

Salvation - By Your Side

Rating: P6

Summary: Follow-up on 2x07 "The Madness of King Tanz" - It's not the President who visits Grace late that night.

Author's Note: This was meant to be a rather angst piece; however, it somehow developed a mind of its own. Or maybe my frustrated Gracius shipper mind did (I think after the last couple of episodes every Gracius shipper can relate).

It was just a knock.

A sound that was innocent enough, and to be heard from each and every visitor that didn't have a key.

A sound she wouldn't get to hear when someone with the intention and means to enter her home without her permission wanted to intrude.

A simple, almost gentle *tap-tap-tap* on her front door.

And yet it made her flinch and her breath quicken.

Grace Barrows knew that there was a security detail close by. Nothing too obvious, no; but still there, and still her best hope and chance of not suddenly being attacked by someone.

Someone whose sister she had killed to protect the Secretary of Defense, Harris Edwards.

In all honesty she didn't actually fear being attacked, truly attacked, by Alonzo. For some reason she had faith that deep inside, he knew what she had done wasn't cold-blooded murder. Yes, she had shot Claire. But by doing so, she had shot the woman who had betrayed their country, had tried to poison their rightful president, and was ultimately willing and ready to take the life of an unarmed other.

Of course she understood Alonzo's anger, and his disappointment in her he most probably felt. She assumed that if she was in his situation, she had felt the same. Reacted the same. In these moments after, when she had told him the truth; when his eyes had held so many emotions. When he had pointed a gun in her direction and pulled the trigger. And when the bullets ripping through the air, thankfully past her, had deafened her soul more than they had her ears.

Over and over that scenario played in her head. Over and over the bullets flew past her, and her only consolation was that due to the way Alonzo had reacted then, the probability of it getting worse at any point later on, when he hopefully had done some research himself, was pretty slim.

At least that was what she told herself.

Life was becoming overwhelming. The imminent death threat from space, the murderous objects waiting to fall from the sky, a world in panic and chaos, governments busy displaying power instead of finding solutions, people not being able to see the big picture... And added to all of that these problems on a small, personal scale, like her daughter alone on some faraway continent, a man she'd actually come to like and who had saved her life at that now filled with possibly deadly anger against her, and the man she... and *Darius* on the verge of madness while holding the scepter.

It was another scenario still keeping her mind busy and awake, despite her tiredness. The Oval Office, empty, deserted, only a symbolic Stars & Stripes pin left behind--

Again, a knock. Firmer, now, but still not demanding. And a soft voice she was able to neither hear nor identify.

Slowly she went to her front door to answer it, the queasy feeling in her stomach apparently not willing to leave her in peace just yet.

That no one other than the same Darius Tanz she had just had on her mind, the man who still officially President of the United States, would stand there before her door, in the middle of the night, alone and unprotected, shouldn't have surprised her as much as it did. At one point after he had vanished earlier this day, she had secretly hoped he'd come to her, now that he had apparently come to his senses and vacated his presidency.

That he was, in fact, here now unfortunately didn't help her stomach all that much.

When she finally remembered that she hadn't yet said anything to him, all that came to her mind in that moment was a simple, "Mr. President", followed by a nod. There was no resentment in her voice; no judgment. And there was certainly no mockery. All of which she, especially after his manic display she had had to witness earlier, should probably have expressed. But this was Darius Tanz. A person she felt she knew better than most people in her life, despite their short period of acquaintance, of friendship, and... It just didn't feel right, even now, to judge him by his actions these past days.

"Oh Grace. There is not and never has been anything presidential to me," he replied, reaffirming her thoughts, and it was as if with that one sentence he was able to release a breath he'd been holding since all that madness - the political one at least - had begun.

Wordlessly Grace stepped aside to let Darius enter the house, and he did, albeit somewhat hesitantly, and his head wasn't held high anymore like he had before. He came to stand next to the stairs, apparently not daring to go any further, and, hands in his pockets and shoulders twitching nervously, looked at her, sorrow and something akin to fear showing in his eyes.

"I'm going to step down. I'll resign my post as the President of the United States," he declared after minutes of silence and staring at each other. He then narrowed his eyes, as if thinking his words over, before he corrected, more quietly, "Well, I suppose in a way I have already done that."

While she had assumed this information he was providing her with now already, she felt a wave of relief at hearing him say those words; Darius was no president and never would be, that much she had seen. They all had. He was a scientist, a mad one at times maybe, but in a genius way, and that was what the world needed right now. Not a mad president, a mad king on the throne that was soon to be turned to ashes if they didn't start working on the problem at hand, instead of worrying about a political game of chess. Or tag, for that matter.

Once again, a proper reply wouldn't come to her - the irony wasn't lost on her, after all it was her *job* to find the right words - so she busied herself with pointing at her kitchen, and followed him as he went there. Still avoiding verbal contact, she took two wine glasses from a cupboard and a bottle from another, putting the items onto the counter behind which Darius stood, and got an opener from a drawer. But when she reached for the bottle to open it, her late night guest's hand came up to cover hers, while his other gently pried the corkscrew from her fingers.

"Are you going to say something?" he asked while screwing the winding metal into the cork.

