Decisions

by kriegersan

Summary

Sequel to Additions. Lana and Archer make some choices. So does Malory.

Notes

Sequel to Additions.

Warning: Characters display in-character racism, misogyny, homophobia.

Fluff and cuteness and dad!Archer. This takes place in a universe where Archer learned to be people, which I'm assuming (hoping, wishing) happens in S6. Enjoy.

“I didn’t think it was humanly possible to have this many brands of garbage bags with which to dispose of garbage. AJ, what do you think.”

“Noooo!”

“Yeah… my thoughts exactly, kid.”

Stupid Lana and her stupid need for AJ to grow up like a ‘normal’ kid, with a ‘normal’ understanding of pedantic things like grocery shopping, running errands and making small talk with the common folk. Archer didn’t exactly understand it, didn’t get why it mattered whether or not he
paid the extra two dollars on the expensive kind, why Lana wigged out and explained it wasn’t teaching AJ good economical management skills. She was fucking barely two, the only thing she understood about garbage bags at this point was whether or not she wanted to crawl into them and suffocate or not. Stupid pregnancy hormones.

Lana had stormed off a few moments before, blood and hellfire about toothpaste or floss or some shit, not that Archer was really paying attention. While he’d been around (sort of, he’d been really drunk) for her first pregnancy, somehow being on the (mostly) sober, receiving end of her natal rage wasn’t exactly exciting him for the arrival of a new puking, crying, keeping him up all night, flesh bag. Baby. It was a baby. A baby whom he would love… lovingly.

He glanced down at AJ, who was busy kicking her shoes off in the seat of the shopping cart. Shopping cart. He felt so fucking domestic. He needed to shoot things. Human things. And have sexual relations. The human part was optional. Maybe. Whatever. He could feel his dick shrinking already.

Flicking his eyes back to the shelf, he grabbed the most expensive garbage bags he could find and threw them into the cart, lost among all of the other organic baby crap Lana had insisted on filling it with. Women. Well, woman. Lana.

Archer trolled down the aisle aimlessly, stopping once to pick up a baby shoe and fight it back onto his squirming toddler’s foot. AJ banged her tiny fists on the bar, and he boosted her out of it, holding her on his hip. She shoved her fat little thumb into her mouth, smacking her forehead against his cheek as she snuggled into his neck. She was such a sook, needed an afternoon nap. He needed an afternoon drink. Or five.

He rounded the corner into the canned goods aisle, kicking the wheel of the cart as it pulled the other way due to his sloppy one-handed steering, AJ blathering into his ear. “See, look, AJ. More peasant food!”

“Why?” she asked. She’d been asking it a lot lately. It had become her favorite word in place of the old faithful ‘no’ she had enjoyed for so long.

“Because poor people like eating canned tasteless crap loaded with sodium. Don’t ask me, Abijean. I don’t want to understand their… poverty.”

“Why?”

“Because I imagine poverty tastes like asbestos and depression, AJ. No one wants to eat that.”

“Why?”

“Because capitalism. You’ll understand when you’re older.”

She squirmed in his hold, Archer rolling his eyes as he bent over to set her down on the floor. She kept hold of his fingers, him crouching down a bit to make sure she had a tight grip as she started to walk of her own volition. “Okay, but if you start crawling I’m picking you up and dipping you in a cleansing acid bath, baby. Who knows what’s on these floors. Probably vomit and… vomit. Or something.”

He stood up straight and let go of her hand, AJ tottering in her unbalanced way over to the next display case. She immediately started pulling down the cracker boxes, full on destructo-child, and he sighed, leaning on the handlebar of the cart and watching her go to town. They paid people to put those back together, anyway, might as well entertain his tiny human atomic bomb in the process. At
first she’d set his OCD off like nothing else, but after two years of baby poop, lack of sleep and toys all over the floor, he just couldn’t bring himself to the level of fucks given as he had, well, actually, never really possessed in the first place. He did long for the days of having walls without crayon marks, though. Wearing anything white. Sex whenever, wherever he wanted it. Not that they really let that stop them.

“Oh, isn’t she just precious.”

He turned, finding an old biddy that had somehow materialized beside him, shopping basket in hand, full of prunes and diapers or whatever the hell old people bought. Woodhouse usually bought candy for him when he was a kid. And the top-shelf booze as an adult. God, he missed Woodhouse.

