

The Dilemma of Not Growing Old

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Fandom: Highlander

Pairing: Methos/Joe

Rating: PG

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Warnings: none

Summary: Methos walks a fine line with the Watchers as Adam Pierson and he knows people are beginning to ask questions, so it is time to move on, but there's just one problem with that.

Author's Notes: This was written for Claire, who requested Methos/Joe in the rare pairing panel at Connotations. I hope you like it, Claire :). This is unbeta'd because I wanted to get it posted for Claire's birthday and Soph is on hols without regular internet, so I will correct it later once she's beta'd it. Apologies for any mistakes until then.

Word Count: 3,320

<http://beren-writes.livejournal.com/485699.html> > My Fanfic Listings (LJ) | <http://beren-writes.dreamwidth.org/130047.html> > My Fanfic Listings (DreamW)

Methos walked into the bar and breathed in the familiar smell, smiling as he did so. Over his many lifetimes he had picked up few places that felt like home, but somehow Joe's had become that for him. So many times he ended up here and today was no different. When he wanted to talk he went to Joe's, when he wanted to drink he went to Joe's and when he wanted to hear good music he went to Joe's, it was only when he wanted to fight he went anywhere near the Highlander. One thing he had given up doing many centuries before was deluding himself about things and he knew that the feeling of home in this place had more to do with the man standing behind the bar than the building itself. It was a feeling that had crept up on him and one that still left him slightly bemused, but he did not argue with his own psyche.

"Adam," Joe greeted with a bright smile as he walked up to the bar itself, "I didn't know you were going to be in town."

Since he'd had his nose in a small private library for a couple of months he was not surprised by the reaction, but he did take great pleasure in the happiness he saw in Joe's face. That had been one of his first clues that this was more than a convenient friendship. He wasn't sure if he was reading too much into what he saw; he hoped not and he had plans to find out.

"Last minute decision," he said, smiling back, but feeling the warmth being stifled just a little by what he knew was coming next and the fact that he was lying, his visit had been anything but spur of the moment, "can we talk?"

Joe looked somewhat perturbed by that, but nodded anyway.

"Mike, can you look after things for me here?" Joe said calling over to the man who was as much a fixture of the bar as Joe.

"Sure, Joe," the assistant manager said and Methos followed Joe into the more private areas of the building.

Methos considered Mike a good friend as well, but the man didn't know the truth about him any more than most of the world did. What needed to be said now had to be done in private. He had spoken about his plans briefly to MacLeod, but talking to Joe was more important and it would decide on his final decisions. He had hopes, but he was cynical enough to have a plan B.

"Drink?" Joe offered as they wandered into the office.

"Beer, thanks," he replied, folding himself into the familiar chair that he had sat in many times over the years he had known Joe.

Time sometimes went by so fast and it always caught up with him, but he liked the familiar feel of this place. Joe opened the small fridge behind the desk and there was the clinking of glass as Joe pulled out two beers and efficiently removed the tops before handing one to Methos and sitting down. It was a pattern that had been repeated too many times to count and Methos silently wondered if they would ever do it again.

"So," Joe said, putting his beer on the desk without drinking it and looking straight at Methos, "what's up?"

They both knew this was a serious conversation, it was hanging in the air and Methos was glad he didn't have to dampen the mood.

"It's time, Joe," he said simply and watched the light dim in Joe's eyes.

It was very clear that Joe knew what he meant, maybe the other man had even been waiting for it.

"You're leaving," was the even statement that came back.

"Adam Pierson has to die," he replied, ignoring his beer in the same way Joe was. "People are beginning to look at me twice and I can't have them finding out. The Watchers has been so paranoid lately."

For a little while Joe didn't say anything, he just sat there and looked at him.

"When?" Joe asked, voice almost devoid of all emotion.

"A few days," Methos explained, since he did have it all planned out. "I've planted medical records that say I'm dying and I'm going to kill myself in a very public manner. My research is all very carefully tied up like I've prepared for death; no one will question it."

More silence, heavy and sad.

"There's no other way?" Joe finally asked.

Methos shook his head; he had taken to greying his hair at the edges, but people were beginning to question the lack of age in his face now. There was only so much he could do to allay suspicion and he knew by instinct when it was time to reinvent himself. He had been playing the good skin card too long and it wouldn't be long before people began to realise there were no wrinkles appearing on his face.

"No," he said, taking in Joe's reactions very carefully and realising that he was nervous, "but I have a question to ask you, a very important question."

Joe frowned slightly.

"You make me question my life, Joe," he said, needing to explain at least a little; "you make me want to do irrational things that I know could get me into serious trouble."

Joe's frown slowly cleared, but Methos was not finished.

"I've been transient and alone for more years than I care to count and I know Adam has to die, but I don't want him to," he continued. "At first I thought it was our intrepid Highlander that was having a bad effect on me, but it's not and I have finally accepted that; it's you. Hence the question I wish to ask."

