when hell freezes over

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Summary

Vaggie and Charlie talk in bed on a cold night; about body temperature, food… and what Vaggie's life was like.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

"You're cold."

Vaggie hums, blinks - well, technically, a wink - to clear her sleepy vision, and focuses her gaze back on Charlie, sprawled on top of her. "Mmm?"

"I mean - I know I've said it lots," her girlfriend continues in a somnolent murmur, laying her head on Vaggie's shoulder, "but to me, you feel cold. In a nice way," she adds hurriedly. "Like… swimming on the hottest day… or ice cream without brain freeze."

Vaggie chuckles fondly. "If you didn't eat it so fast, hon, you wouldn't get brain freeze so often."

"It's not that! It's Hell ice cream - it's supposed to do that!" Charlie pouts dramatically. Vaggie boops her scrunched-up nose with a finger, and they both dissolve into giggles, and the bed creaks beneath them as they squirm.

They subside into comfortable silence. It's been a long day. A sudden cold snap hitting Pentagram City made sure they got plenty of work done on renovating this old Morningstar building for Charlie's rehab-redemption project, and now they're trying to get some rest despite the blizzard battering the windows. But Charlie's mind tends to race, and you know what? Vaggie doesn't mind pillow talk one bit.

She idly runs her fingers through Charle's blonde hair, and it flows between them like liquid gold.

"To me," she says at length, bringing a hand up to cup Charlie's rosy cheek. She flutters at the touch, but leans into it nonetheless. "To me you're so warm." She pauses, searching for a comparison. It's been so many years since she's had it. "Like *sopa de res*, made just right."

"What's *so* - *sopa de res* made of? It's a soup, right?"

"That's right." Vaggie smiles. Charlie was picking up on Spanish, bit by bit in between her other hyperfixations, and Vaggie was very proud of her for that. "A Salvadoran beef soup - well, almost a stew. Lots of vegetables. Yuca leaves and corn ears too - I think." She'd never made it herself. She's found Latin American restaurants scattered across Pentagram City, but the owners mustn't be Salvadoran, or the ingredients in hell must be different; because the sopa they served never comes close to that faint core memory of hers. "Tasted rich and savoury, and herby. And the beef was so tender and soft."

"I don't think I've ever had it," Charlie muses. "I should get Razzle and Dazzle to find the recipe and make it someday." Vaggie wonders if that would entail bribing a succubus or incubus, one of the ones who visited Earth, to seduce the genuine recipe out of somebody. Not the most tasteful prospect - if Charlie does go and ask a demon to do that Vaggie decides she'll have to come along, at least to prove the point that Charlie is hers. "Was it warm like apple pie?"

"In a way? It was…homely."

"Homely." Now Charlie sounds wistful. "Dad used to make apple pie all the time. And Mom…" she sighs. "She had our kitchen staff make the healthier stuff. She said if Dad had his way, all we'd have eaten was junk food. I mean, that is what we're eating these days." Vaggie casts her mind to the WackDonalds and Spendys that dominate their mealtimes; whatever's quickest to drive out and get between renovation work on the soon-to-be Happy Hotel.

"But you," her girlfriend smiles, "you remind me of cream puffs."

"Cream puffs?!" Vaggie splutters.

"Hard on the outside, soft and sweet on the inside." And she kisses Vaggie, first on the bridge of her nose, then on the lips.

"Oh, hon," she flusters, and Charlie nestles her head against her chest, arms snaking around her in an embrace.

"Well, maybe not all hard on the outside." She gently pinches the side of her thigh. When she met Charlie, Vaggie was slim to a practically militant degree; but after a few years with Charlie looking after her she's put on a bit of weight, and now there's softness layered on top of her muscles. It doesn't hurt that it mostly went to her hips and thighs. Knowing Charlie loves that about her has made accepting and embracing her body that much easier.

Vaggie purrs. *"¿Soy tu hojaldre de crema, mi cariño?"* she whispers into Charlie's ear.

Charlie raises her head, screws up her face in thought - the urge to boop Charlie's nose again is very strong - and replies. *"Sí, eres mi ho-hoja…hojaldre de crema. Mi amor. Mi mariposa. Mi hojaldre de crema."*

"I take *sopa de res* back," Vaggie sighs smittenly. "You're warm like pacamara coffee, with honey." She kisses Charlie back. "So sweet. My hon."