AJ shrieked and threw a cracker box onto the floor, cackling as the cardboard split. Precious indeed.

“Yeah. She’s cute, I’ll give her that,” he replied, AJ turning her enthused face up at him. He grinned not at all evilly, setting her running down the aisle squealing, turning to see if she was being followed. “Hey you. Kid. I’m gonna get you.”

“No!”

“You really don’t have a choice here, AJ. It’s been decided. It was decided before you were born. It’s your destiny. I’m gonna get you and eat your toes.”

“Nooo!”

The lady laughed. “How old is she? Such a little charmer. They’re so active at this age!”

“She’ll be two in like… a month? Ish? I think. Probably.”

“You don’t know?” Her smile faltered, and Archer rolled his eyes, starting to follow after his daughter, cart squeaking ahead of him. The lady kept pace. Apparently, aging got rid of your ability to take a fucking hint.

“Close enough. Hey, hey, hey, don’t get all over the floor you Goddamn monkey, you’ll get your dress dirty.”

AJ deliberately sat on the floor and wiggled around. She was a monster. He sighed. Prepare the acid bath.

“Well, she’s certainly quite the lady!” said the woman, smiling down at Abijean, who bounced up to her hands and feet again to half crawl/half walk back to Archer. She ducked behind his pant leg, hiding from the elderly lady. “Oh, how shy!”

“Yeah, well, she knows the ending of Hansel and Gretel. We read that last night, didn’t we?” He turned to look down at her, AJ giggling and ducking her head into his thigh. She bit him for good measure. “Ow! Not nice, demon child! You won’t even have one memory of having had toes after I’m done with you!” He reached down and tickled her side, her high-pitched laughter ringing out.

“What a little darling. I can see you’re a good parent. Just the two of you? Is her mother not around?”

“Her mother is right here. Mothering. With non-fluoride toothpaste. And anger. Why are there crackers everywhere?”

He looked over his shoulder, finding a very flustered Lana, arm full of toothpaste and various other bath products, her relatively large belly in the way. AJ left his side, reaching towards her mother,
Lana shoving the products into the cart to pick up her child. “Hi baby. Did you make this mess? Of course you did.” She looked down at the elderly woman, raising an eyebrow. “Who’s this?”

He smirked, shrugging his shoulders. “Made a friend, I guess.”

“Oh, dear, I was just saying how wonderful of a father your husband is. And another baby on the way! You must be so proud.”

“He’s not my husband,” said Lana, flatly, “But, yes, I am proud—”

She paused to looked down into the cart, completely missing the disapproving frown that had materialized on the woman’s face.

“–to own the most fucking expensive garbage bags in all of America. Possibly all of earth. Seriously?”

“Lana, tiny ears! And come on, it’s not like we can’t afford it.”

“Fuh.”

“We have to set an example for AJ, I told you about this.”

“Fuh!”

“Well I would think in setting an example for your daughter you would be a proper family before bringing another child into this world,” interjected the elderly woman. Archer’s smirk flew into a grin, watching Lana go from flustered to full-tilt pissed in about two seconds.

“Lady. Did I ask for your Goddamn opinion? Was there a point in time where I implied that I wanted it?”

“No, but I–”

“–am a big black lady with a TEC-9 and an unborn elephant child that keeps kicking me in the guts, if I needed a senile old woman’s shitty opinion I would ask my non-husband’s bitch mother, now kindly back the fuck off!” With AJ in tow, Lana took that moment to storm away, leaving an Archer with a cart full of groceries and a traumatized senior citizen in her wake. He broke into a full out laugh, the woman fleeing the scene before any more damage could be done.

As his laughing fit dying down, he wiped the tears under his eyes, beginning to meander to the checkout. “What a cunt. God, I love her.” He had damage control to do. And the ice cream was melting.

Having paid and had the groceries bagged, he made his way out to the parking lot, finding Lana with her arms crossed in the passenger seat, AJ singing to herself in the backseat, barely able to move between her coat and car seat. He slammed the trunk of the car, groceries balanced neatly inside (drove him fucking nuts when Lana just chucked them in), making his way to the driver side. If 15-year-old him knew that one day he’d be driving a 4-door mom car, he would’ve punched himself in the balls so hard his genitalia would’ve inverted.

