

Holiday

By Dexdor

A warm light began to paint the evening sky. Brushing the east horizon with a mellow orange that was slowly covering the massive fields of pillows with those same rays. Eventually wrapping around the white furball slumbering in the middle. Getting him presently awake, and stretch out a bit. Almost feeling a cold spot against his back, well... Colder. Though the titanic body of scales used to be covered in that winter's bite, he was still rather warm and comfortable. Much more than he looked.

All it nearly took was his absents for the white bear to miss him. However, the light was doing its best to warm him awake, and ease his brown eyes opened to greet that very sky with a smile. Best alarm clock ever made, and without the painful glowing orb of concentrated light to blind him.

He remembered setting that alarm now, slowly coming back to his reality and away from his pleasant dreams. Most pleasant, indeed, judging from the red log that decided to greet his morning as well. Smiling at that very weapon as wonderful memories reflected through his eyes. If his larger husband was here, odds are those brass paws would be pawing at that very shaft.

But at the moment, he was not. Granted, the bear had a few good ideas where to start looking for that dragon. Let alone the other, wondering about their progress for today's plans. Though, the bear had his very own. He just ended up spending most of last night working on them. As well as coordinating others, ones that actually somewhat worried him.

Getting up and thanking the morning sky in the master bedroom for its service, the six legged bear started walking. Soon finding a set of large double doors appear through the land of pillows. Opening them carefully and listing in the hall they lead to. Trying to be quiet and sneak to the front door without being too noticed.

His eyes caught another door with some personal stickers on it. Everytime he seen them, it made him smile. Though still a bit worried about hiding the craftsmanship of such a wonderful object, the two begged for it to be personalized. Of course some of the stickers were offset or unaligned for symmetry, it made them very happy. And in return, made their father's happy

as well.

Still, now was no time for distractions. However, that didn't made the white one somewhat worry about how their secret mission went. He mentally questioned if they have returned yet, but odds are they would've brought the package directly to the Counterweight. Regardless, with the Front doors nearly clear, the bear headed outside. Greeting a new guest that had just arrived; two human women. "Tia, Elexus, it's been too long. How are you?"

"We're doing fine, bear." The blonde woman smiled.

"How are you?"

"Quite pleasant, thank you. Things have been going well, to the point where I'm expecting something to go wrong." He chuckled, making the females do the same.

"Has Haytre arrived yet?" The brown haired one asked.

"I'm not sure. I'm afraid that I worked so much last night that I overslept a little. You'll have to explore the house a bit to find him."

"No place off limits, I hope." Tia teased.

"Not even our bedroom, if you two are willing to pay us a visit later." He replied, eyebrows bouncing as the women giggled.

"We'll see, Bartan. But for now, I'm parched."

"Feel free to help yourself to anything. We've got several cooks already working in our kitchen, if you like to either join in or help."

"Several won't be enough." Another human female approached, one in a Japanese Kimono and Hakamas. Getting a confused look from the other women, but the bear chuckled. Seeing something squirm through her top a bit before a Chinese red dragon's head popped out.

"Why would you say that?" The red one asked, getting the younger woman to grunt a bit in annoyance. "I ate before we left."

"Hence why we no longer have a kitchen left." She half pulled him out lightly, getting the message and climbing around her neck. Rubbing his ridiculously spikey mane against her short black hair. "So, sorry in advance when he eats the entire party out." Another chuckle from Bartan.

"Don't worry. I was planning on Endzeit's appetite to sneak in, Sarious. There's no need to starve him. I'm sure we'll have enough food to go around-"

"Hear that? All we can eat-" Sarious' hand covered the dragon's head

as he yelped.

"That was not a challenge for you to accept!" She grumbled, even getting the others to laugh at that. "Again, sorry in advance."

"Nonsense. Enjoy yourselves. All of you." The large beast smiled as they walked passed. "And be sure to get warmed up before you catch a cold." They nodded as he took a deep breath. Loving that crisp air that just came to mind. Having such a large coat of fur, he hardly notices the cold anymore. Only a few instances when it's felt surfaced in thought, as he lightly pawed at the white snow that covered his front lawn. A bit odd how it only outlines that, yet all the neighborhood houses were still in green grass.

