

Title: Held In Trust

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Rating: Teen

Characters: Duke, Audrey

Spoilers: 3.03 *The Farmer*

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Author notes: Written after seeing episode 3.03 but before watching the rest of Season 3. For Tanaqui, who I also have to thank for betaing.

Summary: After Audrey sets Duke up to kill Harry Nix and put an end to his Trouble, Duke's pretty upset. But not for the reasons Audrey thinks.

Held In Trust

Asking Duke to kill Harry Nix had been the right decision; Audrey knew it in her heart of hearts.

Duke must know it, too, right? Even if he still seemed pretty angry with her. He wouldn't have come back while she was calling the ambulance otherwise. And she could understand why he was so distressed: he'd fought his fate, as he called it, long enough. But killing one man—who'd been dying anyway—had ended that family's Trouble forever. Which meant Duke had saved dozens of people. Why couldn't he see *that*?

Sighing and rubbing at burning eyes with her fingertips, she slid from the barstool. She had to get some sleep. Forty-six days left—forty-five now. Not nearly enough time to solve all the mysteries. But it'd be insane to try and stay awake for the next six weeks in an effort to save as many people as she could before the Hunter came. She'd have to settle for today's success, bitter as it was, and hope for more tomorrow.

When she stepped outside, the air was chilly on her skin. The temperature had to be close to freezing and her breath misted in front of her face. Above, the sky was clear, stars twinkling coolly. She drew in a lungful of the clean air. It smelled of the sea: wet and salty.

Rounding the corner and making for the staircase up to the second floor and her apartment, she caught movement out on the deck that hung out over the ocean. Duke was leaning on the rail, staring across the water. Audrey hesitated, one foot on the bottom step. Should she leave it for another day and go up, go to bed? Or make another attempt to fix things between them?

She chuckled ruefully at the irony: here she was, doing her damndest to push Nathan away, while managing the same with Duke without even trying. So why did it hurt so much?

Before she could second-guess herself, she walked onto the deck, approaching Duke slowly. The wooden boards creaked under her weight. He didn't turn, though he must know she was there.

"Duke?" She prayed he wouldn't carry on pretending she wasn't there.

"You should've trusted me." The words were soft enough she could barely hear them over the whisper of the ocean. Duke turned his head, dark eyes reflecting the starlight. "Why didn't you?"

"I—." Like a flash of lightning, understanding struck Audrey. She gasped in a breath. "I'm sorry." It sounded stupid, so insufficient for what she'd done.

Duke huffed bitterly. "Course you are." He peered out over the water once more. "It's easy for you. You save the ones who can be saved. Me?" Another harsh laugh. "I get to look 'em in the eye and murder 'em when they can't."

"Duke..." Her throat constricted painfully, making it hard to breathe. She coughed in an attempt to clear it. "It's not easy for me, either. I'm running out of time and I... I panicked, I guess. But you're right, I should've trusted you. Should've told you the truth right from the start and believed you'd do the right thing. Like you did in the end." She reached out, touching his hand where it grasped the wooden rail. Tension thrummed through him. "It was the right thing, you know that, right? All those people—."

"I know it was. Doesn't make me feel any better."

She had to smile at that. "That's what makes you a good person, a good man."

The corner of Duke's mouth lifted in a self-deprecating smile. "Don't know about that."

Audrey inched closer, resting her hand on his back. Some of the tension had left him and he felt more relaxed under her palm. They stood side by side, watching the ocean ripple and sparkle in the starlight. High above, a light streaked across the sky briefly before winking out. A falling star—a meteor. Audrey shivered involuntarily. Forty-five days....

"We should go inside. It's getting cold." Duke must've caught her shiver and misunderstood the reason for it.

Or perhaps he hadn't, she realized, noticing the way he was watching her intently with hooded eyes. She nodded. Sometimes it paid to speak, to tell the truth straight up. Sometimes things were better left unsaid. "Duke?"

"Hm?"

"Are we good?"

"Yeah." He slung an arm around her shoulders, guiding her toward the stairs. "We're good."

She looked up at him. "Thank you."

She slept better that night than she had in a long while.

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