"I can't go with you," Joe said, clearly having read the meaning of his words; "I'm too old to become someone else."

Methos smiled at that; he had known Joe would say something like that. Joe, for all his traipsing around the world after MacLeod, was a man of friends and family and he had no intention of trying to take him away from such things.

"That wasn't my question," he said, feeling the connection between them more clearly than ever. "I find myself considering crazy things, but there is one thing I need to know before I finally decide what to do. If we both knew it wasn't impossible, Joe, would you ask me to stay?"

On the surface it was a simple question and an easy one, but Methos let Joe see the emotions hovering below the surface. He was not just asking if Joe wanted him to stay and be his friend; he was asking if they could finally stop stepping around this thing between them, this attraction that refused to go away. For long moments Joe just sat there and Methos waited.

"Yes," Joe said eventually, voice cracking slightly as he spoke, "I would ask you to stay."

Methos felt his heart jump in his chest as the emotion of the moment actually got to him. He hadn't felt like this in a long time, not since Alexa, and it was not just his persona that felt reborn.

"Then," he said, "how do you feel about a crazy plan?"

Joe looked confused, clearly not knowing how to react to the pleasure that Methos knew was radiating off him in waves. He usually made it a rule to be far more difficult to read, it was habit, but he wasn't interested in the pretence anymore.

"You're not going to get me killed are you?" Joe asked in a suspicious tone and Methos actually laughed.

That was just so Joe and he had to admit that over the years he and Duncan had occasionally forgotten that Joe was mortal.

"No, Joe," he said and pulled a letter out of his pocket, "the only one who is dying soon is me."

Letting his heart become wrapped up with mortals always caused him pain, but Methos knew this was worth the risk.

"This is a letter from Adam to his estranged younger brother Simon," he said in way of explanation, "and as far as everyone out there is concerned I gave it to you today and asked you to post it next week because I'm going to be going on retreat for a little while. When I kill myself you're going to open it and find all the details of why I did it and then you're going to reseal it and send it on to Simon."

Joe was frowning again.

"You don't have a brother called Simon," Joe pointed out.

"Not yet," he said with a grin, "but all the paper work is in the right places for him to exist. My parents separated when I was very young, you see, and my father had a second family that I have never met. I have a brother Simon, fifteen years my junior. Finding out that I was dying made me want to track him down, so I left him all I have. Dad's genes were really strong and it's amazing how much he looks like me, just younger and blonder. He just finished his post doc and he's going to want to know about his older brother."

It was clear Joe had cottoned on because Joe was looking stunned.

"You're coming back here as your own younger brother?" Joe sounded astonished. "That is crazy."

That's exactly what Methos had thought when he had come up with the idea, but as he had worked on it he had realised that it was just far fetched enough for it to work. He was a good actor and he was willing to risk it for Joe.

"I did consider just letting myself be killed and coming back as an immortal," he said, since he had thought about it, "but I didn't really like the idea that someone might think I know too much and come swinging for my head."

Joe was looking at him as if he'd grown another head.

"You're serious," was Joe's eventually conclusion.

Methos leaned forward and lent on the desk so that they were eye to eye.

"I have never been more serious," he said, finally being completely honest with the one man who had crawled under his skin so totally that he had given up being sensible. "Joe, I don't want to lose you."

To say that Joe appeared shocked was probably an understatement.

"I've set up the identity and everything else and all I have to do is kill myself and then run," he continued. "Then in a few weeks I can come back as someone new and I can fall in love with you all over again."

There, he had said it; he was in love with Joe, had been for some time, only he had been too cowardly to admit it.

"You'd really do that," Joe asked quietly, "for me?"

Methos smiled at that.

"You know me better than that, Joseph," he said in his best teacher voice; "I'm doing this for me as well as for you. You make me feel young; I remember things about myself I thought were gone forever when I'm with you."

Very little made him wax lyrical, but Joe did. He was turning into a sappy romantic and, what was more, he didn't care.

"When I'm here I like myself," he continued; "you make me more than the cynical bastard I've been for centuries. The fact alone that you accept me for who I am makes you worth more than a thousand men I have known. I don't know when I went from wanting you as a friend to wanting more, and I don't care if all you do is let me sit at the end of the bar and listen to you play, but I want to be near you."

It seemed that when he began confessing he couldn't stop and his speech rather surprised him. For the looks of it, it left Joe shell shocked.

After a little while Joe stood up and carefully manoeuvred himself around the desk and Methos sat back and just waited. Nothing had made him this nervous or excited in years.

"I'm not a young man anymore, Methos," Joe said, looking down at him, "do you really want to be saddled with an old cripple."

Methos stood up then so that they were eye to eye again.

"You're less crippled than most of us with all four limbs," he said and for once he meant every single word. "I have lived a very long time, Joe, and I have seen all kinds of people; I've been all kinds of people, and I don't see much of the outside of humanity anymore. When I look at you I see a man who will never be old because he has a heart that is forever young and I see strength that can overcome anything. I fell in love with what was inside and then my libido caught up that time I caught you coming out of the bathroom."