"We can still try *sopa de res* someday though, right?"

Vaggie chuckles at Charlie's blush and puppy-eyed look. "Of course! When things settle down, I'll find a proper Salvadoran restaurant and take us there." She misses date nights. Renovating this old Morningstar property has taken up so much of their time. But one day, soon Vaggie hopes, there'll be enough of a gap in their schedule to treat Charlie right; give her a break and reward her for her hard work and her kindness and her love.

They indulge in some light petting for a minute, savouring each other in that warm and sleepy way. Gradually their kisses and strokes slow, until Vaggie's head flops back against the pillow and Charlie's hands find a place to settle, snug between the small of Vaggie's back and the mattress.

"What about a blanket?" Charlie asks. "Am I warm like a blanket, Vaggie?"

Vaggie snorts, considers how they're positioned. The wind whistles through the holey walls of the future Happy Hotel; but the two have done away with the quilts and duvet, choosing

instead to lie in a nest of messy sheets and pillows - and Vaggie feels as warm and secure as anything with Charlie pressed against her.

She wraps both arms around Charlie's waist again. "Yeah. You're much better than a blanket, hon."

"I guess it's 'cause I'm Hellborn," Charlie murmurs, thoughtfully. Vaggie hums in vague agreement. "But that always seemed normal to me. My mom was warm… but my dad wasn't, cause, y'know, fallen angel and all. Sinners usually run hot as well, I think… until they, y'know…" Her voice peters out into a whimper.

Vaggie knows where Charlie's mind has wandered - to memories of Extermination Day, the aftermath as the exorcists depart; before the flesh and bones and discarded weapons are picked away by scavengers and opportunists. She knows Charlie has been going out trying to heal mortally wounded sinners for years; has seen more coagulating blood and cooling flesh than someone as pure as her should have any right to see.

"Shhh, shhh, hon," she soothes as she feels Charlie's breath hitch quietly into her breast. "It's months away, you don't need to think about it right now, okay?" She doesn't want to think about it either.

The snowstorm rages and moans outside. Some poor soul - maybe an imp or a smaller sinner - yelps and recedes into the distance, apparently picked up by the wind. It's a reminder that despite everything, this realm endures. Charlie calms, and so does Vaggie; still she keeps Charlie's head close to her chest patting the back of her head until she feels her relax completely.

And then they lay there - she's losing a bit of feeling in her legs, but that's okay. It's Charlie; she can never fault or resent her love.

She's half-drifted off to sleep when Charlie shifts and murmurs on top of her. "Hey, Vaggie?"

"Yeah, hon?"

"Would I freeze if I went up to the living world?"

Vaggie chuckles. "Where did that question come from, hon?"

"I've always dreamed of seeing it. I want to see where humans come from, plus it'd be so helpful to see what happens in their lives; what makes them Sinners or Winners. And," Charlie takes her hand, "it must be colder, if you're cold to my touch."

Her blood already runs as cool as the touch of a gold ring on a winter's morning, but an even greater chill runs through Vaggie. She hasn't been lying about her human life, she hasn't been lying that her memories of it are faded and fuzzy; but what she's kept from Charlie is far worse.

She didn't go to Hell when she died.

She'd gone to Heaven.

She'd been convinced to join the Exorcists, thinking she was keeping the afterlife balanced and getting justice; for her own death and for the deaths of her sisters-in-arms. Serving justice to the murderers, rapists, traffickers and abusers down there. But then she'd found herself about to kill a child - a frightened, crying child.

Why was he in Hell? Where was the justice in killing a child? If a child could be sent to Hell, what did that say about the other damned? The adult sinners? Did they really deserve a summary second death?

What was she doing?

Vaggie had let the kid go.

That one moment of mercy had had her mutilated and cast out; cast out to where Charlie had found her. And Charlie had assumed she was a sinner, because Vaggie had, despite the pain, had the foresight to strip off her remaining Exorcist garb, and the luck for the bleeding from her eye socket and shoulder blades to stop.

She catches herself drowning in those memories and tries to banish them; replace them with what's relevant to Charlie's question.

