

Salt and Pepper Seasons

“We’ve been sitting here forever!” Piper fidgeted impatiently. “We should be enjoying the rest of our time somewhere else.”

I smiled at his innocence “Nevermind, they need us here.”

“Maybe we could escape!” He looked around the kitchen for an open door. There was none.

I sighed, he was my soul mate but he was trying at times. “Even if we could get out of our ceramic constraints, where would we go?” I saw only obstacles to a getaway.

“Back to India?” he asked with remembrance.

Back to India. My mind’s eye returned to the smell of sweaty humans packed into a mob-size crowd. I thought back to the scent of turmeric and ginger. Back to where we first met.

People with colorful robes and dark skin crowded around to see what I was worth. I wasn’t sure what my price was, but I saw others like me. I was commonplace. Across from the wooden cart where I was displayed, I saw him.

“What’s your name?” He called over the rise and fall of bartering.

“Sal Gypsum,” I shouted over the crowd’s elongated vowel sounds, “yours?”

“Piper Nigrum,” he spoke powerfully but in a low tone. “I was taken from a beach near the Kerala backwaters. Brought to this spice market,” he spoke the last words with disdain. “I have hated every moment of my life since then. But this moment I’ll keep.”

His smile was charming and exotic. I felt quivery, but in a warm kind of way. He radiated heat like sand burning the soles of your feet. His attention made me feel special. It didn’t matter that we were both prisoners with a grim future. We were the perfect pairing of opportunity meets destiny.

“I originated in a cave in Spain. The Muntanya de Sal. I spent most of my life in the dark, wet obscurity of the earth. Away from light and joy,” my voice trailed off.

“So this is good for you?”

“My home was invaded by miners. It was a bitter taste in my mouth to say goodbye to my home. There is comfort in complacency.”

He nodded, “I grew up off the Malabar coast in southern India. It is close by. The first sound I heard was the ocean waves folding in on themselves like bread dough. The air was thick and humid, but the wind blew with freedom. Under the sun’s intensity, I became who I am.”

“So different from my story.” I smiled at him. I suddenly realized that together we were more than the equivalent of each part. I was white and coarse; he was dark and insoluble. We were created for each other. “What will happen to us?” I worried.

“We will be together,” he predicted solemnly. “We’ve come this far from different climates and altitudes to be here. This place.”

His prediction had been correct. We ended up together in the United States of America, in a country-style kitchen, on a red plaid tablecloth.

My mind was brought back to the present moment. “We can never go back to India,” I answered sadly.

I could see Piper longed to return to his homeland and bask in rays of the sun. Time would slow down, and we could forget about the truth. It was just wishful thinking, but as usual, I was glad to go along with his dreams.

I saw that Piper had settled down a bit. I glanced at him fondly. “We’re fortunate, you know. We have each other. Others are alone.”

“But someday we’ll be gone, all used up.” The future weighed heavily upon him.

“There are others to replace us. Don’t think about that now.” I was compacted at the bottom of my container, but not too uncomfortable, “I would rather be in the metaphorical chains with you than free underground.” I heard the front door close, which meant the masters were home.

Piper grimaced at the sound. He knew I was slipping through the cracks quickly; I would be gone before he was.

“Stay with me,” he whispered.

“I’m practically ancient,” I smiled tightly. I found solace in our purposefulness. Piper didn’t share my sentiment. Footsteps drew closer.

“Maybe we’ll meet again,” Piper said hopefully.

“In India?” I felt myself being shaken. I was sparse and thin; it wouldn’t be too much longer.

“Yes,” he whispered, “in season.”