It was just a little special effect he wanted to bring, yet not let anyone else suffer from it. There was just something about the frozen water, lightly gliding through the air that brought zen to his mind. Once again just smiling at the thought of such a simple thing that reminded him of someone special, even if that was just a hurt side of him.

Speak of the frozen devil with a warm heart, those heavy pawsteps came behind him. Making the bear's smile brighter as those brass arms hugged the fluffball tightly and nuzzled against it. Purring loudly while getting a few licks on his red beard. "Good morning."

"Morning to you too." The bear purred back, getting the two to take a very deep breath and feel the embrace grow tighter. Giving the white one to release a faint moan of pleasure. "Be it ten seconds or ten years inbetween, they remain the same." A few pets of those brass arms as they shared a kiss. "I always loved that about you."

"There's many things I love about you as well." Beo began rocking him slightly, giving a faint wave at a few more arrivals to the party. "Like how you never shed so I can do this." He drove his metallic muzzle into a thick patch of fur and breathed deeply, getting the bear to chuckle a bit. "How you always seem to be resilient and defiant against my hugs."

"Dia's just not quite used to them, huh?"

"I keep hearing bones cracking." The large dragon snorted, getting Bartan to chuckle a bit. "Not breaking, but it does worry me."

"You just need to learn some restraint. Much like you're hugging the little ones."

"Those two can endure my hugs better than Dia'vidd can." The two laughed, feeling the brass one take another snoorf of white fur and start licking it. "Speaking of which, I haven't seen them all morning." A faint

whimper from the bear. "Another thing I love about you; I can always tell when you're hiding something."

Another chuckle from him. "I'm not a perfect Counterweight."

"A defect that I enjoy more than not." Another kiss as a white fox walked up to them. "Morning mistress."

"Morning you two. I finally get to meet the new guy in the family today, I hope."

"Dia? He's either around or should be back very soon."

"Actually, he's helping out in the kitchen. We have alot of meals to prep for everyone." The dragon corrected. "Feel free to help out, it'll be a better ice breaker than riding him at the moment."

"Are things that bad in there?" Bartan asked, a bit concerned.

"Yes and no. We're busy, but not stressed. It's still a friendly space."

"I'll take your word for it." The fox smiled. "But that begs the question: why are you out here?"

"Well... Remember the first year we had one of these for the story characters?" They nodded. "And you remember that... Gnoll who got the concussion?"

"You didn't." She grumbled, making his brass head sink a little bit into the colossal cottonball. "Seriously? Again?"

"I'm beginning to think my tail A: has a mind of its own, and B: holds some sort of grudge against him." The bear just chuckled loudly, shaking his head a bit.

"I'll check up on Kassel later to be sure, don't worry yourselves over it." He gave the dragon a lick, and motioned for the fox to come in for a hug. "Regardless, go introduce yourself, Arson. Dia's been excited to meet another female."

"Mostly for the body pillows." The three chuckled.

"That's fine. And there better be enough onion rings for the entire party." She said, getting a feel for the bear's lower belly, then a tight grip on his furballs. Making him yelp and whimper a bit. "Because if there isn't, I'm going to use these things as a punching bag." A loud swallow from the white one, as those fiery red eyes looked into Beo's green ones. "All three of your bags, that is." She tapped them a little hard before walking inside, leaving the

two males stunned for a few moments.

"...Can you check on the onion rings-?"

"I will check on the onion rings." They hesitantly chuckled a bit before embracing one more time. Sharing a kiss and Beo headed inside, lifting his tail to tease the white one with those brass balls once again and loving the faint whimper he still gives off.

When they were finally out of eyesight, and freeing those brown eyes from its grasp, the bear shook his head a bit. Taking another breath of the crisp air before hearing a faint whistle to the side of the mansion. Looking back and forth once again to ensure no one else would be seeing him, Bartan trotted over to the side of the house quietly.

Turning the corner and going down a ways, he met the two little troublemakers sitting in a line. "How did it go?"