"Well…" she gathers her thoughts. "El Salvador's in the tropics. It doesn't really snow, even on what mountains we had. I never saw snow, except on TV. It was hot and humid, and there was a lot of rainforest outside the cities. Pride's a different kind of heat."

"Except at times like these," Charlie points out.

Vaggie glances at the frosted-over window. The acid snow and sleet might be eating into the exterior cladding; if it has, that'll make more work for them, Razzle, and Dazzle once the weather clears up. "Yep," she scoffs.

"That shocks every new soul down here," her girlfriend carries on light-heartedly. "Hell freezes over more often than they say."

Lute used to say that. She'd use that exact phrase in her speeches before each Extermination, describing her vision of a dead and empty Hell, devoid of any and all demonic life. - though Vaggie knew Lute loved the slaughter too much to want it to ever end. In her own first days after being recruited, an end to Hell's 'threat' to the order of the universe had seemed a satisfying prospect… but now all Vaggie can think about when she hears that phrase is *Charlie's* body among the corpses of sinners and lower-class hellborn 'accidentally' caught in the crossfire.

She shivers.

"Aw, Vaggie, are you getting cold?" Charlie fusses.

"I'm okay, hon."

"Are you sure?"

"…mm-hmm. Yeah. It's just…" She fumbles for an excuse. She isn't good at lying.

And yet somehow Charlie still doesn't see through her. "It's okay, Vaggie. I'm sorry I brought back those memories. I understand." She doesn't. She doesn't know. "Remembering my childhood, when Mom and Dad were still together and happy… that makes me sad too. Anyway - we've had a long day. Let's get some sleep." She slips off of Vaggie, spoons into her side, and kisses her cheek. "I love you, Vaggie. Sweet dreams."

"Love you too," Vaggie whispers, a lump in her throat.

Soon Charlie's gentle snores buzz into her ear like comforting white noise. But Vaggie doesn't join her in slumber.

…

It's been nearly two and half years.

When Charlie had found her, Vaggie was afraid that she would've killed her or just walked away and left her for dead if she'd known the woman she was tending to was an exorcist. And by the time she felt secure in knowing Charlie would never do that to any injured being, it had been so long that Charlie had accepted her falsehood, her omitted truth, as fact; and to confess that now, after two years of committed relationship… Vaggie *knows* it would beyond devastate her girlfriend.

She wants to tell her. She really does. It sickens her that she's keeping this secret, it goes against everything Charlie stands for. Charlie, who has been nothing but honest and transparent from the day they met.

But she needs a guarantee that Charlie won't abandon her for it. And she can't have that guarantee, because it is entirely understandable that Charlie would be disgusted by what she was, and how long she's hidden it from her. If she found out, Vaggie wouldn't blame her if she broke up with her. If she was in Charlie's place, she would.

…Not if it were Charlie. Vaggie doesn't want to lose Charlie.

She thinks it might kill her.

So if she has to bury her past… so be it. She does want to leave it behind. In fact, she'd like to forget it herself, so all she can be is Vaggie, Charlie's lover and protector; and not *Vaggie* the mass murderer, named after her own genitals by a misogynistic pig, forever tarnished by the blood on her hands. But she knows she can't absolve herself for taking part in a genocide. No, forgetting would be wrong; moving on would be a luxury she wouldn't deserve anyway. She deserves the nightmares. She deserves the guilt and the anxiety.

…maybe she doesn't even deserve Charlie.

But, God, she loves her. Can't she have this one guilty indulgence?

Charlie is her purpose. Charlie is her atonement. Charlie is her reason for existing. And if she has to keep her past locked away forever in order to stay with the woman who made her

believe she wasn't unsalvageable, and help make her dreams come true to remedy her sins… so be it.

Despite her self-loathing, Vaggie lets herself snuggle deeper into Charlie. Outside, the wind howls, and more sleet lashes against the window and roof - or is it rain? It's sounding more like rain.

The cold snap is coming to an end.

…

She'll leave Charlie when Hell freezes over.

End Notes

Spanish Translations

"¿Soy tu hojaldre de crema, mi cariño?" – "Am I your cream puff, hon?"

"Sí, eres mi hojaldre de crema. Mi amor. Mi mariposa." – "Yes, you are my cream puff. My love. My butterfly."

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