

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Everyone arrives back at the penthouse~

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Given how the events of the morning had gone, Rumi probably shouldn't have been feeling quite as good as she did when they finally arrived up at the penthouse. And yet... she was feeling pretty damn great all things considered.

There's even a smile on Rumi's face as she listens to Zoey and Bobby both chattering on about this or that. Mira is smirking as well and Jinu still looks hilariously overwhelmed from their shopping trip even though they'd stopped by his guest apartment and put away all of the bags they'd made him carry before coming up here.

Heh, really, it was just like Mira had said... he was SO old. The man had no idea what to do with the freedom to choose his own clothes, so in the end it had been up to her, Mira, and Zoey to do the heavy lifting. Bobby had... played referee, basically.

Frankly, Rumi was grateful for that though, because she swore half of Mira and Zoey's ideas were as much to embarrass her as they were to prank Jinu. Zoey might have been the first to catch on to Rumi's burgeoning feelings for Jinu, but Mira had ultimately been right behind their maknae.

Fortunately, Jinu tended to like Rumi's ideas best... something that she definitely wasn't feeling a certain way about or anything. No sir.

Although now that she wasn't stuck on the mindset of 'he has to be an evil demon, he just has to be'... Rumi couldn't pretend like she still didn't feel this strange pull towards him. It was like something about Jinu was calling out to her. And it was getting stronger.

She'd... never really had a romantic crush before. The closest she got was with her girls, but of course Rumi would never risk the group or their friendships over some latent physical attraction she'd been feeling for them since they first met. They were already as close as friends could be anyways (probably closer) and there was the secret of her patterns to consider.

Or... well, Rumi supposed that wasn't a consideration anymore. Because Mira and Zoey knew about them now. Even Bobby knew about them. And they... they weren't treating her any differently at all either.

Oh sure, Mira was still very clearly mad at her (deserved) and Zoey was a bit hurt (also deserved), but they were both more upset that she'd lied to them than they were that she was part demon. It was, quite frankly, the best outcome she ever could have hoped for.

All of this is running through Rumi's head and yeah, she's feeling pretty damn good... until the doors of the elevator suddenly open up to reveal that Celine is waiting just a few feet beyond them, standing there in the foyer of the penthouse. Everyone tenses for a moment before suddenly Mira's hand is on the small of her back, friendly and supportive, and gently guiding Rumi forward.

She's grateful for that to be honest, because she just might have stayed on the elevator while everyone else got off if it wasn't for Mira's help. Seeing Celine... brings everything back to the forefront. All of the bad suddenly washing away all of the good and leaving Rumi on very uncertain footing.

Especially because she's really not sure if her request to the others will hold or not. Rumi isn't an idiot. She's well aware that Mira, Zoey, and even Bobby aren't at all happy with Celine right now.

If she hadn't asked them to keep their knowledge to themselves... Mira might already be trying to swing on their mentor by this point. Zoey would almost certainly be asking some very pointed questions in between cussing Celine out. And Bobby? Rumi's honestly not sure what Bobby would be doing.

As it is, everything is silent for a long moment as Rumi holds her breath and waits to see if any of them will snap. Mira seems to be the most likely all things considered, and Rumi's not sure she'll even blame her if she does.

But then, before any of them can say or do anything... Celine makes the first move. By giving them all a picture perfect forty-five angle degree bow.

"I owe you all a sincere apology for my misconduct last night."

... What. Rumi just stares, while being vaguely aware that everyone else is doing the exact same thing. At least she's not alone in her confusion right now. Still... what in the world is happening?

"Yeah? What exactly are you sorry for?"

Oh no. Mira please, no.

But it's already too late. Having been addressed, Celine straightens up out of her bow, looking Mira right in the eye.

"As I said, my conduct the previous evening was not appropriate. At this point I'm sure it was obvious that I was working on far too little sleep and far too much caffeine. But that does not excuse my behavior. So I am sorry."

Holy shit. She'd just done it again. Apologize, that is. To be fair, it's not like Celine never said sorry to Rumi while she was still growing up. At the same time, Rumi can count the number of times it happened on one hand. Each and every one had been as surreal as the last too. Just as surreal as this is now.

Mira, of course, just snorts derisively.

"So you're sorry you spilled the beans, but not sorry about keeping secrets from us all this time. Is that it?"

Rumi valiantly resists the urge to cover her face with her hands, biting back the groan that threatens to spill forth from her lips. Mira just had to poke the bear,

didn't she? At least she wasn't confronting Celine about Rumi's patterns but this... this was barely better.