Inside the vehicle, he turned on Lana and smiled. “So.”

“So what. Drive.”

“Pretty sure you made that lady shit her granny panties.”
Her face creased, and she sighed. “Ugh, I’m… I’m sorry, Archer.”

“Wow. Pinch me, I must be dreaming.”

“Shut up. Seriously, I didn’t mean to freak out like that, I’m just tired of everyone harassing me about it.”

“About what? Getting married? Seriously?” He turned around, reaching his arm over the center console, jiggling AJ’s knee. She waved her arms as much as she was capable from the straps. “Hey kiddo, did you have fun watching Mommy totally freaking lose it?”

“Mama loose,” AJ babbled happily, drooling down her chin. He swiped it with his thumb, wiped it off on her pant leg. Disgusting.

“It’s nobody’s business but ours, and she had no freakin’ right to patronize me about it.”

“Oh come on, Lana, why does it matter to you if some geriatric puritan thinks you should’ve been de-virginized on your wedding day? Don’t let it get to you so much, Jesus.”

“But it does.”

“...I mean, I could go back in there and kill her if it’d make you feel better.”

“No.” Lana crossed her arms and glared.

Archer stared at her.

“...Only if you use knives.”

“Lana—”

“Actually, I wanna do it.”

He leaned over to kiss her. “And that is why you are having my second illegitimate child.”

“...So that we can raise them to assassinate old ladies at the supermarket?” She dipped her head and let him catch her cheek instead of her mouth.

“I didn’t even think of that!” He started the car, choosing to ignore that she’d completely shut him down. “AJ, wanna learn how to ice grandmas?”

“Gigi!”

“Yeah, good thinkin’, kid. We’ll start with Mother first.”

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Lana had been oddly quiet and disengaged for the rest of the day, curled up on the sofa with a dossier, while Archer kept AJ busy by watching the same cartoon they watched five times a day, every day. He was pretty sure he could quote it in his sleep, but Abijean never got sick of it, and so it was the show that they watched. They often played tea party while doing so, and Archer was equally sure that everyone would’ve laughed him out of the office if they saw how often he delighted his daughter by drinking her imaginary tea and pretending to eat plastic cake.

(Even so, he filled his tiny plastic teacup with bourbon. Made playing tea party way more fun!)
Fuck it, he wanted to make sure his kid got as much attention as she deserved. He knew what it was like to feel invisible and unwanted, and he never wanted AJ to experience that. Not if he could help it.

It didn’t take too much longer for AJ to completely run herself ragged, passed out over his lap sucking her thumb, while Archer sang the stupid theme song to himself under his breath, watching the dumb cartoon characters live happily ever after. He couldn’t wait to start her on Burt Reynolds -- real entertainment.

He heard Lana close the folder, her hand reaching out to touch his bicep. “...Hey.”

“Uh, hey?”

“Do you want to put AJ down for a nap? Then come into the kitchen, I want to talk.”

Oh, God, something incredibly bad was about to happen. Lana wanting to ‘talk’ was never a good sign. His throat suddenly felt tight, and he watched Lana awkwardly slide off the couch, overcompensating for her belly, then pad off into the kitchen. Feeling apprehensive, he stood with AJ in his arms, babbling quietly in her sleep.

Once she’d been moved to her room, he flicked off the light, a million scenarios flying through his head as he slowly walked into the kitchen. Lana was probably going to leave him. Be a single parent, so that no one (especially Mother) had to pressure her to marry him. Kick him out, tell him that this wasn’t what she wanted. That was definitely why she’d been so quiet.

Inside the kitchen, Lana sat at the table, leaning forward, cup of steaming tea before her. He walked to the bar, poured himself a bourbon, and sat down next to her. They didn’t speak for a moment, before Lana started.

“So... I just wanted to ask you a question.”

“Lana, it’s only like my... third, ish, drink today. And it’s like 7PM, so I’ve staggered them, I’m not even--”

“Archer--”

“And I swear to God, that girl at the office I was talking to the other day, I told you, it was just talking (mostly)--”

“No, idiot, nothing like that. Let me talk.” She was quieter than usual. Fuck, he’d really done something wrong, then.

