

Meatloaf & Roses

Ashes Valentine's Day Short...

There's more than one way to say I love you!

Meatloaf & Roses

For a change it hadn't been the club that had kept Andy up all night. He'd been working on a new series of paintings and the visions that streaked through his mind arrived at odd hours of the day and night. He'd been driving Rez half crazy waking up at all hours and sleeping away what time they had together but the grumpy I/S hadn't protested too much.

It was hard enough on them with Rez staying up until the club closed to oversee the I/S side of the things and not getting to bed until four or five in the morning. Generally Andy was in bed a few hours before that but he'd wake up as his slender lover slipped in beside him. As much as he wanted to pretend that they were having wild monkey sex every night, the truth was they tended to curl up and sleep more nights than not. Which was fine by Andy but had taken a lot of convincing to make Rez understand that it really was okay. Months couldn't undo years of being valued only for how he was as a sexual thing but Andy was trying.

He'd tucked Rez into bed with a kiss and worked until after dawn before exhaustion had pulled him down. Andy had washed off the paint and stripped off his clothes and crawled in beside where Rez was curled up into a ball of creamy pale skin and scattered vibrant lavender hair. It made him smile to see his lover sleeping soundly but as he slipped under the covers Rez sighed and rolled over.

"Wha' time...?"

"Just after dawn, go back to sleep." Andy whispered back and let Rez curl up against his back.

"Stupid human..." Rez sighed but that didn't stop him from pulling Andy closer.

"Go to sleep." He smiled happily and drifted asleep, warm and happy.

Only he didn't get to sleep until noon like he would have wanted to. Pounding drifted through the loft and shook Andy awake. He pulled a pillow over his head and tried to muffle it out but the pounding continued. It didn't matter how tired he was, the noise wasn't going to let him get back to sleep. He tossed the pillow toward his feet and sat up in a huff but he was alone in the bed and didn't have anyone to complain to.

"Rez!" He shouted and kicked off the blankets. "Rez!" He'd pulled on cotton pants to sleep in but didn't worry about a shirt or robe as he stomped to the steps and glared out at the space below.

What he saw wasn't what he was expecting. Rez had dragged a ladder into their space and was steadying the bottom of it. Jos, his green hair pulled back into a simple tail, was up on the top of the ladder, leaning against the tall window, a hammer in his hand. Andy had to squint but he was pretty sure they were putting up the brackets for the blinds he'd bought.

"What the hell!" He shouted.

The hammering stopped and both men glanced up and looked at him like he was the crazy one.

Rez pointed up at the windows and at the same time Jos' ass. "You said you wanted it up."

"Yeah, workmen coming to do it next week!"

The two I/S glanced at each other but Jos was keeping his mouth shut. Rez shook his head and frowned. "You said you wanted it done."

"Not when I'm sleeping!" Andy sighed loudly. "Not when workmen are going to do it in a couple of days!"

He pointed at the window again. "You wanted it done!"

He was too tired to fuss. "I'll never understand I/S...I swear I'll never understand them... I'm going back to bed." He waved at the two men. "Just try to keep it down." He picked up the pillow as he crawled back into bed, stuffed it down over his head and tried really, really hard to hear the racket.

Surprisingly, exhaustion and the pair moving to windows further away from the loft with their bed, allowed Andy to actually get back to sleep. He was warm and wrapped happily in his blankets with the sound of brackets being pounded into place became background noise. He would have slept soundly into the afternoon if someone hadn't started poking him.

He pried his eyes open and peeled the pillow off of his head. "Rez?"

"Wake up!"

"What?"

"Wake up, lazy slut!"

"God, go away." He tried to pull the pillow back over his head but Rez caught it and threw it across the room. "Knock it off! I'm tired."

Rez caught the blankets and yanked.

"Stop!"

"Get up, slut, get up." Rez poked at the bare shoulder and pulled the blanket completely off the bed, leaving Andy half naked on the mattress.

"Stop it." Andy snarled but by the time he sat up Rez was already on the steps.

"Get up!" The purple haired man shouted.

"What the hell has gotten into you today?" Andy hollered after his lover. "Is it national not let Andy sleep day and I didn't get the memo?"

"Out of bed!" Rez shouted from downstairs.

