and she needed their help. And so she took a deep breath, opened a portal, and went home, coming face to face with those she had left behind, spent so long watching.

For the first time, she was no longer just observing.

End Notes

Listen. Liiiiiiisten. I have a lot of feelings about the whole “What? You think I'm cheating on you?” Scene, and rather than Erase it From History, I decided to deeply meta the shit out of it. These three had such a potential, and yet it was never properly developed, since the show was so focused on playing that ”Angry Love Triangle” angle. So I fixed it for them! Anyway, John and Erg are grumpy boyfriends who don't quite know how to talk about it yet, and Clarice really wishes she could make them talk about it. It'll happen with time, though. I hope you all enjoyed this! Stay tuned for more post-season 2 fic because ho boy that finale wrecked me.

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