“Uh, okay, Jesus, Lana, get on with it, already.”

Lana turned to face him, eyes tense, biting her bottom lip. This was the exact moment when his life was totally ruined forever. He sat up straight, took a drink, awaiting the deathblow. Goodbye.

“Marry me?”

Archer abruptly swallowed, alcohol burning his throat, coughing as it went down the wrong way. “What?” he croaked, Lana reaching over to rub his back awkwardly. “No, Lana, actually what?”

“I mean it. Let’s get married.”

“Should I be checking you for signs of demonic possession? Have you been bodysnatched?”
“No, stupid.”

“Don’t go towards the light Carol Anne!”

“Stop it, dickhead.” She took his glass and set it on the table, grabbing both of his hands as he turned to face her. “Just… everything that happened today, and stuff and I’ve just been thinking a lot lately, and I just… there isn’t any reason why we don’t get married, and I dunno. Maybe I’ve been selfish. Scared. I know how badly you want it, and it’s not like I don’t want it—”

“—but,” he interjected, watching her carefully.

“But nothing.” She exhaled noisily, looking a little bit scared. That was his Lana -- she sucked, hard, at emotions. “I think it’s just, y’know, me, being me and being bullheaded as fuck and afraid of commitment and… stuff.”

“And stuff.”

“Yeah, stuff. Shitass. I don’t want to get married because other people want me to get married, I want to get married because I… want to get married!”

“So you actually want to get married. And not just because I want to get married or because Mother keeps insinuating that you’re an unwed whore.”

“I’m pretty sure Malory would insinuate even if I were the literal second coming of the Virgin Mary, reborn on earth to smite the non believers.”

“I’m pretty sure you’re right. Shut up.” His head was spinning, the tight feeling in his chest was tighter, but a better way. “Lana, you actually want, um, that?”

She looked down at their hands, where she was actually holding onto him so tightly he’d lost feeling in the tips of his fingers. She loosened a little as she noticed how pink his hand was.

“Lana.”

She stayed quiet.

“Lana.”

“...Maybe.”

“Lana.”

“What?” She laughed, looking up at him.

He stuck a finger out to silence her, then finished off his drink. Might as well. Then, slammed the glass on the table. “Actually, wait.”

He sprung out of his chair and turned down the hall. Came back in a few minutes with a hand behind his back, slid back into his chair. “Figured I should do this the proper way, or whatever.”

Archer faced her, tense, taking her hand. “Sorry, I don’t have a box for it. I knew you’d find it if I did.”

She sniffed, let him slide it halfway onto her ring finger. Pregnancy had made her already large hands swell. Fuck. “You stupid asshole. You had a ring this whole time?”
“It’s Bub’s ring, technically. Mother gave it to me months ago. I had it re-set, because she had shit taste in gaudy ass jewelry, seriously, so this is the engagement band and I had the other part made into the wedding ring which I will give to you later, I mean, assuming we have a wedding, and I knew you would’ve like, hated non-fair trade diamonds, so it now has diamonds that teeny children from Sierra Leone didn’t die for. Oh, and also I had Krieger coat it with an indestructible film, so you could totally use this ring to punch someone’s face off and it probably won’t break. I mean knowing you and your Luke Cage-ian hands, you probably will—”

Lana started crying.

“—and I should probably stop talking. Please don’t cry. Shit. Your hands really aren’t that, okay, they are that big but—”

“Fuck you, pregnancy. I’m happy! I swear I’m happy, these are happy tears. Goddamnit. Ugh. Archer, I can’t-- this is-- you—”

“I know, I know. I’m awesome. You can totally blow me later.”

She threw her arms around him and held him tight, as much as her belly would allow. “You douche. I love you.”

He turned his face into her hair. “Me too, stupid.”

They stayed there for a moment like that, Lana studying her ring over his shoulder. His hand slid down her side, curling over her belly. Their weird, fucked up little family. AJ was going to be thrilled when she woke up.

Lana pulled back with a dirty grin. “So… wanna fuck me?”

“Do I ever.”

He gleefully let Lana drag him off to the bedroom. Celebrations were in order.

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“Holy shitsnacks! Look at that thing!”

“I know, right. Tackyyyy.”

