

Part8. In which an American tradition is celebrated

SGX 22. Close encounters.

Emma didn't ask about his day, or why he'd needed to stay late. She had already explored the local shops and as well as buying things for the party she had chosen some cold meat and salad for their evening meal. Going out every night was an expensive habit and in any case she knew Adam would want to relax after his first day back at work.

Adam felt guilty. Not about Vlad or their wild sex in the office, but about SGX in general and the way Emma had to be kept in the dark about what his job really entailed. This was worse than GCHQ. Emma knew that all his work was covered by the Official Secrets Act, here as well as in Britain, but Adam disliked letting her meet people who were not what they seemed, and that didn't just extend to Teal'c and Jonas. It all seemed like lying.

He was quiet and moody as they ate but Emma put it down to tiredness and he didn't contradict her.

After dinner they phoned his mother and spoke to her for longer than usual, to make up for having forgotten until too late the previous evening, and he heard Emma say how much she was enjoying herself. He hoped she meant it. He wanted her to have a good time but after all, he hadn't invited her, and had in fact been working up to breaking off their relationship.

Then there were people at the door and his thoughts were shelved for the time being. Sam had brought Janet to meet Emma, assuming that the two doctors would have something in common. She was right, and soon all three women were chatting and laughing over cups of coffee. Adam felt decidedly out of the conversation and eventually lost himself in his book.

He returned to the present century with a jolt. Emma was asking him something or telling him – he wasn't immediately sure which. It turned out that Janet had a friend in one of the local hospitals who would be happy to show Emma around and let her observe American medicine in action. Janet apologised for not being able to admit her to the hallowed precincts of the air force but Emma was obviously thrilled with the offer that had been made. Janet phoned her friend and Lindsey happily arranged to pick Emma up at the apartment the next morning. There would be plenty to interest her for at least a couple of days and Emma seemed really excited at the idea. Then Thursday would be filled with party preparations. Emma's holiday would continue to be a good one.

Work was fine, too. The team had a day off – apart from Adam, of course, - then everyone settled down to some neglected paper work. Adam enjoyed knowing Vlad was on the base, even if all they had time for was the occasional coffee. At least he didn't have to worry about him.

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Sharon had seen Vlad head for Adam. She herself had gone straight to Teal'c, but somehow, his solid warrior's presence had not comforted her as she had expected. He had said and done nothing to upset her, but her brain kept reminding her that he was an alien. Sharon was not very fond of aliens right now.

Teal'c sensed her mood but did little to counteract it. He was beginning to regret their liaison. He liked and admired Sharon but she was, after all, from this earth, not his. By the time she invited him to attend Adam's party with her, he had made up his mind. 'You do not mean that,' he said, quite sternly. 'We should not take this further, Sharon Vaughan. We are friends, and we should remain friends. If we try to be more, I think we may destroy that friendship.' Sharon was surprised at his perception. Most men, in her experience, were thickheads when it came to relationships. She had to agree, but as she said goodnight and left him, she felt sad for what might have been.

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Emma asked some of the hospital staff to the party. She was a little hesitant about telling Adam what she'd done, but he was delighted. Emma would feel more confident with people she considered her friends, and the presence of non-base people would prevent anyone from making a stupid mistake and speaking out of turn, thinking everyone was from Stargate Command.

He came straight home on Thursday evening and helped get the flat ready. Not that there was much to do. They rearranged some of the furniture so that it was against the walls, tidied up and opened packets of salad and dips and cheese. Adam unpacked the drinks they'd bought and the glasses they'd hired and set them out in the kitchen. Then there was nothing to do but get changed and wait.

Most of their friends were all too pleased to have a social occasion to attend and there was none of the fashionable lateness that Adam was used to in England, and that for all he knew might be the norm in America.

By eight o'clock, things were in full swing, and the small apartment was crowded, noisy with chatter and laughter. Everyone was there. All of SG1 and SGX, plus Paul, Niki, some of the medical staff, Lindsey and others from the hospital and the scientists who'd accompanied the mission to the green planet. There were partners, too, including Bob Somerfield's wife. Adam hoped Emma would see how well he fitted in here, how many friends he'd made, and perhaps consider him in a new light, no longer the reserved civil servant from home. It might make the break easier if he was no longer the person she thought she knew.

