

## Candle in the Dark

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# Candle in the Dark

by [guesswhattimeitis](#)

## Summary

After a hard-fought victory, the powers-that-be determine a grand celebration is in order. Katarinya Greyfax, an Inquisitor of fearsome reputation, steals a dance with the elegant and steadfast Saint Celestine.

Breaking her usual stony demeanor, the Inquisitor admits something she shouldn't. The Saint has something to say about that.

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Saint Celestine stood with her back straight and her head held high, the belle of the ball as it were. Arrayed as was her right in a gown and matching heels of fabulous gold and expensive silks, jewels and gems. She was standing to the side of the great hall, observing the proceedings with some of the other leaders. At her left side were the Geminae Superia, Eleanor and Genevieve, arrayed in similar fashion to their charge. They were saints in their own right, and despite their lesser power they stood beside her as equals. At her right side was Inquisitor Greyfax, in freshly pressed high-waisted pants and a plain white blouse, a simple necklace adorned with an aquila around her neck. She wore her Rosette hanging from her belt for all to behold, and a more handsome wide-brimmed hat than her duties usually called for. A sour look graced her face, as it always did, and she held a glass of dark alcohol loosely in one hand.

“You know, I’m usually against such frivolous events, but this is quite lovely,” Celestine said, “well, for a mandatory and rather tiresome affair full of sycophants.” She cocked her eyebrow at the inquisitor, who returned her look. It was an odd thing for the usually upbeat woman to say.

“Oh yes, another chance to mingle with people I don’t even like to interact with when it’s required. Excellent, to say the least.” Katarinya was her usual cheery self. Eleanor and Genevieve chuckled at this, though Celestine seemed not to hear, already lost in her own thoughts. Her eyes were scanning the crowd but she could have been lightyears away for all she seemed to see them. Sometimes the saint would just become vacant, odd, and disconnected. Katarinya wondered at times like this if there was some part of her divinity that pulled her away from humanity. Could she be seeing something no one else could? Would she tell anyone if she could?

“You know, Katta, I quite enjoy a spot of dancing,” Celestine said, returning to the present, “though, it has been quite a long time since I’ve indulged in that particular hobby.” She said this with a twinge of what Katarinya took to be sadness. She no longer felt it proper to try to read Celestine’s thoughts, though she didn’t have to; it was written across her face.

“Does no one find it agreeable to dance with a saint? Or do they simply not have the nerve?” It was a dry question, though Katarinya scanned the crowd as she said it. Celestine’s current duo of Geminae only had eyes for each other, which was a somewhat open secret Katarinya shared with the trio of saints. Instead she searched, though she was unsure why, for a surface thought that might indicate a willingness to dance. Ignoring the more desperate thoughts, she honed in on the most reasonable and likely of the participants. She quickly inventoried them and found them all wanting. Celestine’s response brought her out of her thoughts.

“On occasion the boldest might ask, though they usually find the prospect of potentially, accidentally embarrassing themselves too much to bear. Or worse, they think they might get burned at the stake for even attempting.” She chuckled, though not enthusiastically. Celestine looked over Katarinya after she finished her statement, before asking her a question.

“What are you drinking?” Katarinya raised an eyebrow at this, but humored her. Celestine could change subjects in a heartbeat with no warning, it was something Katarinya had gotten used to over time.

“It’s very strong, and I’m sure it’s expensive. I didn’t bother to ask.” She didn’t think twice or even hesitate in extending the drink Celestine’s way, though as soon as she did, Katarinya knew that she shouldn’t have. Of course Celestine took it anyways, oblivious or uncaring to any connotations or implications about sharing drinks with someone. They had become familiar and comfortable with one another over the latest campaign, and Katarinya was starting to wonder if it was wise to be so publicly casual with an Imperial Saint. After a small sip, Celestine scrunched her face up for a moment. Handing it back, she shook her head.

