

AFTER everything, Enchanté kept going; it probably would have seemed exactly the same as before to anyone who didn't know what had happened. To be honest, there were more changes in the world outside Enchanté. The GPM was starting to look very different now that the Second Development Division was gone and the big secret about non-humans was out. Our priorities obviously had to change; and, as Mikado had told me, there was more time for him to work on that one project.

So I kept going to Enchanté because unlike at work, I always had a pretty good idea of what I would find there: my non-human friends, really the same as ever. Apart from Misyr, who was of course no longer a non-human, and wasn't quite the same as he had once been either.

I asked Il about it once. "Yes," he said. "I had noticed that Misyr seems quite preoccupied sometimes. I assumed it was because of Kotone, but then perhaps that's just what he was like when he was human before."

"You think it's like a personality change?" I said. "Being non-human made him different, and now he's back to how he should have been in the first place?"

"Maybe," said Il. "I can't see what else it would be. Other than Kotone."

It wasn't that Misyr wasn't happy. He was mostly the same friendly, happy-go-lucky guy that he had always been (or, if Il's theory was right, the same guy he had been for ten thou-

sand years anyway). But it was just the odd moment, when he thought nobody was looking, when he seemed – kind of wistful, I guess. I couldn't help thinking something was up. I wondered to start with whether he might consider confiding in me as the only human who visited Enchanté regularly. But then maybe he wasn't used to being human yet. Maybe he still saw himself as more similar to the others.

The call from Mikado came on what seemed like a normal afternoon. Misyr was behind the counter with Kotone, where they were somehow managing to wash the dishes together – I didn't look too closely. Il was huddled over his games console, and the rest of us were playing cards. Kariya was in the kitchen somewhere too, trying to fulfil Ignis's latest order.

"It's Mikado," I said, when the call interrupted the game. "Sorry, I should take it."

"Rindo," said Mikado, "you need to come in here right now! Whatever you're doing, this is much more important!"

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

"Nothing's wrong," he said, "quite the opposite! Thanks to my genius – no, you have to come and see or you won't believe me. I promise!"

"Right," I said. "I'm at Enchanté, so I'll be there in twenty minutes –"

"The former demon king's there, yes?" said Mikado. "Bring him too."

"You sure?" I said.

“I promise,” he said again, breathily.

I went to fetch Misyr; as he turned to face me, Kotone became noticeably more transparent, which was unnerving.

“Why does he want me to go?” Misyr asked once I’d explained.

“I don’t know,” I said. It was a lie: I did know, or at least I thought I did, although I didn’t really dare believe what I was starting to think. But the fact that Mikado had asked for Misyr specifically didn’t seem like a coincidence. I really needed to stay realistic, but it was kind of difficult.

Kotone disappeared completely as we left the cafe. Misyr had seemed to get used to this. I wouldn’t have liked it if it was *my* girlfriend in that position, but I wouldn’t have dated a non-human anyway. Even one who had been a human before. It was something I’d told myself for years, but this time, thinking about it reminded me of Mikado and my stupid optimism about why we had to go to the office, so I decided to distract myself by seeing if I could encourage Misyr to open up to a fellow human again. “So, how’ve you been?” I asked as we got into the car.

“Good as new,” he said casually. “I mean, you know how I had to have all that medical stuff done ... but I’m pretty much completely recovered. Last time I saw the doctor, she said it was almost like nothing happened.”

“Apart from suddenly turning human again after ten thousand years,” I pointed out.

"I guess," he said.

"So," I said, thinking about my conversation with Il again, "you don't think it's made any difference to ... who you are? It doesn't make you feel different?"

"You know the guys at the GPM did tons of tests on me," said Misyr, "and they never found anything."

"Yeah," I replied, "but I don't mean stuff that shows up on a test, I mean how you actually feel. Like not being able to do magic anymore – that's gotta be weird, right?"

"A little," said Misyr. "I guess it'd bother the other guys if it happened to them. But I was human to start with, so ..."

"I guess," I said.

I should have pressed him more about it, probably, but I wasn't totally concentrating on the conversation; as we got closer to the GPM, I couldn't stop thinking about that phone call from Mikado. I parked the car in my space and swiped us in, then watched the walls go by as we headed up to Mikado's floor, and then –

My wild imagination had been right. There she was. Not a type 2 non-human, not even a type 3, just: human. My sister, Shizuku.

"You know old men get really ugly when they cry," I said, or I think I said it – maybe I didn't make it through the whole sentence. I hugged her. She was so warm – I never thought she'd be so warm. Her voice sounded just the same.