“Cheryl, we know you’re jealous, now shut your cock cavern.”

Archer leaned back against the desk, watching Lana show off her ring to the rest of their friends, Pam and Cheryl by far the most excited. Cyril looked a little sad, but for the most part seemed to be happy for her, when he wasn’t being a passive-aggressive cockroach. Woodhouse dabbed a tear off his face, touched by how far his charge had come.

Krieger had taken it upon himself to entertain AJ, for the time being, having seen the ring previously. He carried her to the window, talked to her about how birds flew, the toddler singing along in agreement. As weird as the doctor was, he made a damn good babysitter when the occasion called for it. With supervision, though.

Malory still wore a perpetual frown, probably a little chuffed that she hadn’t been the first to see it. Still, these were their friends, their makeshift family, and this was a family event, considering everyone had been asking for ages now when they’d finally settle the fuck down.
Ray sidled up next to him, leaned his champagne glass over for a clink. Archer obliged. “Congrats, dude. That’s a real pretty ring.”

“Yeah, well, I have pretty great taste.”

“So, y’all gonna have a big old fashioned wedding? Ooh, I can officiate it and everything! Are you gonna wait until the baby’s born?”

“Not really sure, but yeah, we’d wait. Lana would kill me if she had to take photos looking all blimpish like that.”

“Well, I doubt she’ll ever get her pre-pregnancy body back after that one. Boys carry different, look, her hips are much wider. And she’s certainly gained more weight than the first one, I would say.”

“Thank you for your input, Mother.” She’d materialized alongside, into her fourth glass of scotch. She’d switched from champagne earlier on.

She sniffed. “Just an observation, dear, I’m simply concerned for her health! No need to be snippy.”

“Well I think she looks great,” interjected Ray, “Don’t be such a Debbie Downer, Malory. Be happy for your son!”

“Don’t you tell me how to feel, you old queen!”

“Oh, p’shaw.”

The older woman’s face distorted into a smile. “I’m plenty happy for my son and his new fiance. She is the mother of my grandchildren! I am only providing advice, as one mother to another. What I mean to say is… she is overflowing with maternal softness.”

She took another sip. “And also maybe, possibly, incidentally, she should lay off the sweets. Maybe.”

Archer snorted into his drink. “Mother, maybe you should lay off the sauce.”

“You... lay off yourself!”

“Now, now, Mother. I know you’re jealous of mine and Lana’s forthcoming marital bliss, given that you’re a divorced barren old crone, but if you imply that Lana is in any way overweight again while she is literally carrying a tiny person inside of her, I will be forced to let AJ eat an entire supply of Halloween chocolate and let her loose in your wardrobe.”

She scoffed. “You wouldn’t.”

“Oh, he would!” Ray sloshed champagne over the edge of his glass.

“Yeah. Wouldn’t even clean her up. Chocolate fingerprints, Mother. Everywhere.”

She gasped. “Everywhere?”

“Everywhere. Especially on your white mink coat. AJ, like myself, likes the finer things in life. A daughter after my own heart.” He (mostly) faked a little sniffle of fatherly pride.

“You’re a monster,” she responded, then walked over to the cluster around Lana in a huff. Immediately, she went from antagonistic to charming, complimenting Lana to her face.
“Yeah, well, I learned from the best.”

“Cheers to that,” said Ray. “Biiiiitch.” They touched glasses again, then downed the rest of their champagne together.

As the night wore on with the initial festivities dying down and everyone starting to drunkenly meander off, Lana decided to take a sleepy AJ home to bed. Archer stuck around at the office to help his mother, the elderly woman well and gone having polished off the scotch.

She wasn’t being all that cooperative, loose kneed and fluid as he walked her to his car. “Mother, come on. Ugh.”

“Don’t you ugh me! I can manage!”

“Well okay, if you say so.”

He released his hold on her, letting her stumble over to the vehicle, hand catching the back bumper before she could fall. She sniffed, stood up straight, and sidled her way over to the passenger door, mostly falling inside. He chuckled, going to the left.

Once inside, Archer looked at her, frowning and disheveled, mascara starting to fill into the crow’s feet around her eyes. “Mother, what the hell?”

“What the hell,” she parroted, shooting daggers at him. “Why do you always ask such idiotic questions? I’m simply not my best, Sterling. Drive me home.”