“And *that* is why I don’t drink much outside of wine.” Katarinya rolled her eyes at that. She wasn’t sure what Celestine had expected, Katarinya had a famously indiscriminate taste. What Katarinya definitely hadn’t expected was that Celestine’s jet black lipstick, a sharp contrast to her complexion, would rub off on the lip of her glass. She stared at the perfect print of her bottom lip for a moment, and considered her options. Her eyes darted left and right, and once she was sure no one was observing her, she placed her lips against the black marks on the glass and took another sip. It felt juvenile even as she did it, but she did it all the same. As she lowered her glass, Katarinya looked up and met Eleanor’s eye. The look on the woman’s face told Katarinya that she had been caught. But Katarinya had kept her face level and unchanged under worse conditions, so she weathered the look without flinching. Eleanor shot her a smirk before turning back to Genevieve. Katarinya felt her chest tighten for a moment before letting the thought go. She would have to be more cautious. Katarinya resumed her search for a potential dance partner for Celestine out among the partygoers, but the saint’s voice interrupted her thoughts.

“You know I’m starting to understand why you find these things so boring. If all I can do is stand around I think I might lose my mind.” As she listened to Celestine’s words, Katarinya appraised the orchestra master. With a quick determination, she had made up her mind. She turned to Celestine.

“Celestine, do you know the Cadian Waltz?” It was, in many ways, an idle question, suitable for such a situation. Celestine nodded.

“I am classically trained on many of the most popular dances, yes. I’m told they are quite fond of that one here. Why?” She cocked her head in question.

“Well, in about ten seconds they’re going to start playing it.” The inquisitor put down her glass on a nearby table. Hands free, she extended one to the saint, and met her eyes.

“Would you do me the honor, Celestine?” The saint’s face was nearly as bright as the gold in her dress as she took the inquisitor by the hand, and Katarinya could swear that she had even momentarily begun to literally glow. Katarinya was intent on not looking at Eleanor, who surely would be wearing a smug, knowing look right about now.

“I would be delighted, Katta.” They strode to the dance floor as the orchestra changed to their next piece, and the assembled guests parted for the duo, and stared openly as the music began. Many of them considered themselves to be lucky to even see a saint at all, but to see her accompanied to the dance floor, and by an *inquisitor* no less, seemed an impossibility.

“Would you like me to lead?” Katarinya offered, moving her hands to hold Celestine in the starting position.

“Yes, I think that would be most appropriate.” Her smile was still beaming as they took their position and started into the first steps. They began elegantly, and swayed and stepped to and fro for several stanzas before Celestine whispered to her partner.

“I am not sure I appreciate the stares, though I suppose it is to be expected.” Katarinya met her eyes with the usual neutral expression she was known for as she deadpanned a response.

“I think if you focus on them you will lose count of your steps.” Celestine looked back at her, and seemed to relax her hold. With a smile she whispered again.

“You know, I think the planetary governor was about to ask me to dance for this number, I’m sure I would have gotten a dance. You didn’t have to do this.” There was a playful tone in her voice. Katarinya knew the governor was a spineless whelp of a man, though his ambition surely would have propelled him to ask for a dance, if his thoughts were anything to go by. That wouldn’t do, not for someone of Celestine’s stature, elegance, and beauty. Not that Katarinya would admit that last bit. So she had simply stepped in.

“Was he? What a coincidence.” Her face was dead flat as she said it, but Celestine’s eyes widened with realization.

“You knew he was going to ask me.” It wasn’t even an accusation, it was just a statement of fact. The inquisitor said nothing to acquit herself of it. Her eyes lingered on Celestine’s, though her face remained unreadable. After Katarinya put her through a particularly dizzying spin and an impressive lift, Celestine whispered again.

“You know you’ve probably started some rumors by doing this.” Celestine was right, but the inquisitor shrugged slightly as they twirled across the hall. What did it really matter? She was known for a lot of things, very few of them polite or generally liked and appreciated. What was one more rumor?

“There are many rumors about me.” She didn’t say it with disdain or malice. Katarinya was aware of the effect she had on people, rumors were just a part of the job. She would gladly endure any scrutiny for Celestine’s sake. After all, any number of blame and fault could be laid at the feet of an inquisitor without issue; laying them at the feet of a saint could be troublesome. Katarinya would shield her as best as she could. For the good of the Imperium, of course.