"I'm not one of your workers..." Andy grumbled as he hauled himself from bed. He had a t-shirt that he'd worn two or three times and smelled of paints but it was comforting smell. His hair was tangled but he didn't worry about it since he wasn't planning on going out. All he wanted now was coffee and coffee was only to be found downstairs.

He was rubbing at his eyes as he stumbled into the kitchen so he wasn't sure what he saw was real or not. Rez hadn't just made coffee, he'd actually cooked. The small table they shared was set properly with napkins and everything. The smell drifting through the kitchen was one he knew

and it made his mouth water. It was only as he placed the smell that it connected to the fact that he hadn't cooked it..

"You cooked?"

Rez nodded. "You didn't eat last night."

"But...you....cooked..." Rez barely ate and had showed no interest in learning to cook anything more complicated than oatmeal. Andy watched as the man flopped spoonfuls of mashed potatoes onto the plates. "You cooked meatloaf and mashed potatoes?"

"Yeah."

"You cooked?" He asked again in shock.

"Jos helped."

"Jos..." He felt like he'd fallen down some rabbit hole. "Since when have you two been so buddy, buddy? Generally I need to leash you two to keep you from snarling at each other."

Slices of meatloaf slapped onto the plates beside the potatoes. "You want food or not?"

"Yeah...it's not drugged or poisoned or anything?" He sat down at the table and poked at the very well made and quite delicious smelling meatloaf and ignored the stupid human look Rez gave him. "What made you cook?"

"It's your favorite, right?"

"It is, yeah. How'd you know?"

Rez shrugged. "If you don't want it?" he paused with another slice hanging over Andy's plate.

"No. No I don't mean that I just...this is a first."

Rez snorted and sat down. He cut into the dinner he'd made and grimaced as he shoved it into his mouth like it was something distasteful. It made Andy put the first bite into his mouth with caution but the flavor was shockingly good.

"Oh...this isn't bad."

Rez snorted louder.

"This is nice. Thank you." Andy grinned and was almost willing to forgive the early waking. It wasn't until he'd almost stuffed himself on good food and coffee that a scary thought floated to his mind. "What do you want?"

"Huh?"

"You're being nice, what do you want?"

"Idiot."

"If you and Jos think you can butter me up for threeway you don't have to do all this stuff. Just ask."

"Just shut up and eat."

"So you two don't want a three way?"

"Moron, I'm living with a moron."

Toshi pushed open the store room door and found the light already on. Andy sat on an overturned, empty keg. His hair was brushed out but loose and his clothes looked rumpled. He had a sketch book balanced on his knees and pencils scattered around him. He glanced up, a pencil caught between his lips and grinned around it.

"What are you doing hiding in here? I thought you were locked in the loft painting." Toshi frowned.

Andy pulled the pencil from his mouth and shrugged. "I needed a place to hole up for a while. Rez is...well I'm starting to think he's been replaced by aliens."

"Aliens?"

"He's being all nice. This morning he and Jos put up brackets for the new blinds, Jos helped him cook my favorite food for lunch and now they're putting the blinds up and fixing the weather stripping on the door. There was talk of them even moving the living room furniture around and cleaning the fridge out. I swear he's been replaced by aliens. They were creeping me out so I ran like a girl and hid here. What are you doing here?" Toshi was fairly hands on but a back room for spent kegs was a little more hands on than he needed to be.

"Ah..." He glanced around. "Well...it's Valentine's day and Mick....you know Mick..." A blush crept up Toshi's neck and reddened his face.

"Mick likes the thrill of almost getting caught but it's not likely anyone is going to walk in back here. You dirty dog you." Andy grinned.

"It seemed like a plan."

"I swear, need to put bells on you two so folks know where you are at all times. It's not safe to turn a corner in this club anymore, if it's not you two it's always someone."

"You're not innocent of that either."

"True."

"Any plans for tonight?"

Andy shrugged. "Rez isn't the flowers and candles sort. I didn't even mention it so he's forgotten it. It's okay. I wasn't expecting anything."

"Andy...he hasn't forgotten. He's I/S, not human."

"I had noticed. Figured the whole romance day thing wasn't high on the list of I/S holidays. It's okay."

Toshi brushed his hair over his shoulder and smiled softly. "Well, you're right...but we do have affections for each other and old traditions die hard. Flowers? Candy? Not things found in the camp so when for Valentine's day I/S do things for the one they care about. They fix things or find things to make their house better or find a way to cook favorite foods. I'd say Rez hasn't been swapped for an alien but he's been trying to show you he cares all day."