"You did it," I said to Mikado once I could speak again.

“All thanks to my genius!” he said. “I knew I’d work it out someday!”

I hugged him too.

He spared me the scientific details, but explained how it worked in a way that I mostly understood. The change in priorities at the GPM had given him the time to experiment safely, and learning that Misyr had turned back into a human had spurred him on, too, even though it wasn’t as if he could just use Noah’s method.

“This is it,” he said, showing us a bottle. “Drink that and it’ll turn any non-human who used to be a human back into one. Best stay away from non-humans who were never human before, though – I’ve no idea what would happen in that case. Although it would be interesting to try!”

“You can make more?” I said, looking at the bottle.

“As much as I want!” he said. “Easy!”

“So we can take this one?”

He grinned. “Be my guest. That’s why I told you to bring the former demon king here.”

Misyr hadn’t spoken much, but he did now. “I’m already human,” he said.

“I mean your girlfriend, obviously,” said Mikado.

“Oh,” said Misyr. “I see – I mean, that’s sweet of you, Mikado, but ...” He had the sort of expression on his face that he had never shown much as a non-human.

Mikado stepped forward; his expression was unusual too. “I know what it’s like to be with a non-human,” he said. “I know it’s not the same when you can at least make her *look* like a human, but it’s not what you want, is it?”

“But what if it goes wrong?” he said. “At least ... the way things are ... yeah, I know it’s not great, but she’s there when I call her. What if I can’t see her at all anymore?”

“He genuinely is a genius,” I said. “As much as I hate to admit it.”

“It worked on me,” Shizuku pointed out. (I still couldn’t believe it! Every time she spoke I thought I was going to lose the ability to stay standing!)

“Why don’t we ask Kotone what she wants?” I suggested.

Misyr looked relieved. “Yeah. Let’s do that.”

While we were driving back, I wondered if it might finally be the time to encourage him to confide in me. “It must be rough,” I said, “having her so close, but, you know ... not really there ...”

“Well, you can see what it’s like,” he said.

“I’m not the one who’s in love with her,” I said.

He didn’t really reply to that, so I glanced over at him. It surprised me to see there were tears on his cheeks, although I guess I should have expected it.

“Eyes on the road, old man,” he croaked.

I smirked. “Sorry. But if you want to talk, you know ...”

“Yeah,” he said. “I appreciate it. Thanks.” He sniffed. “Ugh, humans are so *vulnerable*.”

We updated the others when we got back. Ignis obviously wanted Misyr to call Kotone right away without taking the time for discussion. Il thought the whole thing would be terribly romantic. Kariya and Canus were more cautious, but they seemed to agree with me that seeing what Kotone herself wanted would be the best option. So Misyr sat still and took a deep breath, and concentrated for a few moments, and then she appeared again.

I was reminded of Shizuku as I looked at her. To be trapped like that, non-human but tied to humanity by love, not knowing if things would ever change – and then to be brought back and made whole and human again. I took out my phone and sent Mikado a quick text.

*Tell Shizuku I can't wait to see her again. Also tell her she needs to get a phone asap. I'm not using her boyfriend as a messenger.*

*Absolutely,* was the reply. *First on the agenda. I don't want to have to relay every message from her overprotective big brother.*

I scoffed and turned my attention back to Kotone just as the others finished their brief explanation of Mikado's potion.

“I'd love to,” she said. “I'd love to be human again – and to be with you properly, Misyr ...”

Kariya grimaced. “Behave,” I hissed into his ear.

“But I don’t think it’s possible like this,” Kotone went on. “I mean, I’m not really here – this isn’t my real form, is it? I can’t eat or drink while I’m here; how am I supposed to swallow that?”

“You could try?” said Il.

She could pick up the bottle in her hand easily enough, and even unscrew it, but as soon as she tried to taste it, all that happened was that a few drops of liquid ended up on the floor.

“I think you need to come to my world,” she told us. “Where I really am – then I’ll be able to drink it. Come and find me there.”

She left us then, so it was our job to work out the details. The problem was that the former World of End Times was sustained by Kotone’s non-human consciousness. If we disrupted that, how would we make sure she and anyone there with her could get back to our world safely? It was more complicated than with Shizuku, and I was ashamed that I hadn’t seen it.

