Everything Old Is New Again

by samyazaz

Summary

It doesn't take more than a moment's thought for Abbie to realize that she's going to have to bring Ichabod home. The man can't even figure out how to unlock a car door, a hotel is absolutely out of the question. He'd probably lock himself inside and then starve to death.

So she takes him home and sets him up in the guest bedroom, shows him where the bathroom is and how everything in there works, and gives him a stern warning about the dire fate that will await him if he leaves the toilet seat up. He nods somberly and promises obedience like he's swearing an oath. She leaves him in there, investigating the sink faucet with fascination, and trudges out to the kitchen to raid the fridge for leftovers. It has been a hell of a long day, and even the effort it takes to throw something into the microwave seems like more than she's got.

Ichabod comes out while she's scooping cold jasmine rice and shrimp curry into a bowl, sucking on his fingers and looking affronted. "Found the hot water tap, did you?" she asks with a smile that's a little bit amused but mostly sympathetic. "I probably should have warned you."

"Where does it come from?" he asks, and his scalded fingers are forgotten in the wake of his curiosity. "How does it get so hot all on its own?"

Abbie sighs and shoves her bowl into the microwave. "I'll explain all about water heaters and modern plumbing later, all right? Right now I just need to eat something and get off my feet."

Ichabod nods, distracted again already, and leans down to press his face to the microwave's door, watching her bowl spin around and around inside. Abbie's not sure if the stories her grandma told...
her about getting cancer from sticking her face too close to the microwave is true or not, but she figures it's better not to risk it, and swats Ichabod back.

When she pulls her bowl out, steaming and fragrant, he looks amazed and sticks his hand inside the microwave like he expects it to be hot in there. "Is it magic?"

She snorts, but probably not as hard as she would have the day before, and shakes her head as she mixes the sauce into the rice. "It's science." She shoves the first bite into her mouth and gestures to the take-out containers still sitting on the counter. "Do you want some? You must be hungry."

He doesn't answer straightaway, but his stomach rumbles, and that seems answer enough. She grabs a second bowl from the cupboard, scoops more rice and curry into it, and starts for the microwave, but Ichabod hovers at her elbow looking torn. She swings the microwave door closed harder than she has to and turns to square off with him. "What?"

"It seems untrustworthy," he says. "I must confess, I have rather had my fill of magic for one day."

"It's not— You know what, forget it." She snatches the bowl out of the microwave, grabs a saucepan from the cabinet, and empties his dinner into it before she puts the pan onto the stove. She's got a gas range, at least, thank God. If he'd put up a fuss about electric, she'd have let him eat it cold.

He edges away uncertainly as the lighter clicks, then his brows shoot up when the gas ignites in a rush. "Will you trust that?" she asks, lifting the pot to show him the fire underneath.

Ichabod holds his hand out over the flames, then quickly snatches his hand back and smiles. "Yes. Thank you, Lieutenant."

She nods once, grabs a wooden spoon from the drawer, and shoves it into Ichabod's hand. "Stir that," she says, pointing at the point. "Don't let it burn. Let me know when it's bubbling." When he nods, she grabs up her own bowl and fork and carries them out to the living room, where she can kick her feet up and finally eat.

Five minutes later, she's wolfed down half her curry and Ichabod leans out of the kitchen and says, "It's bubbling, Lieutenant."

With food in her stomach and at least a few minutes off her feet, she's feeling magnanimous enough to instruct him on how the stove works before she shuts the gas off and dumps his steaming curry back into his bowl. She points him to the drawer with the forks, then returns to her seat and leaves him to follow after on his own.

He sits stiffly at the other end of the couch, balancing his bowl on his knee. When he makes a sudden, sharp sound, Abbie glances at him quickly, afraid he's burned his mouth on the hot food. But his expression isn't one of pain, it's full of surprise and wonder. He swallows the bite in his mouth quickly and gasps, "Now this is magic, Lieutenant. I've never tasted anything like it."

Abbie grins at him. "No, I guess you wouldn't have had much exposure to Asian food two hundred years ago, would you?" She waves her fork at him. "Go on, it's better when it's hot. We can explore exotic cuisine later, all right?"

He doesn't need to be told twice, he just tucks right back into his dinner and eats it so quickly that Abbie has to marvel a little. Still, she guesses that when you haven't eaten in two hundred years, you probably work up a bit of an appetite.

They finish their late supper together in silence, and Abbie leaves the bowls and the saucepan in
the sink for later. She wonders if Ichabod might try to pepper her with more endless questions about modern life, but when he doesn't, she decides to take advantage of it and wish him a good night before he gets any ideas. The promise of bed is a siren song that she doesn't have any interest in resisting.

"Sleep well, Lieutenant," he says after her, and it's the last thing she remembers before she passes out face-first on top of her covers with her uniform still on.

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The thing is, Abbie enjoys cooking, but only when there's someone around to appreciate it. When it's just her -- which it usually is, these days -- she's more likely to get take out or something frozen and quickly nukeable than to put in the effort.

But now there's Ichabod, and he's as appreciative an audience as anyone could hope for, and his stubborn refusal to trust any food that's come out of the microwave gives her an excuse to indulge in some of the recipes she hasn't had a reason to break out in far too long.

She's more charmed than she likes to admit by how easy it is to impress him with just a sprinkle of cardamom or a few threads of saffron. But after a few days of letting him hang over her shoulder as she cooks and sniff all the bottles of herbs and spices in her pantry, she steps back one night, hands him the spoon, and says, "All right, I'm not going to wait on you every night, let's see you cook something." And she leaves him to it, kicks her feet up and watches National Geographic, and only helps by shouting back answers to his questions about where to find things.

He makes a cottage pie that is more than passable, and watches her closely as she takes the first bite, until she hums her appreciation and nods earnestly to tell him that it's good. He spends the rest of the meal grinning slyly at her whenever he thinks she isn't paying attention.

After that... Well, it isn't exactly a competition, but they take turns cooking. Abbie uses her nights at the stove to try out new recipes and introduce Ichabod to new things like turmeric and cinnamon and hot chiles, and Ichabod seems determined to use his to prove that he's capable of holding his own as well.

He startles her with dessert one night, a rich custard he calls syllabub that's sweetened and flavored with a red wine and is surprisingly tasty, and he positively glows with pride when she finishes her bowl and scrapes it clean.

She grins, and when the weekend rolls around, hands him an apron and informs him he's going to help her. She shows him how to make chocolate chip cookies, and doesn't let him taste any of the chips from the bag because she wants him to be surprised. They both end up covered with flower and Ichabod has a streak of it on his cheek that she's itching to wipe away, and when they put the first batch in the oven she has to turn the light inside on so that he can crouch in front of it and watch them bake.

And when they're done, she makes him wait just long enough that he won't scald his mouth with molten chocolate, and then she pours him a glass of milk and hands him a plate of cookies and leans back against the counter to watch him, her arms crossed over her chest and her grin irrepressible.

He's a quick learner, Ichabod is. He's been with her a week and he's already learned enough that he could probably survive in a hotel room without doing anything catastrophic. But hotels are expensive and being a Witness against the apocalypse doesn't exactly pay well. And there's something to be said for having someone else in her home, making it feel lived-in and comfortable instead of cold and lonely. So she doesn't say anything about Ichabod moving out, just snags a
couple of the cookies for herself and promises to introduce him to peanut butter tomorrow.

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