He grinned at that; he remembered the moment very well. He had been staying on Joe's couch and he had had a very nice eyeful. Joe had a very well defined upper body thanks to compensating for his disability and Methos had liked what he had seen very much indeed.

"You've got a lot more to offer than the fragile shell you inhabit," he added, "but, Joe, don't sell yourself short either."

Joe didn't look as if he believed him so he did something impulsive; he reached out, took Joe's face in his hands and kissed him. He poured everything he had been bottling up into that kiss and when Joe responded he wanted it to go on for ever, but he was a little overenthusiastic and they both almost ended up in a heap on the floor. Joe grabbed the desk, Methos broke the kiss, and they just about managed to end up still standing, at which point Methos burst out laughing.

"Next time," he said, enjoying very much the flushed cheeks on Joe and the happy warm feeling residing in his chest, "we do that sitting down."

The slightly stunned but happy expression on Joe's face looked good on him and he made a mental note to make sure it came back as often as possible.

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Joe still couldn't quite believe that Adam Pierson was dead. He had been in on all of the plans, but it felt like one of his friends was really gone and, in a way, he was. Methos was coming back, of that he was sure, but the part of Methos that was Adam was gone forever. What the old man had decided to do was incredibly dangerous and no one could ever find out the truth, but Joe had to admit he was counting down the days. Methos was supposed to be returning at the weekend; he had the phone message to say that Simon was coming to collect Adam's things and he was looking forward to it more than he cared to admit. The funeral had been hard, all the questions from the police and the Watchers had been harder and the waiting was killing him.

He was polishing glasses when he heard the door go and when he looked up, for a moment, his brain did not realise what he was seeing. He almost dropped the glass in his hand: he had never imagined. The man he had known as Adam Pierson had started in his mid thirties and seemingly matured from there, but the man standing in front of him didn't look a day over twenty five, if that. Methos had sandy brown hair with highlights, and it was longer than Joe remembered ever seeing it before. There were a pair of black rimmed spectacles on Methos' nose and the clothes Methos was wearing were much hipper than Adam would have worn. Joe was honestly stunned.

When he had heard Methos tell him that he could pull off the fifteen years younger thing he had doubted it, but Methos looked even younger than that. For a while Joe's brain stalled.

"Hi," Methos said with an open, friendly smile, "you must be Joe, I'm Simon."

"Hello," Joe said and did his best to gather his thoughts together, "sorry, you look so much like Adam."

Methos walked up to the bar and stuck his hand out.

"Dad always said his children were cursed with his genes," Methos said and for a moment Joe thought he really was talking to a completely new person. "Sorry I'm early; they messed around with my flights and it was today or the end of next week."

"No problem," Joe replied, beginning to recover himself, "please come through to the back; we can talk there."

He looked over at Mike and gave a surprised shrug and Mike sent an eyebrow raise back. Given the way Mike reacted Joe was almost sure Methos had the man fooled. He mentally awarded Methos points for great acting and led Simon into his office. Only when the door closed and they were alone did he watch the façade fall away from his companion and then Methos grinned at him.

"What do you think," Methos asked, putting his arms out and all but doing a twirl.

"I think you're trying to kill me," was Joe's response.

Methos laughed at that and ran his fingers through his new hair, but there was something just a little off about the Immortal; he almost seemed nervous. It was only after a moment of staring that Joe realised what it was; Methos appeared to be looking for approval.

"You do realise that if we pull this off everyone is going to think I am a dirty old man with a boy toy, don't you," he said, leaning on the desk and enjoying the view; "a very pretty boy toy."

The smile on Methos' face this time went all the way to his eyes.

"Just so you know, they really did mess around with my flights and I have to pretend to be poor," Methos told him and stepped closer. "Was everyone crying at my funeral?"

Joe tried to smile at the joke, but he couldn't quite manage it; he had been one of the ones mourning. He looked down at the floor and tried to push aside the darker thoughts.

"Joe, look at me," Methos said, reaching out and lifting his chin for him, something that no one had tried for several decades; "I'm sorry we have to play these games, but it's just me; all that's changed is my hair and my name."

That was when he really looked; he ignored everything that was different and looked at what was the same. Methos looked younger, ridiculously younger, until Joe stared into Methos' eyes and then the strange unsettled feeling began to lift.

"I missed you," he said, feeling just a little sappy and Methos leaned into him.

"I missed you too," Methos replied and ever so gently kissed him.

They were lifetimes apart, mortal and oldest living Immortal; past his prime and forever in the middle of his; light and dark and yet Joe felt himself connect with the man who was still mostly a mystery to him. He knew he would never know everything about Methos, but he would take what he could get. They were so different and yet in the kiss they were the same: alone and needy and Joe did not know how he was going to stick to the long and drawn out plan they had come up with so they could ease into a relationship. Maybe this would kill him, but it seemed like a wonderful way to go.

The End