As they stepped through the dance, Inquisitor Greyfax rifled through the different various elements of the dance she would incorporate. Each spin and extension, she planned as they stepped in time. But she had not remembered, as they had walked to the floor in the first place, that it was customary—nay, *required* that it end in the leading party dipping the follower in a clear show of physical prowess. It was showy, and more than one drama vid had ended with a love confession hinging on that element. Katarinya weighed the social ramifications of dipping a saint before deciding that she wouldn’t deprive Celestine of a critical part of the dance. After all, she was doing this for *her*. She may have been known as a cold hearted bitch, but Katarinya Greyfax wouldn’t disappoint Celestine over something so minor as ‘social capital’. She simply hoped that she would have the physical strength to dip a woman who easily had nearly a foot on her in height.

“Even while dancing you don’t smile, I’m beginning to think you can’t.” Celestine’s voice brought her back from her planning, and Katarinya eyed the woman for a moment before responding.

“Smile, in front of a crowd of influential military figures and socialites? I have a reputation to uphold.” Celestine chuckled, before shaking her head.

“You’re a woman of very few surprises, aren’t you?” The music was moments from its conclusion, as Katarinya whispered her response.

“I think I’ve got one left in me.” As the music cued her to do so, Katarinya Greyfax slid her leg out, as far as she dared, and dropped Celestine as low as she could. As Celestine’s dark hair was very nearly at the floor, the pair heard murmurs and gasps at this bold display of the dance’s signature move.

And looking directly into Celestine’s eyes, with her hair beneath her hat falling to frame her face and hide it completely, Katarinya let her mouth curve up into a small but genuine smile. Just once, *for her*, where no one else could see it. The look in Celestine’s eyes, of pure shock and delight, was worth it. The smile dropped off Katarinya’s face as she returned them to an upright stance, and more than a few people clapped and cheered. Celestine was positively beaming as they returned to their place at the side of the hall. The pair had not noticed, too wrapped up in the dance and each other, but they had been the only pair to continue on until the end, the whole hall entranced by their whirling display and giving way to their mesmerizing movements. Eleanor had a knowing smile plastered across her face as they returned to the observing space they had occupied, and Katarinya shot her a level look and mouthed, “not a word.” Celestine didn’t seem to notice either of their reactions, as she had a smile that was spread ear to ear. Katarinya was quick to reclaim her glass from where she had left it. After a few minutes, and as the party got back into its usual routine, Celestine looked at Katarinya with a twinkle in her eyes.

“You’re quite a dancer, and,” she said, dropping her voice, “you can be rather charming when you want to be.” Katarinya glanced her way, taking a sip of her drink. Glancing back over the crowd, she intoned over the lip of her glass.

“No one will ever believe you.”

“Least of all you, I suspect.” Katarinya furrowed her brow at that. She was not lacking in self confidence but she admitted to herself she didn’t think she had any traits that could be described as ‘charming’. Celestine had a habit of making her rethink things, though. Katarinya noticed Eleanor whispering something in Genevieve’s ear, before addressing Celestine.

“I think we’re going to tour the party a bit, maybe find a quiet corner to rest from this nonstop scrutiny.” Katarinya knew what that meant. They would likely exit the party for somewhere a bit more secluded to have some time alone with each other; it wouldn’t be the first time. And at a place like this Celestine would be in no danger, especially with Katarinya nearby, so she could hardly blame them. Eleanor gave Katarinya a quick wink before leading Genevieve out into the party. She was glad Celestine missed it, she had made it a priority not to lie to her as much as possible. Fair is fair, in all their time serving alongside one another

Celestine had never once lied to her. After a moment without the less than subtle pair, Celestine cleared her throat.

“Perhaps a breath of fresh air would do us some good?” She led Katarinya out onto a small balcony, only really fit for two. Stepping into the night air, the duo took places side by side. They stood at the railing, taking in the night air and twinkling lights of the city far below them. Celestine chuckled after a minute or two of silence.

“What’s got you laughing?” Katarinya truly had no clue what kind of mood Celestine was in tonight. She was always cheerful and bright, but something had brought out a certain bubblyness. It certainly wasn’t alcohol; a single sip was all she had had.

“Charming, chivalrous, a good dancer, excellent at swordplay, and dare I say handsome? A woman like you is hard to come by. If not for your fearsome reputation I think you’d have suitors lining up for a chance with you.” Katarinya didn’t know what to say to that. None of those words were how she would describe herself, except maybe fearsome. ‘Handsome’ in particular threw her off, and though they had spoken fondly of one another on many occasions, Katarinya did not think that she had ever heard herself referred to in such a way. Celestine continued, seemingly oblivious to Katarinya’s lack of response.

