

Title: A Second Chance For A First Impression

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Rating: General

Characters: Stanley, Mimi

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Author notes: For Neotoma, who prompted "Jericho—Running out of shampoo". Set between episodes 1.06 9.02 and 1.07 *Long Live The Mayor*. Slotted into <http://jericho.scribblesinink.com/awesomejakeverse/> Awesome!Jakeverse, but it can be read independently. Thanks to Tanaqui for the beta.

Summary: Stanley's none too happy about his new house guest. But then he learns there may be more to Mimi than the snobbish, big-city girl who meets the eye.

A Second Chance For A First Impression By Scribblesinink

Stanley stomped up the porch, glad to get out of the sun and into the shade. He wiped an arm across his face; it was another unseasonably hot day. He hoped the heat didn't have anything to do with radiation, from Denver or any of those other places they heard about. Everyone, from Mayor Green to Jake to that guy Robert Hawkins said it didn't, but...

His stomach growled; he'd been working in the fields and lost track of the time. He'd have to put together his own lunch, though; Bonnie was volunteering up at the med center in town, so he was by himself—well, except for his unwanted house guest, he amended, pausing on the threshold as he caught sight of her. He'd managed to forget about her for a while, keeping busy to make the farm winter-ready.

But there she was, puttering around in his kitchen like she owned the place. The witch from the IRS, come down to threaten to take away the farm that had been in his family for generations. Yet, when she'd invited herself in after the hotel in town closed, he hadn't the heart to turn her away. Not because of her argument that she'd deduct her board from his debt—that was as fake as the upbeat front she presented to everyone. He saw right through both. No: he let her stay because, in a way, he felt more pity for her than he felt resentment at her presence. Couldn't be easy to be stuck in a place you hated, with no way out and no clue what had happened to your friends or family or home. Plus, he mentally added, she *had* tried to help save the corn, in her own meddling way. That had to count for something.

But—his brow furrowed as he took another good look—what on earth was the woman up to? She'd stripped down to a sleeveless shirt, her hair loose. Her bare shoulders were

covered with freckles, just like her nose. The kitchen looked like a battlefield: cupboards standing open, their contents strewn about on the counter. She hadn't seen him yet, as she rummaged through a drawer, muttering something to herself Stanley didn't quite catch.

"What'cha lookin' for?"

She jumped half a foot in the air, letting out a startled "Oh!" before whirling in his direction. "Oh," she said again, this time more snobbishly. "Can't you knock?"

Stanley's brows flew up to meet his hairline. "In my own house?"

"Uncle Sam's house," she reminded him, smiling faintly as she threw his own words back at him.

"Yeah, whatever." Dismissing the reference to his tax debt, Stanley stepped fully across the threshold and shut the door behind him. "What are you doing?" He flapped a hand to denote the mess.

"Washing my hair." She pointed toward the kitchen table.

Stanley glanced to where she indicated. A bucket was set out, with a folded towel next to it. Faint steam rose from the bucket. *So she can manage to heat up water without help.* "You had to turn the kitchen upside down for it?" Walking over, he started collecting spice jars and bottles of syrup and put them back at random in the open cupboards.

"Your kitchen is the most disorganized sty I've ever seen." She sighed. "I was looking for baking soda."

"Huh?" Stanley paused in what he was doing, the open box of cornflakes he'd just snapped up forgotten in his hands. He stared at her, too surprised to address the insult she'd just flung at him. Had the stress of the last few weeks finally caught up with her?

She gestured impatiently. "Baking soda and water make for effective shampoo."

Stanley started to laugh as he turned back to put the box on the top shelf of the nearest cupboard. Of all the strange things he'd heard her say....

"I read that somewhere." She sounded defensive.

He twisted around again, leaning against the counter and folding his arms, looking at her curiously. "And why would you wanna make your own shampoo?"

"Cause I ran out, alright?" she snapped. "Wasn't like I planned to stay in this town for more than a day or two."

Stanley shook his head, still amused and still boggled. "So get a new bottle at Gracie's. Should be some left."

She huffed and flopped down on the nearest kitchen chair. "I don't think I'm one of Gracie's favorite people at the moment."

He nodded; she might have a point there. After all, her interference with the pesticides had nearly started off a war with Gracie, never mind landing his butt in jail.

"Besides," she went on in a quieter voice, "I've got nothing to trade for it."

Stanley's amusement evaporated a little at the reminder she possessed nothing beyond the clothes on her back and whatever was in the small suitcase he'd carried up to the guest bedroom a few days before. "There's detergent." He pushed the bottle of Dawn along the counter in her direction. It was three-quarters full; no chance of running out any time soon.

"I can't wash my hair with dish soap!" Her eyes were as wide and horrified as if he'd suggested she strip naked and perform a rain dance in the yard. "It'd leave my hair dry as straw."

Stanley shrugged. He pulled the bottle back toward him and put it away under the sink. "Could've used you to chase off the birds then," he muttered under his breath to himself, remembering how flocks of birds had gone after the winter wheat he'd sown shortly before the bombs.

"No," Mimi continued, unaware of Stanley's private joke, "baking soda and water is best. And some vinegar or lemon juice if you have it." She looked up at him, eyebrows arched in expectation.

He rolled his eyes a little. There she went again, ordering him around as if he was her personal servant. If she was gonna stay, he really needed to teach her different. "Try the pantry," he suggested, grabbing the loaf of bread Bonnie had baked that morning to cut himself a few slices. He ignored Mimi's soft huff and, after a minute, he heard her feet scuff across the floorboards. He grinned in satisfaction.

But somehow, to his surprise, he found himself setting his sandwich aside a short while later to help her rinse the soda-and-water paste from her hair. Even more startling, he didn't mind half as much as he'd expected. Afterward, he watched through the kitchen window as she combed out the tangled strands: outside, where the sunlight made it shine and sparkle. It looked no worse for the odd shampoo.

He chuckled to himself, pulling the plate with his half-eaten meal toward him. Baking soda and water: who'd have thunk she'd come up with something like that? Perhaps, he decided, taking another bite from his sandwich, the witch from DC wasn't as

completely inept as he'd originally thought.

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