She sighed at that and pressed her lips together, lest they tried to be quicker with an answer than her head. Finally, though, she settled for the easiest of replies: "What do you want me to say?"

"I need to know something, Grace."

"And here I thought you knew everything there is to know," she retorted quietly, though her voice lacked the venom it should have held for that kind of come-back.

"Fair enough. I deserve that." He did, doubtlessly. But that didn't mean she had to throw it in his face when he came to her in some kind of peace offering gesture, and she felt a stab of guilt when he accepted her words just like that, not even the tiniest bit hurt in his face visible.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..."

"Yes, you did, and you're right. But that's not..." He stopped himself and turned away from her, taking a deep breath, as if unsure of himself and his words - so much unlike the Darius she had seen in these past days. "I... I need to know you're with me. I can't do it without you. You ground me, Grace, you keep me sane. And what I said before... it's still true. I need you."

She couldn't help but stare at him then, wondering if he was serious. Not about the needing her - but his claim that she was the one who kept him sane. How good that worked they had seen during his short stint of presidency. Apparently he read her thoughts then.

"Aside from everything that has happened, it was you who... woke me up." The words were followed by the *plopp* of the cork coming off, and it startled her a little. She tried to cover it by pushing the glasses towards him so he could pour the wine. If he noticed, he didn't show it. "I have been stupid, blinded by the power invested in me and my being so sure of myself and my knowledge. *How hard can it be to run a country these days when all we really need to save us is science, and I am one of the best there is when it comes to science?* - I had fooled myself into thinking. I had forgotten by then why I had handed in my resignation as vice president in the first place. But then you left, as did Harris and Jillian, and I realized - I can't be president alone." He huffed and shook his head. "I can't be president, *period*. Obviously."

As she took the first sip of wine, she repeated his words back and forth in her mind. The Darius standing in her kitchen now was so different from the one who had sat in the presidential office, ready to declare war upon a group of hackers because of some personal vendetta. He was the old one again, the one who didn't care about politics, who made his own rules - and got away with it because he was so good.

So the genius scientist was back to his old self - which, however begged one question for her.

"But if you are not going to be president anymore, what do you still need me for?" At that, he actually smiled - even though it was a sad smile.

"I need to know there is someone I can trust. Someone I can turn to. Someone who will tell me the truth, their honest opinion, without holding back. Someone who will call me on my... *BS*" he explained, the last bit accompanied by a small eyeroll, seemingly directed at himself. His hand that was lying on the counter slipped towards Grace then, his fingers lightly touching hers. "I know you can be that person - you *are* that person."

"Darius, there is so much--"

"Whatever position they give you now, you will most likely have a lot of work on your hands, I know," he predicted what she wanted to say. "But politics can't be our foremost concern right now. It won't matter anymore if that asteroid hits us. Whereas that project--"

Now it was for her to cut into his talking.

"That project you want to use to destroy these nuclear bombs and shift the power from RE/SYST back to us?"

"No, Grace. No more of that. The only thing I want to do right now is save the world. With science. That hacker group are still terrorists to me and they need to be dealt with, but not while we're in danger of global extinction," he finished, and the open honesty in his eyes captivated her just as much as his passion and enthusiasm had when they had first met. Still, there was this nagging voice somewhere inside her that wondered if it wasn't all too good to be true.

"Then what do we do about them?"

"I leave that decision to the new president, whoever that will be. It can't be my responsibility anymore, and I can't use it to exact my revenge. I was a creator, an inventor, before all that started. I look in the mirror and don't recognize myself anymore, and I know it can't go on like this. This isn't me." He rounded the kitchen counter then, and put down the glass he was holding when he came to stand right in front of her. "I am the one

coming up with the craziest ideas and then find a way to actually let them become reality, *working* reality. I am the one who built a rocket for the best and brightest to discover new worlds. I am the one who promised to find a way to save us all, and I will."

"Darius Tanz, your self-confidence our whole government could live on," Grace quipped when he paused his speech for a moment. He gave a crooked smirk as response, and a shoulder-shrug that said he knew all too well that his greatest wealth wasn't his money or his inventions, but in fact his nearly unshakable believe in himself. It was what allowed him to walk paths and risk trying his hand on ideas others would shy away from because of the sheer possibility that they could fail. Darius Tanz, however, didn't believe in failure. He just kept trying, having faith that at one point, he would succeed.

It was this attitude of his that had made Grace stay with him, work with him, *collaborate* with him and even follow him around the globe from the very beginning on, when they had first met, and despite his lacking first impression in terms of courteousness.

He took her hands in his, holding them to his chest, and ducked his head a little look into her eyes. "I am the one having the honor of dancing with a wonderful, intelligent, compassionate, and gorgeous woman amidst an old, rundown Russian flat after being dosed with a truth serum," he whispered, and at that, she actually couldn't help but laugh lightly.

"Darius..."

"What I don't want to be anymore is the man who alienates you and drives you away because he's in over his head." He leaned his forehead against hers and repeated his earlier exclamation, his confession really, once more - "I need you." - putting emphasis on every single word.

"You have me," she breathed, the only answer she was able to voice then, even though her head was spinning with his words and her own thoughts on them.

"Thank you," he whispered, and when Grace leaned in a little, he met her halfway, their lips melting together in a sweet, soft kiss.

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