“I really do wonder about you sometimes. I would think you lonely, or isolated, yet at every chance you could allay these things, you scare people away.” Celestine was right. But Katarinya didn’t want to admit it, and she stayed silent.

“If I had to guess, a woman like you has no wants. With your influence you could have anything in the galaxy, yet for all that you don’t seem content. What a curious paradox you are. Maybe nothing will satisfy you.” Katarina took a sip of her drink and huffed.

“I am an inquisitor, the Imperium has neither the time nor the concern for my wants. I am an instrument of Him on Earth, and that is enough.” She stared into her glass of nearly empty liquor, wishing it was full.

“If there is time enough for my wants, there is time enough for yours. Even if you refuse to see it that way.” Katarinya would not look at her. A pit had developed in her stomach, and it had nothing to do with her imbibing.

“Tell me then what it is you want, maybe if an inquisitor can’t have it, a saint can.” Celestine wore a devious little smile on her face, a mischievous look that cut to Katarinya’s very soul. She knew she was about to make a mistake, but whispered just over her breath anyways.

“What I’d give for a saint to have *me* . To want me.” Her stomach flipped and churned, and she fought the urge to vomit off the balcony. Instead, Katarinya threw back the last gulp of her drink, looked down at her glass in disgust, and tossed it idly over the railing. “I think I’ve had enough to drink tonight, and enough of this party. Goodnight, Celestine.” With that, she stalked off without another word, not once looking the other woman in the eye.

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Katarinya slammed the door to her quarters. She roughly removed her hat, tossed it on her desk, and ran her fingers through her hair. Nearly sober, she rubbed her eyes before fumbling in her pocket for a hair tie. Pulling her hair back she tied it loosely, tight enough to keep it out of her eyes, but not tight enough to keep her from looking like a mess. Her eyes wandered to the mirror on the far wall above the room's bar, and she stepped over to it slowly as she assessed her appearance. Katarinya Greyfax was not a vain woman, but as her eyes trailed across her visage they came to rest on the streaks of grey at her temples.

Celestine had admired them, once. Said it made her look august, distinguished. Katarinya had worn her hair up more recently, her vanity sparked by that idle comment. As she looked at them now, she considered finding some scissors or clippers and cutting them off then and there, but she had sobered up enough to know that using scissors was a bad idea in her current mental state. As her hand came to rest on a decanter in the bar, Katarinya was vaguely aware that her door had chimed. She wasn't about to answer any callers tonight but it had been the coded emergency chime, accessible only by a few, which set her on edge. Picking up the decanter and a glass, Katarinya sulked over to her desk and pressed the door release key. She placed the glass on the desk and unstopped the decanter as the door slid open. Not looking up, she addressed the guest with a scowl.

"Make it quick, I'm in no mood for idle conversation." Hearing no reply, Katarinya finished filling her glass and dared to look up. She nearly dropped the decanter. Saint Celestine stood there, a few steps away from the desk, an unreadable look on her face. She was still wearing her evening gown, but made no further move into the room. Katarinya grimaced as she placed the decanter down on the desk, perhaps a little harder than she wanted to.

"Are you here to watch me make an ass out of myself for a third time tonight? Because I really was intent on keeping this one to myself if you don't mind." Celestine didn't say a word, just standing and staring. Katarinya glared at her, misplaced anger welling up in her chest. She kicked her chair away and opted to sit straight on the desk, brushing some loose papers onto the ground. She picked up the full glass and just held it, waiting for Celestine to say something.

"I thought you said you'd had enough tonight," she said. It stung to hear it, but Katarinya has weathered far worse.

"I changed my mind. I think I'd rather forget this whole night ever happened, and if I have to forget it the hard way, so be it." She lifted her glass to take a sip, but Celestine's sudden grip on her wrist stopped her.

"Can we talk?" Her voice was low, just above a whisper, nearly pleading. Katarinya couldn't say no to her ever, but especially not now.

"I want to be alone."

"No you don't." Celestine was right. Katarinya wouldn't admit it, but she was right. She hopped up onto the desk to sit next to her, after gingerly taking the glass from Katarinya's



hand and placing it out of her reach. They sat there for a couple minutes, not talking. Katarinya broke the silence.