"Mission complete!" The two chirped, giving faint salutes and dragging out a burlap sack with a body inside.

"He has no idea what hit him!"

"I have every idea what hit me." The sack grumbled, getting four pairs of ears to perk at it for a few moments. "...You can let me out any day now." A nod from the larger one, and the dragon swiped the knot with his claws. Cutting it, allowing freedom for the humanoid polar bear. Giving all three of them a glare with his brown eyes.

"Glad you could make it, Bartan 1!" The Counterweight said rather happily. "Your acceptance to our invitation this year has been greatly appreciated!"

"What invitation!?" He growled, brushing off the dead leaves from his navy shirt.

"You didn't get one? I was sure I sent it in the mail."

~~~~~ Three Weeks Earlier

The Polar bear walked through his front door, coming back from a walk and to receive the mail. Shuffling through a few store flyers, a specific letter stood out. Written and designed with childish handwriting and stamped with pawprints, he barely read the text outside of the word 'Celebration'. "Pass." He grumbled, throwing the letter in the pellet stove.

~~~~~

"Nope. Never got it." The smaller bear muttered, still brushing his clothing. "And why are you inviting me into these parties to begin with? You know I don't like them-"

"I admit that the first one you went to might've been too harsh on you, whereas it was in your own home." The six legged one explained, holding the two little ones for a warm hug and thanking them for their assistance. "However, this year: I'm taking care of everything. You're just as much as a guest as everyone else here, so don't worry about a thing. Nothing is expected of you, and you may do anything you like-"

"Like Leave-?"

"Except that." The smaller one tossed his snout. "And if you try to, in any way, these two are going to sack you. Then they're going to put you in another sack." The larger one teased, getting a solid nod from the two little troublemakers. A moment of study between the two adults, and the hexaped nodded. "Yes, I know. For someone who doesn't care for ballplay, we tend to use that phrase quite often."

"It's a bit odd really." He grumbled, then sighed. "Fine. What do you want me to do?"

"You say that like it's a job." The Counterweight chuckled, leading the way to the front door. "Just mingle with the others a bit. Talk to them, tell them what's been on your mind."

"So, the usual Winter Meta Story?" A solid nod from the large one and several quick ones from the two twins. "And what if some of these people want to sack me?"

"Then these two will protect you, inbetween snack breaks that is." A slight toss of the smaller bear's muzzle as they entered the massive doorway. Watching as the walls almost folded out into a massive room that couldn't possibly fit within the home displayed outside. People were lounging on the many couches and love seats, half dining on the snacks set all over the place, and even getting the two little ones to scamper off the Counterweight and into a plate of cookies. Getting a few chuckles at the young energy.

Though it was a bit awkward to be in such a public area, the two were not being watched. Maybe the six legged one over the rather average looking bear, but it didn't make him feel very comfortable still. Trying to make out the many conversations coming from all directions nearly made him feel almost boxed in, wanting to just turn around and go out through the doors. Even turning about to do so, but those fluffy tails barricaded the way. "Relax, you're safe here-"

A loud growl came from the kitchen as well as some words they couldn't quite make out. As some heavy pawsteps started making their way to the dining room, a black dragon half slid out on the floor. Instantly eyeing the two bears and roaring at them. "**YOU** DID THIS!?" Those purple eyes glared harshly at both of them with undiluted hate.

The two bears looked at each other while a lot of the house went silent, save for the other heavy pawsteps coming from the kitchen. When the doors flew opened again, Haytre charged at the two Bartans, roaring loudly in a rage. Only getting a few steps before a wave of concussional force threw him to the wall a bit. Halting his advance, but not completely stopping him.

Staggering back on his feet, the black dragon growled. Barely seeing two blurs of white and brass scamper under his right wing, then feel his inner hind legs get pushed outward. Forcing him to squat for a moment, before getting two kicks in the stones by Rev and Lexar. Grunting and hissing loudly, but shaking it off a bit like it was an incontinence.