He felt surprised and sorry that Teal'c and Sharon had arrived separately and seemed to be making no effort to be together. They weren't hostile; just indifferent. Adam smiled to

himself. He wanted everyone to share his happiness – he and Vlad had enough and to spare. But other people had their own agendas.

He was genuinely enjoying himself. Vlad was talking to Teal's beside the window and Adam allowed himself a moment's luxury watching his lover's expressive face and the hand gestures that tried to make his English more comprehensible.

But if Vlad was over there, who on earth ... ? He could feel himself blushing a deep red as someone groped him. He whirled – whoever it was, this wasn't funny. Emma was nearby, and some of the medics. He expected to see Niki or even Paul but instead found himself looking up into the amused face of Jean-Pierre.

There didn't seem to be adequate words so he just looked his outrage and astonishment. But the Frenchman merely laughed.

'I thought you enjoyed the admiration of other men,' he murmured. 'We could be something special together, I think.' He had an inquiring smile on his handsome face and Adam gulped. The man seemed to think he, Adam, was available and even looking for a partner. At least the approach appeared to be genuine. How on earth did he turn him down without causing offence? He wasn't exactly used to the etiquette of the gay world.

'I – I'm already spoken for. I thought you'd know.' It was the best he could come up with and it sounded lame.

'Maybe, but maybe I could persuade you to think again.' The Caribbean accent was rich and caressing. Adam didn't feel caressed; he felt trapped. It shouldn't be this hard to say no, but he felt like a schoolboy, gauche and wrong-footed.

'After all,' Jean-Pierre went on, 'Your girlfriend isn't exactly hanging round your neck, and I know you aren't as straight as she might like to think.' So that was it. His relationship with Emma had made Jean-Pierre think Vlad was only a passing fancy. Somehow, he would have to explain.

Except that he wouldn't, because Vlad was beside him, his face a mask of Russian temperament. Somehow, he had picked up on what was going on.

'If you is wanting my place, Frenchman,' he said, 'You is having to with me fighting.' Despite the English garbled by stress, his meaning was very plain. Jean-Pierre's eyebrows rose swiftly and he looked appraisingly from one man to the other. Then he gave a small bow and a rueful smile.

'I misunderstood,' he said. 'I meant no offence, Major. Please forget the incident.' Adam could feel Vlad retreating from the brink of war, and took absurd pleasure in the knowledge that he had occasioned such protective wrath.

‘Don’t worry,’ he said, wanting to defuse the situation further, ‘ I’m flattered, but off limits, so now that you know, there’s no problem.’ Vlad and Jean-Pierre glowered at each other for a moment but Adam’s words seemed to calm the first and relieve the second.

‘In that case,’ Jean-Pierre began, in a totally different voice, one lacking the deep undertones, ‘We should all be friends. We are all foreigners here.’ And he went on to invite them to visit Martinique next time they had leave. He was going himself on Monday, for a fortnight. Next time, perhaps they could plan to join him.

He walked away, ostensibly to fill his glass in the kitchen, and the party swirled round him, hiding him from their view.

Adam grinned at Vlad.

‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘But I thought I was supposed to be the knight in armour.’ Vlad’s eyes laughed at him.

‘Yes, but Niki is warn me. That man he has a - a something people are all knowing about him - a - he go with any person who is moving. And I think Niki does not warning you and I am seeing his face – and your face also.’ Adam wished Niki had indeed warned him. Maybe he’d thought Emma was protection enough. Still, there was no harm done, and at least he now knew his inclinations were public knowledge, and that he needed to sort out his clumsy reactions and learn to turn unwanted attentions away lightly.

‘So do you want a holiday in Martinique?’ he teased.

Vlad stared at him then burst out laughing.

‘I think he is hoping we are not seeing very much Martinique,’ he spluttered. ‘Is French ménage à trios he want, St. George.’ And Adam realised that he still had a lot to learn.

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The party went on until the early hours. Despite it being a weekday, nobody seemed anxious to go home to bed. Emma was flushed and lively, chatting to everyone, not just her new medical friends, and Adam was pleased for her. Jean-Pierre was one of the first to leave, followed by Colonel Somerfield and Martha.

The drink started to run out and a few more people noticed the time. Eventually Adam and Emma were left in alone, and Emma insisted she could clear up next morning while Adam was at work.

‘I had a lovely time,’ she told him. ‘It was one of the best parties I’ve ever been to.’ Adam couldn’t quite grasp what had been so special, but he was glad she was happy. And extremely glad to say goodnight and go to sleep.