“So you wanted to talk?” She stared straight ahead, again refusing to look Celestine in the eyes. Celestine let out a little huff, followed by a chuckle.

“You know, I had a wonderful night tonight,” she said, “even with you stomping off on me right there at the end.” She was smiling as she said it. No hard feelings then. Katarinya looked at her finally, a sullen look of defeat plastered on her face.

“Do you suppose the Emperor might strike me down here and now if I ask him nicely enough?” Celestine threw her head back in a laugh, before smiling at Katarinya with a fond look in her eyes.

“I’m quite sure that’s not how it works, but regardless I’d much rather He didn’t.” She paused, before changing the topic. “You know, I almost should thank you for taking off. I might have done something rather stupid if you hadn’t.” Katarinya arched an eyebrow at that. She couldn’t fathom what Celestine could mean. To her credit, Celestine didn’t give her time to think about it long. Her hands caught Katarinya’s face, thumbs across her cheekbones, and pulled their faces together for a kiss that left them both breathless. Time lost its hold on Katarinya then, and she was rather disappointed when it reaffirmed its hold on her as Celestine pulled away.

“I might have done that on that balcony, whether all those people could see us or not. I think I prefer privacy,” Celestine whispered. Their eyes were locked on each other, and Celestine did not pull her hands away from Katarinya’s face for a moment. All at once Katarinya’s brain caught up with what had happened.

“We... shouldn’t. We can’t, we, we, I... you’re a saint, I’m, well, I’m just a woman, and the Ministorum, I doubt they would allow...you kissed me!” Katarinya’s tone was almost incredulous, accusatory. But the implications caught up to her shortly thereafter, and her voice dropped to a whisper. “Does this... does this mean you feel the same way I do?” She almost didn’t dare ask, for the truth would be painful either way. How could this end with anything but pain?

“Katarinya. I have been mortal, and part of me is mortal yet. I can’t help my feelings, I *do* want you, I have for a while now. You’re a real intolerable bitch when you want to be, but I like that—” Katarinya started to open her mouth but Celestine wasn’t finished, “—and I know you’re going to insist that we can’t, or that it’s a bad idea, but frankly I don’t care. For all I do, the least the Ministorum could grant me is some happiness.” There was nothing Katarinya could really say to that. It couldn’t be plainer. A knot had worked its way into her stomach again, but it wasn’t an altogether unpleasant one. She has already made at least one ‘mistake’ tonight, why not make another?

“If you’ll have me,” she whispered, “I would like to be yours.” Celestine slid off the desk, stepping in front of Katarinya. She reached out and gently grasped Katarinya’s collar, looking down into her eyes. Katarinya placed a hand on Celestine’s hip, and another curved upwards to move around her neck. As Katarinya began to pull the taller woman down towards her, the two of them froze. The door had chimed again. Over the intercom, a man’s voice was heard.

“Inquisitor Greyfax, might I have a word with you?” It was Admiral Harut, no amount of buzz and distortion in the transmission could hide that. Katarinya thought quickly and keyed the intercom to tell the Admiral to wait a moment. Celestine seemed unsure what to do, so Katarinya pointed to the back room of the quarters. She took the hint and disappeared inside, closing the door quietly. Inquisitor Greyfax opened the door to her quarters, for a second time that night, and in strode Admiral Harut.

“Can I help you with something, Admiral?” She tried to hide her annoyance. At least, as much as she felt was necessary.

“I wanted to give you this,” he said, dropping a dataslate on her desk, “confidential and all that, couldn’t be transmitted.” Katarinya frowned.

“It could not wait until tomorrow?” Her annoyance was clearly written across her face now, and she felt more than justified in letting it out.

“Well...I also came to ask you what that business with Saint Celestine was tonight.” *Oh* she thought. *Wonderful* .

“I’m not sure what you mean Admiral.” Her voice was level even as she knew Celestine could likely hear them from the room several feet away. As if everyone at that damned party didn’t watch her dance cheek to cheek with the saint.

“You know damn well what I mean! If I pulled a stunt like that I’d be burned at the stake!” He huffed. “And just so you know, I heard the archbishop say something about ‘appropriate behavior’ and ‘a mockery of decorum’ while you danced the night away as you did. I’d be surprised if he didn’t come to give you a right talking to!” Katarinya filed this away in the back of her mind. Something to deal with later. Admiral Harut continued.

