

Kim plodded down the hallway, trying to think about anything other than how much she just wanted to sleep for at least six hours. She fumed at how her partner, a rat by the name of Enobarbus, had suddenly decided to retire in the middle of a mission. Not only did Kim have to kill a pirate Sue by herself, the Flowers had made her help look for him even after she insisted that he was too good to be found.

She tried to cool her anger by thinking about how she should be grateful that he was gone, but it just made her madder. It was bad enough that Eno only did the Duty because the alternative was to be sent home, but she also had to keep a supply of chocolate and rum to bribe him with when threats didn't work. Also, she had to carry most of their gear, plus whatever valuables he managed to grab, and he expected all of the loot to either line his rat-hole or be exchanged for things he wanted.

Kim briefly wondered how hard it would be to find Eno's hoard. Then she suddenly had the feeling that she was being watched. She whirled around to see Samantha, who was still recognizable even though she was using some sort of illusion spell to actively defy description. "What're you doing?"

"Agent Kim, I did not recognize you from behind," Samantha said. "I was following you because you appeared to know where you were going. I dislike being unaware of my surroundings, and I have trouble navigating the hallways properly. "

Kim could sympathize. When she first came to the PPC, she hated that she needed to be distracted to get anywhere. Back in New York City, that was a good way to get mugged, or worse. The fact that she had been followed by a creature of the night, probably for several minutes, was not lost on Kim. She groaned inwardly at the irony. "I'll take you where you need to go. Following people around is creepy, you know."

"I apologize if I frightened you," Samantha said as she fell into step beside Kim. "Many people do not seem to notice when I follow them. Of those who do, most do not seem to mind once I explain what I am doing."

Kim wondered if Samantha's illusion helped, but she still thought that most agents wouldn't care even if they could tell she was a vampire. "You're still hiding with that spell."

"It is a useful habit," Samantha admitted.

"How so?" She usually didn't pry, but this was just a friendly chat and she was curious.

"There are missions where my true form is useful, but I would still look out of place should the SEP field fail," she said. "I do not wish to become comfortable with revealing myself to strangers."

Kim nodded in appreciation. She firmly believed in cultivating good habits and avoiding bad ones.

Against all reason, Kim had a sudden urge and asked, "How about we go get some coffee from the cafeteria?" She believed the rumor that they used kopi luwak directly from the civet, and had thought that the cafeteria coffee tasted like fecal matter even before she knew that. She also had her own coffee pot that made normal coffee taste amazing and sub-par coffee taste acceptable.

Samantha was allergic to water and many other fluids that were not blood, but she wasn't upset even though she felt that Kim should remember that. Samantha was going to politely decline the invitation, but the words died in her throat. Instead, she just nodded and continued to follow Kim.

When Samantha was an intern, she had been comfortable with considering Kim as a superior. Now that Samantha was more experienced, there was very little of that hierarchy left. Even if Samantha was still brand-new, she wouldn't have followed Kim's orders outside of a mission. There was no explanation for Samantha to stay with Kim now.

When they reached the cafeteria, it was in the throes of a full-on food-fight. The chance of getting pelted with substances was Kim's second reason for avoiding the cafeteria, the first being that they served a lot of unidentifiable mush alongside confirmed wuzzle-meat and alien substances. Undeterred by what should have been all-consuming revulsion, she boldly shoved through the doors.

Samantha should have been petrified with fear since many foods would burn her skin on contact. Instead, she followed Kim into the cafeteria with a dreamlike acceptance that walking through a food-fight was completely normal and safe.

Kim was the first to get hit with a piece of flying food. It resembled a turkey leg, but it was green, rubbery, and covered in spots. The blow was glancing, and she rubbed the spot while seeming to wonder what had hit her. Samantha received a custard tart to the face, but fortunately eggs, milk, and sugar did not topically bother her.

The Ironic Overpower was usually thought of as a malevolent force, but it could also be kind when it was appropriate. Kim inadvertently shielded Samantha from a face full of Nickelodeon slime, causing the secretary to remove her glasses and shake off the green-tinted mixture of pudding and applesauce in disgust. A moment later, the vampire caught a dwarven scone to the shoulder. Samantha hissed in pain, but she could recover from the injury easily while Kim would have needed weeks of physical therapy.

Other than putting Samantha in a food fight and then preventing her from getting hit with anything truly harmful, the Ironic Overpower's finest moment was when it made a random person throw a pie-tin that knocked the coffee mugs from both agents' hands and simultaneously made them forget the compulsion that drew them to the cafeteria in the first place.

Samantha was consumed with mad glee as she forgot what she was. She cackled as she threw a grilled cheese at an Andalite that had avoided most of the flying food. He easily knocked the sandwich away, but he couldn't bring his tail-blade around fast enough to divert a handful a stewed gagh that was thrown from a different direction. The worms splattered over his back, and Samantha grinned in smug satisfaction. He retaliated with a bowl full of gray goo, but Samantha just laughed as she wiped the liver away from her eyes.

Kim was overcome with the knowledge that she would have to shower and change her uniform anyway, even though she would have rather have gone to clean up at the first bit of mess. She let out a warcry and dove across a table, scattering the remaining trays of food all over herself.

Across the cafeteria, a man started beating a large metal bowl with a spoon, producing a loud clanging noise. Once the chaos died down, he shouted, "Oy buckos! It be takin' a lot o' time and effort te bring ye the grub ye be wastin'! Ye should bae ashamed o' yeselves!"

The cafeteria was eerily silent as everyone either shuffled back to their seats to finish their meals or back to the RCs to clean themselves up.