Stiffening up, Celine's jaw clenches.

"... As I said before, certain things were not relevant when I was training you three."

Growling, Mira takes a challenging step forward.

"Who were you to decide what was and wasn't relevant?!"

But Celine has never backed down from a challenge and she's not about to start now. At least she doesn't also step forward, but she still matches Mira's energy head on.

"Your teacher and mentor, Mira. The only one left available. Was I perfect? Of course not, I've never claimed I was. But I did the best I could with the time I had."

Mira grits her teeth, curling her hands into fists at her sides. Her next words come out as a snarl.

"And the best you could with the shoddy resources you were given to work with, is that it?"

Rumi flinches, though to her surprise... Celine flinches too. For a split second, an expression of shock can be seen on the older woman's face. And then...

"What?! No! You girls are the best hunters we've ever had! The strongest, the most powerful, the most unified! Even in spite of your training being rushed and haphazard, all three of you have risen above my own failures in spectacular fashion! I couldn't be more proud of you girls and all that you've achieved together!"

Mira rears back in the face of Celine's vehement defense of them, looking just as stunned as Rumi feels at the moment.

The veteran hunter had told them she was proud of them before now, of course. She'd said it plenty of times when Rumi was growing up, training alone. She'd said it often enough when they'd finally retrieve Mira and Zoey and started training as a trio as well. And she'd said it each and every time they won an award or had a particularly good concert over the past half a decade since their debut.

... But she'd never said it quite like this before. Celine has never been this... effusive with her praise, while at the same time talking about her 'failures' so blatantly and brutally.

"Oh."

Mira's one word answer is followed by an awkward silence which ends with Bobby clearing his throat and stepping up to save all of them from themselves.

"Celine, you wanted to talk to me as soon as possible, right? Shall we head downstairs and use your office here in the tower for that conversation?"

Looking a little bit like a woman grabbing onto a lifeline for dear life, Celine nods sharply.

"Yes... yes, I think that would be best."

And just like that, Celine and Bobby are gone, back in the elevator and descending down into the tower. Rumi watches them go along with Mira, Zoey, and Jinu... only to jolt when Mira suddenly curses loudly.

"Shit! I meant to tell Celine she'd better not come up here without messaging ahead from now on!"

Rumi blinks, baffled.

“What? Why?”

Her arms crossed over her chest, Mira shrugs one shoulder as she scowls angrily.

“Because I want you to be able to wear whatever you feel like around the penthouse if you want. You know, without having to be worried about who will see what.”

Oh. That was... well, that was very kind of Mira. Exceptionally kind, in fact. It was also very much something Mira would do and Rumi finds herself smiling slightly in spite of herself.

“Hey Rumi... did you forget your phone when we had to run out earlier?”

Zoey’s voice pulls Rumi out of her head and back into reality, her eyes widening as she notices her phone on the counter face down. For a moment her heart stops as she wonders if Celine got a look at it at all... and then she remembers there’s nothing incriminating on there anyways.

Reaching over and grabbing it, she unlocks it just to be safe, but beyond Bobby’s text about the bathhouse and then a missed call from him a little later, there’s nothing there. Smiling, she nods.

“Yeah I guess I did. No biggie.”

Then, she looks to Mira.

“And Mira... while I appreciate the thought, I wouldn’t worry about it honestly. It’s not like I really want to start wearing tank tops or anything that would let my patterns show anyways...”

Mira frowns at that.

“Why not? They look sick on you.”

Zoey is quick to jump in as well, of course.

“Yeah Rumi! They’re really pretty!”

But Rumi just shakes her head.

“You guys don’t have to lie to make me feel better. Jinu’s patterns are pretty. MY patterns are dark demonic purple. They’re ugly and I hate them.”

She means every word, to be clear. In fact, this is Rumi’s attempt at being more honest and upfront about her feelings. Frankly, she’s feeling pretty good about herself... until she sees the looks on all of their faces. Mira has a hard frown to go with an intense stare. Zoey’s lower lip is wobbling and her eyes are glistening with unshed tears. Even Jinu looks troubled.

“What?”

Surging forward, Mira grabs her by the arms. Luckily, not directly by her patterns this time around since she’s wearing her sweater, but still, Rumi can’t help but flush...

“Listen to me, Rumi. No part of you could ever be ugly, do you understand me? You’re the hottest woman I know and you make even demon patterns look good, you got that?”

