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As with all content-altering events, what happened next happened suddenly.

Servergrippers on either side of the respective pickup lines entered into battle over the singular remaining Glonut, nipping at each other like a pair of angry dogs. Someone else had requested this Glonut.

It still amazes me, even from my position as somebody semi-responsible for this type of thing, that we program these devices that in turn program us. Errors, though rare by now, still happen more frequently than you'd expect. How many times has the tech led you astray, caused you to override your own instincts and listen to it instead of your own (correct) intuition? The mobi suite gets you lost. Autostove burns your dinner. We're flawed and we make them, so why do we expect them to be perfect, or at least any different? Ask any AL, or any AL embodied as a ReelPal. They feel a lot of pressure to flawlessly deliver. I've made them, worked with them, trained them, so I know.

Anyway, I was getting a little upset. Someone else desired the very pastry that I had clearly ordered for myself. Someone annoying who was about to show up any second. Until then, I continued to observe this curious struggle transpiring in the pastry case, a battle of mechanical wills each attempting to deliver the Glonut to its respective consumer. I hated conflict. My use of time was simple. I kept everything pared to its essence. You may think I was hiding something or that I was really sad or lonely, but I was none of the above. I was quite content with my content. Smug, then, even. It may not have been so thrilling, but it was decent enough for me, or if it wasn't, the years ended up getting me used to it. Nothing may have been notably right, but more importantly, not a lot could go wrong.

Then came the voice: "Excuse me, I ordered that."

I looked up, turned around, and there was the person. One of the servergrippers backed off. The other had won. The Glonut emerged, proffered by the victorious servergripper to one, as announced, "Mischa Osborn."

"That's me." I smiled beneath my SterilAire Facedrape and tried to remain casual. Because I'd seen them and I'd immediately felt something I'd managed to make it through my content so far evading.

But in that moment, in that Cafelandia on that realspace morning, a glance at this one stranger floored my stomach and sent my heart into disturbing arrhythmias in a way that was unfamiliar and strange. I didn't have time to contemplate my bodily doings. They started speaking to me.

"Hi...was it Mischa?"

I nodded, clutching the Glonut. Words were a failure.

"Well, I ordered that, so—"

"Here you go, you can have half."

That Moment stuck so clearly in my organic memory even without Reel to save it for my external one forever: they're so, so familiar, as if I know them from somewhere, or I have to know them. As if I'd known them for my content entirety already. Their energy pulled me toward them as if they exerted their own gravitational force. Their dark eyes, huge, bright-white toothy smile (was it weird that I was possessed by the sudden urge to brush their teeth? Like, as a caring gesture of affection?). Theirs was a wide face with great bone structure that would look so good onReel. (Spoiler alert: it did.) I noticed the light makings of an incoming beard flecked ever so slightly and appealingly with natural gray.

They smiled, looking straight at me. They seemed almost bashful and I wanted to smash my face into their soft blue shirt and rub it around on their chest and inhale some smoky-woody sweetness. I swore I could smell fresh soap and sandalwood even through my Facedrape. They leaned in closer. It felt like a gift.

“Why did you decide to share ‘your’ Glonut with me?” they asked.

“Just being nice, I guess.”

“If it was the other way around, I can’t say I would have thought to do the same.”

“That’s forgivable. We rarely think during Moments, right? We can only think about them after they’re over.”

“You are funny, Mischa Osborn. Victor of Glonut.”

I worried they would find me awkward, incapable of socially realspacing. But then I saw their eyelet, glossy and iridescent, lit up green. They were in a Moment. *I’d* put them in a Moment?

“So what are you up to at ReelCon?” they asked, words muffled as they took a bite. Iridescent ooze dribbled down their chin. They wiped it away.

“I presented on Innovations in Content Clearing. I—” and I hoped to impress them with this—“spearheaded creation of the AL that’s taking over Content Clearing. That’s why I spent some time in that department.”

They leaned toward me. *Success!* “Wow, so, is Content Clearing really as brutal as they say?”

“Oh, it was. Murders, beheadings, some really bizarro porn. If you can think of it, somebody’s into it.”

“Congratulations. I’m sure you saved a lot of people from self-induced content obliteration.”

“That’s the idea. The spearheader of the SuicideReels movement was a Content Clearer. Not good optics.”

“So what’s next?”

“I’m pivoting to the Productivity and Accompaniment space. ProWatching.”

“Really? Why would you downgrade after you did this great thing?”

If this was going to be my permanent Personal Intimacy Companion or anything like that, I figured I may as well be as bold as I managed to be with my various nameless/faceless temporary ones.

“If you really want to find out,” I said, “we can finish this Glonut and get dinner later. I’m here another night and I have no plans.”

“Sterling,” they said. “But first I have to go give the keynote and do my book signing.”

I realized I had just split a Glonut with someone I should have known.

If I’d cared more for watching ReelStars I would have. But as soon as they said that, awareness shook my rusted brain. I’d read the ReelCon program. I knew the keynote speaker was an ultra-fancy recent Bestie® winner, the kind I tried not to watch because their content would only inspire curiosity’s ugly siblet, envy.

How had I managed to have zero awareness of having been in the presence of someone I should have known with no intro? I could be so wrapped up in my own content that I wasn’t attuned to something so obvious. Dev held the stats of how I reacted internally upon realspace-meeting them and that gave the full picture: 98bpm, sweat excretion.

“Are you Nick?”

Their eyebrow shifted. “NicAdán.” They were trying to discern whether I was pretending, as those who try a faux-casual tactic usually are.

“You’re trying to say you didn’t know?”

“I can be a little wrapped up in my own content,” I said. “I miss things. But I do now, and...it’s really good to meet you, Nick...Adán.” I couldn’t even get their name right that day. “And it was really good sharing this Glonut with you.”

They laughed. “Well, if you didn’t know me before, you will now. I’m a lot of people’s reason why they can’t get stuff done. Want to come to my talk? It’s in forty minutes. Go straight to the front row, there’ll be an open seat. Consider it yours.”

“Do you hold seats for accidental Glonut-splitters you meet at Cafelandias before all your ReelCon keynotes?”

NAL chuckled. I’d made Nicolás Adán Luchano chuckle. So what if it was forced?

“Hope to see you!” they waved.

I was a goner. They hoped to see me. There was hope for something I didn’t think I wanted and suddenly understood I could no longer do without.