“Of all the inquisitors I’ve ever met, you’re the last one I would expect to...” His words trailed off as he seemed to look at her lips for a moment, before he started again, “...well anyways, it’s your business but I want nothing to do with it. The less I know the better.” With that, he turned to exit the apartment. “Peruse the reports at your convenience, tomorrow afternoon I will be hosting a feltbriefing. I hope I can count on you to be there.” He closed the door as he left, as little fanfare in leaving as he had in arriving. Katarinya took a deep breath after the door closed, and took a moment to collect her feelings. Her mood had swung back and forth several times over the last couple of minutes, and frankly she was exhausted even without that particular headache. Dabbing at her lips, she noticed her fingers came away black.

*Celestine’s lipstick* . A stab of embarrassment pierced her heart, but there was little to be done. The admiral had almost certainly noticed and made an assumption, right or wrong. It was a problem for later, which Katarinya found she almost certainly was going to be telling herself a lot in the near future. Which was beyond frustrating, though perhaps worth it, all things considered. After taking a moment to compose herself, Katarinya braced herself to continue the conversation she had been having. She feared the entire mood had been lost, and despite having made leaps and bounds in a matter of minutes. Katarinya wondered if the interruption could have been any worse, but her paranoid mind told her it could have been. It could have been Guilliman himself at the door, after all. Katarinya sulked to the back of her

quarters, bracing herself to restart the conversation that had been so rudely interrupted, and opened her bedroom door.

And for the first time in what was likely decades, Inquisitor Katarinya Greyfax was truly and completely surprised.

Sprawled out across her bed, having discarded her gown and heels, lay Saint Celestine of the Order of Our Martyred Lady. She was clad in undergarments that would have begarred a king. Black stockings, lined with golden thread. Black panties, edged in gold filigree and studded with precious gems and jewels. Black bra, similarly clad.

“*Throne...*” Katarinya could do little more than breathe. It felt scandalous, nay *blasphemous* to see the saint like this, but she couldn’t help it. And Celestine was smiling. Finally regaining her wits, Katarinya addressed the situation.

“This is...you are...Celestine I...”

“I know we lost our moment but...well.” Katarinya just stared for a couple seconds, eyes trailing across Celestine’s figure, before forcing herself to say something.

“I feel criminally underdressed.” Katarinya was still in her dress attire but it paled in comparison to Celestine’s divine garments. Her carefully chosen outfit simply couldn’t compare.

“I’d prefer you *undressed*.” Celestine giggled—giggled!—before continuing. “Sorry, I couldn’t help it. And I know this is sudden but...” Celestine smiled. “...I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want you to see me in all this.” She paused, looking down at herself, “It’s not like I wear these often.” Katarinya stepped slowly to the bed, coming to a stop at the very edge.

“You look...I don’t think I have the words. Perfect, I suppose.” Celestine slung her legs over the edge of the bed, sitting directly in front of Katarinya.

“I know this is quite bold but...would you care to join me?” Katarinya was starting to wonder if this was a cruel dream. That she might wake up any minute. That Celestine would transform into some nightmarish creature before they touched. Or worse than all of that, it wasn’t a dream and Celestine would change her mind or realize that she had made a mistake. Katarinya’s doubt jumped to her lips.

“Are you really sure about this?”

“I’ve been sure about you for a while.” Celestine reached out her hand, and gripped the front of Katarinya’s shirt.

“Don’t make me beg, Katta. Just take me. I am yours.”

## End Notes

My thanks to:

My friend fragileKnight1 here and faithful-protector on Tumblr for the fic's new name (and generally bouncing ideas around and reading my writing).

My apologies to:

Calchexxis, here on Ao3, reading your Saintsbride series probably rubbed off on me and I probably stole something on accident; that said, I shamelessly stole "Katta" as a nickname and Celestine calling her an "intolerable bitch" on purpose.

Peter S. Beagle, for shamelessly stealing the line "I have been mortal, and part of me is mortal yet" from The Last Unicorn. Much respect and love, and credit where it is due.

I've been meaning to post this for several months (it's been in an almost complete state for a while, only for me to start writing something else and not just finish and post it) but here it is. Now it's out of my wips and out into the world!

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