Rumi is full blown blushing by the end of Mira’s rant, even as she nods up and down jerkily with wide eyes. Mira looks at her closely for a moment longer, almost like she’s making sure Rumi actually internalized it. Finally, she lets her go. Which is when Zoey comes in from the side for another hug.

Rumi can’t help but smile again as the youngest of their group clings to her hard. She hugs Zoey back for a long moment, just... enjoying the physical affection. Then, when they pull back, Zoey glances between Rumi and Jinu.

“... Maybe your patterns could become like Jinu’s somehow. Rainbow instead of purple.”

She'd be lying if she said the thought hadn't crossed her mind at least once since they'd met the iridescent demon. Even when Rumi had still thought Jinu was up to something duplicitous and malicious and therefore not to be trusted, she'd been jealous of his patterns. They were just... everything that demons and Gwi-Ma weren't. They were truly beautiful. Not like the harsh, dark color of her own patterns.

Jinu straightens up as all three of them turn to regard him, Zoey's words hanging in the air. He glances down at his own patterns for a moment before grimacing slightly.

"I think... I think there might be a way to do it, yeah. But it's a bit more involved than just aesthetics. Until you guys, but most of all Rumi, trust me implicitly, I wouldn't recommend taking that leap. Because whenever we finally do go there, there's no going back."

Oh. That was... well, at least he was being careful. Of course, Mira just lets out a 'snrk' noise.

"Damn dude. Trying to sound deep while rocking a Hawaiian-style shirt that tight sure is difficult, but you're just barely managing to pull it off."

Jinu's eyes dart down to the shirt he currently has on and he lets out a loud groan.

"You guys are the ones who insisted on getting this for me and then making me wear it, out of everything we bought."

Zoey, gremlin that she is, pipes up immediately.

"You kept looking at it! Clearly you wanted it!"

But Jinu just shakes his head.

"I told you back at the store, it reminded me of someone and that was all. At no point did I say I wanted it. I CERTAINLY did not tell you guys to get it two sizes too small for me."

Rumi blushes. She'd put her foot down for a lot of Mira and Zoey's more egregious choices during their shopping trip... but this was one case in which she'd let them have their way. And frankly, she wasn't regretting it even now because as silly as the Hawaiian shirt looked on Jinu, it also looked DAMN good. Like those buttons might just pop off at any moment, mm...

Jinu just sighs, causing Rumi to belatedly realize she's not the only one taking the moment to ogle him.

"This is karma. I deserve this. I know that. Still sucks."

She doesn't fully understand what he means by that, but Rumi does suddenly feel bad all the same. And before she can really second guess herself, the words are already spilling out of her mouth.

"Hey... how are you doing, all things considered? I mean, between me literally trying to kill you last night and Gwi-Ma sending hundreds of demons to try to kill you today... it's alright if you're not doing okay, you know."

Jinu blinks, looking downright surprised that Rumi even cares. Which is fair, given the aforementioned murder attempt from the night before. After a moment though, he just waves a hand through the air.

"Oh, I'm actually doing amazing. Really, you don't have to worry about me. Between Bobby triggering a Honmoon-induced vision of my family for me and these two figuring out your secret without TOO much heartache and angst, this has probably been the best day I've had in the past four hundred years."

Oh. That was...

"Wow. That's really sad."

Yeah, that. Trust Mira to be the blunt one, of course.

“Hang on a second, did you just say Bobby triggered a Honmoon-induced vision of your family?!”

And trust Zoey to latch onto one specific thing like a dog with a bone. As she gets in his face, Jinu leans back a bit.

“Uhhh...”

And suddenly Zoey is all fretful.

“I-I mean, if it’s too personal I understand. I don’t want to intrude; it just sounds really interesting a-and...”

Rumi and Mira exchange a knowing glance at this and Rumi is just about to call Zoey out on very deliberately weaponizing her cuteness when Jinu shakes his head and shrugs.

“Oh, no... it’s honestly a good story so I’m happy to tell it. Though... I hate to be that guy, but can we get lunch first? I’m getting rather hungry.”

“Ohmygod yes! Let’s get order all our favorites sent up from the tower cafeteria and you can tell us about the vision over some food!”

Well... Rumi would be lying if she said she wasn’t curious too. And also hungry. Exchanging another glance with Mira that ultimately results in the taller girl just shrugging, Rumi shrugs as well.

This was nice, actually. Just so long as she didn’t think too hard about the fact that Celine was still in the building and the only person currently holding her at bay was Bobby. But it was... it was probably fine.

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A/N: Hmm, what do you guys think? Is it really fine?

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