"Oh." Now he felt like an ass. "I didn't know."

"No way for you to know. The better question is why would Jos help? Maybe he's got a bit of a crush on you."

That made him frown. "Jos? No, I'm just a human bug to him."

"Things change." Toshi grinned. "Still want to hide here? I can find another room."

Andy stood up and gathered the pencils together. He tucked everything under his arm and leaned over to brush a kiss across Toshi's cheek. "No, it's okay. I think I need to go have a conversation with a couple of I/S. Thanks for the heads up."

"You're welcome."

"Oh and Toshi?"

"Hmm?"

"I'll make sure no one brings empty kegs down here until you tell me it's okay."

That made Toshi smile brightly. "Thanks."

Andy was always impressed by the club. Even having seen it built hadn't prepared him for seeing it finished. At night it lit up with music and lights, movement and voices and became something magical. During the day it looked almost simple. Once afternoon rolled around workers moved around. They cleaned up the mess from the night before, straightened and prepared for the crowds to come. The human workers still didn't interact freely with the I/S and vice versa but they were starting to get more used to each other as they moved around the maze of rooms and back rooms and sub-rooms.

That made find Jos more difficult than it should have been and Andy spent a lot of time wandering around looking for a flash of green hair. When he finally spotted Jos he hurried to catch up and managed to meet the man in one of the storerooms where he was counting cartons of plastic drink cups.

"Jos?" He asked gently and the man spun around guilty. "Look, I didn't understand or I would have said something. I'm flattered but Rez and I...well, he keeps me pretty much on my toes. I'm thrilled to be a friend to you and you know you're welcome in our loft any time but nothing serious will happen between us. Okay?" He tried his hardest to let the I/S down gently.

Jos smirked and rolled his eyes. "Well. I'm glad we cleared that up."

The green eyes almost looked mocking and Andy wasn't sure just what was going on but he nodded. "Good...good." He left the room more confused than he had been that afternoon. Andy wasn't sure if he was grateful Jos didn't seem to be carrying a torch for him or hurt that the man seemed to find the idea silly. It was just another strange moment in a very strange day.

Rez had a checklist of things that had to be done before the club opened. Things that had to be checked on, people he needed to make sure were okay. Instead of the responsibility crushing him down he found he was thriving in his new role. Even checking on the new arrivals who still had to be nagged to eat and encouraged not to use helped him feel more stable. It didn't matter how long his list was, he always made sure to sit down to dinner to Andy not because it was

expected of him but because he found himself missing the artist if he didn't get a few stolen moments alone with the annoying human.

Before he could go back to the loft for dinner he had one thing to do first. Unlike Andy, Rez had no trouble finding Jos. One of his responsibilities was to round up his floor mates and make sure everyone ate dinner and Rez found him doing one final walk through just to make sure no one was straggling and stalling on eating.

"Rezzy?" Jos asked when Rez just stood in front of him. "Cat got your tongue or something more interesting?"

"He's mine."

"What?"

"The stupid artist. He's mine. Thank you for helping me today but there's no space for a third with us."

Jos's large green eyes blinked confused before he lowered them. "I don't have an interest in any human."

"Then why did you?"

"I didn't help for him." Jos confessed.

It was Rez's turn to blink until understanding dawned. "Oh...Oh but..." Their relationship had been volatile even before they'd gotten clean and being sober had only seemed to make everything a power struggle. "Jos." He wasn't sure what to do with his former rivals efforts during the day.

"Don't. Look...don't say anything. It's not a big deal it's just..." Jos' eyes darted up but unlike Rez's pink, Jos' green eyes rarely gave anything away. "I'd be a whore still if you hadn't stood up for me and yeah you're a bitch and you've lousy taste in men but...we were good together, when we were together..."

"We were high!" Rez hissed. "Put on display like animals, too Shiny to walk straight!"

"But we could be good together." Jos corrected.

Rez wanted to be angry but he could feel the loneliness in Jos. The man had been struggling with his own sobriety and moving through his own new life. Rez was the closest to a comforting face he had and he could understand Jos trying to cling to something that had never been there.

"We have rules."

"You and the human?"

Rez nodded.

"He has you leashed."