After attempting to get back up, two large brass paws grabbed his black tail, sliding him back into the dining room and colliding with the already set table. Luckily without any prepared meals on it yet. Growling loudly, Beo stood between him and the two bears, as the two dragons shared provoking hisses at each other. Haytre still prowling from side to side, trying to find an opening in the metallic wall and sharing glares with those brown eyes on the other side. "You Did This To **Torment** Me, Didn't You!?" He roared loudly, getting the larger dragon to roar back.

"Father, stop this!" An orange scaled dragon came out of the kitchen behind him, trying to stand between the two males and pull back his father.

"Stay out of this, Dia! He's just trying to force me into his freakshow-!"

"Watch your tongue!" Beo'Karah roared at him, getting another one back that wasn't quite as loud.

"Beo, Please..." Dia'vidd looked at him, placing a paw on his metallic chestplates, and finally getting those green eyes to focus on something else. Closing them for a moment and taking a breath, then a nod. Taking a step back, but still guarding the two bears. "Bartan didn't ask me, Haytre-" A growl from the black one said that he didn't believe him. "He didn't, father."

"I did." The brass one said sternly, finally getting the main focus of those purple eyes. "And before you make assumptions, the furball didn't even know about it-"

"Why? Because he said so, and you believe every word that drools out of that white snout-?" A loud hiss from Beo got Dia to stand between the two

once again, quickly regaining his composure and exhaling a wall of heat, the brass one let the insult slide once again.

"Why do you insist that Bartan had anything to do with this?"

"Because that's the only thing he can believe, David." The smaller bear said, finally getting the attention of the others. "You want to know why you're immortal, Haytre?"

"Hey, wait a minute-" The Counterweight started, only getting a raised white paw from the smaller one.

"...This has gone on long enough. I know you're just trying to protect him by giving Haytre someone to blame, but Dia'vidd's addition changes things." A faint growl from the black one when his son was mentioned, but nothing past that. Meeting those smaller pair of brown eyes with his purple glare, and focusing on them for a few moments. "You want to know who did this to you? It was Shea'dinn." His black neck curled. "Your brother, he was training to be a Reaper for the Force of Death. And you were supposed to be his first escort, but he couldn't do it."

"You're lying-"

"Believe whatever the hell you want, but ask Shea yourself! He's probably around here somewhere. He altered your soul so that you couldn't be taken from them-so you couldn't even be Found by them with normal means! But in return, he... His soul *Melded* with yours. He's been with you ever since, even now." A few moments of silence, and the black one started to calm down. "Bartan just carried the blame so that Shea wouldn't. He would rather you hate him with everything you have, than to go against your own brother."

"Yet you continuously praise his actions-"

"He's done alot for you, wyrmling!" Beo growled.

"Like Rape Me!?"

"Like curing you of an addiction you once had!" Dia started in. "Rehatching a faith that you once lost...!" The smaller dragon's scales faded to a grey. "It lead you to me, didn't it?"

"Which lead you to-..." The black one caught himself before Beo growled. Seeing the much larger dragon take a step closer and place a paw on David's shoulder, turning his scales pink. A display Haytre still didn't like.

"Beo was there for me when I needed him the most. He taught me how not to be a monster, did you not read my story? Destruction Preventer?" A

moment of just staring told the son otherwise. "He asked me to join them, and I accepted that offer. So if you want to blame anyone for this... Blame *me*." Dia said sadly, his scales changing into a blue.

A long minute of silence as the white fox came out of the kitchen, getting those purple eyes to drift to her red ones for a few moments. "And what about you?"

"Didn't even know they were a thing until about a month ago. Hence why I was trying to introduce myself before you had a tantrum." A faint growl left the black one's throat. "Like it or not, we're part of your family, and you're part of ours. Every sixty seconds spent of you denying it is a minute of happiness that you'll never get back. No matter how long you'll be alive. Now hug them, or I'll be the one to sack you." A grumble from him as the female crossed her arms. "Do it."

An uncomfortable grunt as Haytre looked over his son and the much larger dragon, then back at the fox as she gave him a gesture to carry on (or else). A breath was taken before he took a slow step forward, wrapping a wing around the pink dragon and hugging him. Now realizing they were about the same size now, then a bit of a yelp when Beo's arms pushed them closer. All while getting a large hug from the metal dragon. "Just..." Haytre started, grumbling in embarrassment while still in the large embrace. "No stories about your... Sessions."