“Uh, I will, as soon as you tell me why you’ve been acting like a grade-A asshole the entire night.” He started the car, pulled out of the stall. “I mean, I kinda thought you’d be happy for us. Or as close to happy as you’re capable of. Not sure what that would be. Guile? Maybe.”

“Oh, I’m happy.”

“Wow, that sure convinced me.”

“Shut up.” She paused, fingers clasped on her Chanel bag in front of her. “Sterling, it’s.... complicated.”

“Complicated. Huh. That I’m getting married to the only woman on the freaking Earth that you like and/or respect? Mother, up until this point you treated Lana better than you ever treated me--”

“That isn’t true!”

“--shut up, it’s so true, and now it’s like she took a shit in your Cheerios this morning. What gives?” Malory sniffed. “Sterling, I--”

“Mother.”

She started sobbing. “I just can’t believe my little boy is getting married off to a black--”

“Mother.”

“--ops field agent!”

He abruptly slammed the brakes, pulling off into a bus lane at the behest of other drivers. Many a honk sounded around them, Archer turning in his seat.
“Okay, two things.”

“What!”

“First thing. I am like forty fucking years old. Pretty sure I stopped being your ‘little boy’, like, five years ago.”

Malory wiped her eyes. “You shit.”

“Right?” He laughed. “Okay, seriously though, second thing, this is Lana we’re talking about. I am marrying Lana. Who I have been, like, basically I dunno, let’s go with ‘destined’ to be with for freaking years now. Not to mention since, uh, AJ’s been born you’ve been throwing it in my face that we weren’t married.”

“Sterling, that isn’t the point—”

“Yes, Mother, it is the point. You’re just losing your shit because I’m finally happy or stable or whatever and you can’t deal with the fact that it has nothing to do with you.”

“That isn’t true!”

“Come on. You don’t have to be a Goddamn martyr and act like me getting married somehow ruins your life. You can be a kick ass grandmother and not treat Lana like she’s about to go all black widow on me and feed my corpse to her younglings or whatever. It’s gonna be fine. You can be a part of this. I want you to be.”

“Well, what about what I want!”

“What the hell do you want?”

She sputtered. “My son!”

He stared at her hardened face for a moment, then turned in his seat, hands gripped tight around the steering wheel. “God, Mother, you are shitfaced.”

“Shut up.”

He started driving again, keeping his eyes on the road. Sped to her apartment and pulled up out front, refusing to look at her as he popped the lock. She paused, hand on the door.

“Sterling, I—”

“If you’re going to piss all over the little patch of happiness I’ve managed to cultivate after years of self-induced torture in failed attempts to please you, then save it. I’m done, Mother. Nothing I do will ever be good enough for you. Got it. Loud and clear.”

Malory stared back at him, eyes watering, her lip starting to tremble as she took in his face. He knew he’d started to sweat a bit, she made him anxious when she got like that, but he was done, for real this time. He wouldn’t let her do this anymore.

“But you are good enough, Sterling. You’re my son!”

“Could you trust my freaking judgment for once then?” He took a deep breath. “Lana is the person that I want to spend my life with. Mother of my kids. She’s good enough for me. Too good for me. She was good enough, fuck, better than good enough for you once, so could you treat her with the respect that she deserves?”
She nodded, tightly. “Of course, Sterling, but I--”

“-- don’t want to hear it.”

Malory closed her mouth. Then opened it again. Her voice cracked. “It just… feels like I’m losing you, Sterling.”

He snorted. “Mother, I’m not, hey, I’m not going anywhere. You can tell me I’m an ass every morning at work. You can even call me at five AM to bitch about the maid if you need to, or to help you uncork your wine or whatever, that doesn’t have to change. Pretty sure I’m never escaping you, at this point. Unless I get blown up on a mission or something.”

“Don’t you ever say that!” She flew across the center console, wrapping her bony little arms around him. She reeked like alcohol and expensive perfume, tears and mascara smudged across his cheek. He sighed, wrapping his arms around her, watching bystanders stare through their car windows as they walked by. Nothing to see here, just a drunk old lady and her idiotic, co-dependent son.