"No." He couldn't even be angry at the other man's misunderstanding. "We play together. If you can accept that...Andy is more I/S than human...at least in bed."

Green eyes blinked. "You'd consider..."

"Maybe." He glanced to his watch. "I'm late for dinner and so are you. Go eat."

It was a dismissal and Rez didn't linger around to see any reaction from Jos. Frankly, he wasn't sure what kind of reaction he was supposed to have. It wasn't that he didn't find Jos attractive and he knew from Andy's teasing that the human wouldn't be adverse to the idea, it was just that he wasn't sure he was ready to become involved with someone else.

He had his head down and was lost in thought as he walked back toward the loft. So much so that he literally walked into Mick in the hallway and nearly knocked the man down. "Watch it!" He snapped.

"You ran into me." Mick corrected and juggled the roses and square box of candy he was holding.

"Yeah well, I'm not the douche holding flowers."

"It's Valentine's day." Mick shook the paper wrapped red roses at the I/S. "Let me guess, you've gone all I/S and like painted the bathroom or something for him and he's absolutely confused."

"What? Like it's any of your concern!"

"Hopeless." Mick sighed. "Here." He pushed the roses at Rez and reached into the bunch to pull out a single flower. "Take those and give them to Andy."

"What?"

"And here..." He pried up the lid to the box of chocolates and fished out a few before putting it back on and handing it to Rez. "Take these too. He's a sucker for the cream ones."

"It isn't like that."

"Shut up and for once trust me. Give those to Andy, he's human."

Rez looked to the clichés in his hand and frowned. "These were for Toshi-san."

"Yeah but he'll understand and I'll make it up to him. I'll find a way."

The besotted tone made Rez cringe. "Ew."

"Just go find Andy."

He knew he should thank Mick but it was just more than he could manage to force out. Instead he nodded, cradled the flowers in his arm and hurried down the hallway. He didn't just rush to get away from Mick, he wanted to get back to the loft before anyone saw him looking stupid with roses and chocolates in his arms.

"Andy?" Rez shouted as he slammed the door shut behind him. "Where are you?" He demanded but the loft seemed empty. "Human!"

"Up here..." Andy answered from the loft above.

"Did you eat without me?" He frowned and moved to follow his lover's voice and wished he could have thrown the flowers out.

"No..."

He cleared the steps and froze. Andy sat on their bed. He was twirling one braided pig tail around a finger. While he was gone, Andy had changed into an outfit that was burned into his mind. The schoolgirl short skirt and white button down shirt were slutty and one of the favorite things Andy

had in his closet.

It made Rez's mouth go dry and his hands feel sweaty. "I...what are you doing?"

"I'm sorry I didn't understand, about today? About what you did for me? I didn't know but I do now and it was really, really sweet. I'd like to make it up to you." He smiled seductively and uncrossed his stocking covered legs.

"Andy..." the flowers crinkled as his fist closed tighter around their stems. "These are for you."

The human slipped from the bed with a slinky, sexy twitch and came over to accept the gifts. "You didn't have to. I just didn't understand."

"I didn't." Rez stuck his chin out stubbornly. "It was Mick-san's idea."

"I know." Andy took the offered chocolate and opened the box. He smiled at the missing pieces. "Twenty three roses, a few missing chocolates...he was trying to point you in the direction of a human's idea of Valentine's day. You didn't need to, I understand now. What you did today was really sweet. Thank you...though Jos has to be set straight."

"Jos wasn't hitting on you."

"Oh?" That shocked the sexy out of him. "Oh! Well...if you want we can call him over now...? Would a three way be more of an I/S way to celebrate the holiday?"

"Yes...but..." Rez looked to the flowers and at Andy. It was an absurd human concept, cut flowers that would die in a few days as romance but if he was going to have a human lover he was going to have to compromise. "Jos can wait for another day."

"Oh? Can he? Is a stupid human enough for you?"

He shoved the roses at Andy. "Just take the God damned flowers, whore!"

Andy laughed and accepted them. "We have time before the club opens for me to show you why roses are romantic..." He tossed the bunch of flowers toward the bed behind them and wrapped his arms around Rez. "I'm glad to have you in my life too..." He whispered. "I love you too." It was a confession rarely made but one Rez needed reminding of.

The I/S snorted one of his sarcastic huffs. "Slut."

Andy didn't take it personally.

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