A faint whimper from Dia has his scales faded to a purple. "O-oh... Then don't read Counting Stars." The black one tossed his muzzle, then glared back at the fox.

"Satisfied?"

"Hug the bear too." His ears went back. "Or we'll all sack you."

"You realize he won't let go of me." Haytre snorted.

"Beo has his ways of stopping that, don't worry." David and the larger one chuckled, letting go of the black dragon and watching him take a step back. Letting the white beast approach the black one and almost get an angry grumble from his scaled muzzle. Looking at Arson once again.

"Do it!"

"Why am I taking orders from you?"

"Because she's the boss." The hexeped teased, getting Haytre to toss his snout. Grumbling a little bit before letting the white beast hug him. Feeling those four fuzzy paws stroke him a little and almost purr at the black

one's figure.

"Keep it above the waist." Haytre grumbled, trying to struggle free a bit. Realizing those paws were strapped to him, he sighed in irritation. "A little help?" The brass dragon came behind Bartan and pried his large paws between them, squeezing the furball until it yelped a bit, then gave him a deep kiss. Hearing the bear whimper in bliss and making those white straps melt, freeing the black dragon.

After the kiss was finished, the Counterweight fought to catch his breath. "See? Simple as that." Beo smirked at the black one, then noticed how the bear attached himself to the larger one instead. Getting him to grumble a bit and sigh.

"Works perfectly. Except for the fact that 1: he's still not letting go. And 2: If I kissed him like that, he wouldn't stop. Ever." Haytre snorted.

"He does tend to cling to those he likes." The brass one chuckled, giving the fluffball a few pats on the back. "Come on, you. I've got a dinner to prep." Bartan whimpered almost desperately, still licking at his neck and jawline. "Fine, what if I give you a stroking? Will that do until the shuffle?"

The back dragon double taked. "Shuffle?"

"He's talking about the Sex Shuffle." Arson said, getting an almost frightened look from those purple eyes. "Basically, they've written a bunch of names and threw them into a hat. They'll pull out two, and they get locked into a room until they're finished." A whimper from Haytre as Dia patted him on the shoulder.

"It won't be that bad."

"Easy for you to say." The black one snorted at his son. "Odds are, he'll just pair himself up with me."

"Only because you're playing hard to get." Beo chuckled, getting a faint growl. "Besides, he's not picking the names." The two related dragons double taked.

"What?"

"I think Lillith is. She'll announce the results after supper."

"Says you. Odds are he'll manipulate the entire thing to-" A whimper from him as the fox took a firm grip on his obsidian pouch. Sighing with a bit of a grumble, he tossed his snout. "Fine. We'll see what the results are, and then I'll gloat about being right. Happy?"

"A little." She said with a rather disturbing straight face.

"Can you let go of me?"

"I'm still deciding whether or not to punish you for your attitude problem with my husband." The statement made his ears slowly fall, looking into those red eyes and almost tasting the fear they brought him. "I better not." A slight sigh of relief as she let go and entered the kitchen. "Not yet, anyway."

"That totally makes me feel better." He grumbled. Getting a small hug from Dia'vidd again.

"You're digging your own grave, father. You need to stop holding grudges." He didn't respond much to that, but lead the way back in. Meanwhile, the brass one was still stuck with a fluffball, constantly licking at him and whimpering during the silences.

"Alright, let's get you back to normal. I'm afraid I am the cause of all this, regardless." Beo turned around and laid the Counterweight on his back. Giving him a few licks and kisses of affection before double taking at the clearly uncomfortable smaller bear. "Oh, right, you actually made it this year."

"Y-yeah..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "I totally arrived here. On my own." The slightly sarcastic statement made those frilled ears perk. "...And not in a burlap sack."