“And you have AJ, and a new grandkid on the way, and Lana too. So stop trying to act like you’re losing something when, uh, you’re totally gaining stuff too. People stuff.”

“I know. It’s just... difficult for me, darling. You know how I am.”

“I know, Mother.”

She kissed his cheek, pulled back to look in his eyes. Gave a hint of a smile, that wasn’t tinged with mirth or any of her usual insincerity. It was something. He still kind of wanted to knock her out. Or crawl into her lap and cry like a child.

“Just promise me one thing, Sterling.”

He smoothed down the fur of her coat, let her sit back in the passenger seat. She kept hold of his arms, looking up at him. “What’s that, Mother?”

“That you don’t let Lana name your son.”

“Mother.”

“I will not stand for another grandchild with an ethnic name.”

“...Ethnic.”

“Yes, well, you have to admit, ‘Abijean’ wouldn’t have been your first pick.”

Archer started laughing. “Goddamnit, Mother, can you not be a racist asshole for like three frickin’ minutes? Those are my ‘ethnic’ children you’re talking about. Get out of the car already, woman.”

She popped out of the door, light on her feet, as he rolled down the window to say his last goodbye. “I care about you, Sterling,” she said, leaning heavily on the window. “Please give AJ and Lana my love.”

“You actually have any left to give?”

“You ass.”

“Shut up. I care about you too, Mother. Have a good night.”
She waved to him and walked off with a flounce, ignoring the doorman as she whisked through the entrance. Archer sighed, leaning back in his seat. He checked his phone, read the messages from Lana, (“So did you kill her yet?”). He had people to go home to. People he didn’t want to murder. People who cared about him.

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It was dark in the foyer already, only the yellow light from Lana’s (and his, now, really) bedroom bleeding out onto the hardwood floor to guide his way. He toed off his shoes, yawning, making his way over to the bedroom, exhausted and a little sad.

Lana was on her side, a sleeping AJ curled up in front of her mostly hidden in a pile of blankets, her mother’s fingers carding through her curly hair. She looked over her shoulder as he came in, lamp light leaving shadows under her eyes. “Hey.”

“Hey,” he replied, making short work of his suit jacket, pants and overshirt, dumping them on the floor. A few years ago he would’ve rather jumped out the window than treated his clothing that way, but it didn’t seem to matter as much when Lana was waiting for him, welcoming nad warm. He crawled into the bed behind her, spooned up against her back, hid his face in her hair.

“So…”

“Mother sends her love.”

“Uh huh.”

“She said she was really just scared that she wasn’t going to be included. Or something. And she apologized.”

“How can one possibly apologize for like, what, 100 years on earth as the living embodiment of cuntiness?”

He wrapped his arm around her hip, up higher over her belly, reaching over to AJ’s covered form. His daughter babbled a bit in her sleep, no doubt drooling all over the pillow. Adorable.

“Yeah, not sure about that. Whatever. I told her off. If she isn’t nicer to you, I’m, sorry, we’re not having anything to do with her.”

“Well, we kinda work for her so--”

“Lana, don’t try to use logic on me right now. Just cuddle. This is nice. Forget about Mother.”

“But--”

“Lana. Cuddle.”

“You big baby.”

“Yeah, you’re right. Abi is pretty big for a two year old. Don’t say that though, Lana, you’ll give her a size complex.”

Lana laughed. “You asshole.”

“Your asshole.”

“Yeah, guess I’m kind of stuck with you.”
“Like a congenital, benign growth.”

“I hate you.”

He shifted up onto one elbow, leaning over her to kiss the side of her mouth. “No, you don’t.” She turned onto her back, let him catch her lips and kiss her, soft and reassuring. Her hand curled around the back of his neck, pulling him down into the crux of her throat to hold him there.

“You okay?” Lana asked.

“I think so. Yeah. Now I am.” He leaned back, looking down at her, eyes tired and face puffy from pregnancy, though she was smiling a little. “Thanks.”

“Yeah, thank me again in a few months, when you have to wake up every thirty minutes to console a screaming, shitting newborn.”

“Hooray.”

Archer collapsed beside Lana, coiled around her like a clingy octopus, muttering to himself as he often did before sleep, her smiling as she closed her eyes. On the other side, AJ did the same, so much like her father, and it was nice. Quiet. Good enough.

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