We came up with a plan, although it didn’t feel very secure. All five of us would go to that world, leaving Kariya behind to mind the cafe – he complained about this, but I told him he could visit other worlds as much as he liked when he was an adult. We would find Kotone, or conjure her up or however it worked, and ask her to come as close as possible to the gate. Then we would all join hands, with Misyr at one end of the chain and me at the other, with my hand on the handle of the gate so I could open it and pull everyone back through as soon



as possible. Canus and Il's job was to look out for anyone who might need help making it back to the gate. Ignis had no particular role, but it seemed good to have his powers on standby as well. I didn't need to be there either really, but I think everyone felt that I was a better link to the human world than anyone else, so I suppose I had some kind of symbolic value. I guess it just seemed fitting that all of us should go and get our cafe owner back.

We went through the gate into Kotone's world; it just seemed like a big grassy meadow.

"Wasn't like this before," said Ignis.

"This is the world she made," said Misyr.

"You think she'll just come when you call her?" said Canus. "Like at the cafe?"

"I think so," said Misyr. "Gotta try."

We arranged ourselves into the chain as we had decided, and I kept one hand on the door, but Misyr let go of Canus after a moment and walked towards me.

"What's up?" I said.

He held out the bottle. "I think I'm gonna mess this up. Nerves, you know. You should do it."

"What's there to mess up?" I asked him. "You just make sure she drinks it, right?"

"Yeah, but ..." he said. "Look, this is your job, isn't it? Dealing with non-humans like us – uh, like these guys. So there's no way you can get it wrong. You're a professional."

“If you’re that worried about it,” I said, and I left my place in the chain. There was a discussion about how we should rearrange ourselves. In the end, Ignis was on door handle duty, with Il next to him, holding onto the back of Canus’s jacket. Then Canus held Misyr’s hand with one of his, and mine with the other, and I had the bottle ready.

“Here goes,” said Misyr.

Then the meadow moved, and there she was, more solid than we had seen her at Enchanté for a long time. She was wearing the same clothes that she had always worn to serve our food, but the grass and flowers wove through them, right into her hair, even onto her face. It didn’t make her look any less sweet.

“Hi, everyone,” she said. “Thank you – thank you so much for coming,”

“Kotone,” said Misyr, “are you ... are you really sure you want to be human again?”

“I want to be with you,” she said firmly.

She stepped towards me then, and I unstopped the bottle and handed it to her. She started drinking, and then it began to happen: the grass seemed less green, somehow. The ground felt less solid under my feet, as if I was suddenly wading through mud.

“Something’s happening!” I warned the others. “Stay alert!”

I wondered if Kotone was about to collapse. I assumed she needed to drink the whole bottle – I wished I’d confirmed that with Mikado – so I reached out to make sure she could still hold it. Together, we guided it towards her mouth and she swallowed the last few drops before falling forward. Misyr was there to catch her before I had to. She fell into his arms; I could feel the ground shaking.

“Now!” I yelled. “Let’s go!”

Ignis yanked on the door handle, and the chain of humans and non-humans was hauled back into the cafe. I didn’t see what happened to the former World of End Times, but I was pretty sure that if anyone tried going there again, they wouldn’t have much success.

We were all accounted for, at least. Canus carried Kotone up to her room and I called Mikado. “OK, it’s done. How long is she going to be out?”

“Ah,” said Mikado, “so you’ve all witnessed my crowning glory! Isn’t it splendid?”

“You know I didn’t need any more convincing,” I said, “not after seeing Shizuku. But I think Misyr would appreciate knowing.”

“Oh, I suppose so,” he said. “Well, no need to worry – it won’t be long at all. Just enough time for her cells to become fully human – no more than half an hour!”

We all crowded into Kotone’s room to wait, which probably wasn’t very gentlemanly of us. Misyr perched on the side of

the bed and everyone else stood behind. Nobody said much. I debated calling Mikado again, but it would probably just make everyone even more on edge. And in the end, it didn't matter: she woke up after twenty minutes, and she looked straight at Misyr and gave him the kind of smile that made me wonder whether she had even realised the rest of us were there.

"I'm human," she said.

"Me too," said Misyr.

She reached for his hand and sat up. "Then ... we're a good match."

"At last," he said.

"At last," Kotone echoed, "and forever."

There's not much to say beyond that. She seemed back at full strength straight away, and she even insisted on making coffee for us all, although I'm not sure Misyr even finished his before the two of them went upstairs again. I didn't stick around long after that; I had a sister to catch up with. There would probably be some more strange stuff cropping up at work before too long; that's what the GPM's like. But until then, I was going to take this chance to enjoy how normal everything would be for a while.