"Sack...?" His head tilted a bit, getting a faint whimper of neglect, as well as picking up a few giggles from the hatchlings as they scampered nearby. "Where have you two been all morning?" He asked them, getting rather excited looks at first, then fell like they were in trouble. Getting the brass father to look back and forth between them and connect the dots. A grumbling sigh soon turned into a faint growl of anger as that red tongue went after one of his ears. "Look you-"

"I did it." The larger bear said, still in deep desperate breaths. "I asked them to last night..." A whimper from him, as he started mauling the dragon. "Now punish me." He purred.

"I didn't know he was into that." The smaller Bartan said. "...I didn't know I was into that."

"Only a little." Beo chuckled, licking at the furball a bit, then biting his neck. Getting a few whimpers of pleasure, as well as a few squirms. Releasing the grip soon enough and dismissing the little ones for now. He started to climb down and paw the red weapon gently. "I'm glad you made it though." He said to the smaller bear who was somewhat uncomfortable. "We missed

you last year."

"Yeah, well. I was a little busy being kidnapped then too, if you don't remember."

"I do, but that was before the party. Maybe ten or twenty days, in fact." A shy look away as the Counterweight whimpered in bliss. That is, until the dragon Muted him for the time being, still stroking the red shaft as the bear squirmed in the pin. "Does this make you uncomfortable?"

"N-no. It's not that." A puzzled look from Beo as the smaller one sat up against a nearby wall.

"...It's the party, isn't it?" A look away from those green eyes. "You're more embarrassed at the fact that you're attending a social gathering rather than me pawing off your future self right in front of you?" He teased, also gripping the ridges a bit. Almost hearing the loud whimper as he struggled against it.

"I should be more surprised at how often you read me right." He half grumbled.

"That's because I know you."

"You know *him*." The bear corrected the brass one. Not trying to be grouchy but getting the puzzled look regardless.

"You still don't believe you'll turn out to be the same person, do you?"

"How can I? I mean, look at this place. Look at all this." He gestured the surrounding areas. "How is anyone able to do this?"

"You mean, build a house?"

"A house is..." A breath from the younger one. "A house is a physical shelter. A structure made of many forms of matter, all combining into many different things. What this is... What you guys made, what he made...? It's a Home." That made the brass muzzle smile. "How did that happen though? How did it become that?"

"What do you mean?"

"What changed between being a structure to being... This?" Another gesture. "That never made any sense to me, how someone can suddenly have this: people that they can trust, friends, a family. I mean, mine wasn't the worst. Far from it really, but I never felt part of it." A silent breath. "I've felt disconnected from it for so long, that I don't understand the idea of Community anymore. And I can't make sense how he got over that."

"Because it would take so long for you to finally get it? Do you seriously have any idea how old this Chicken Hawk is?" The two chuckled at that while the white beast whimpered silently in pleasure. "I know where you're coming from though. Being stuck with a group of... 'People', if you can even call them that."

"You mean how Fear Is The Weakness started out?" He nodded. "Yeah... That's about as dysfunctional as a 'Family' can get. And like I said: mine was... Bad, but it wasn't *that* bad." His off paw stopped Bartan from continuing.

"Remember what you said in the first party we attempted: you can't measure Hard Times." His white head fell a bit, but nodded. "And I know it can be overwhelming, what you're expected to become." The two looked at the hexeped for a moment, still on his back and squirming desperately. "Not one of his better moments, but."

"I hear you." The smaller one sighed heavily.

"The important thing to remember is that this is what you will become *Eventually*." A look at the brass one. "That means in the future. The far, far, far, farfarfar, farfar Future. Not tomorrow." He got a faint smirk from that. "You'll get there. Me and everyone else here believe it."

"No pressure there." A faint grumble as the bear got a nudge.

"There's nothing expected of you, not even to blossom perfectly into this. There's alot of him that isn't shown, but keep faith that you will get over this pain." The smaller one closed his eyes and sighed, getting a nudge and a large lick from the dragon. "It will happen again one day, but you need to leave yourself opened enough to do so."

"And also find the right people."

"You have already, and I don't mean us." A painful look at Beo. "You've encountered many people that have shown some type of affection, be it just friendly or deeper. And everytime, you've drifted away from them."

"It's my nature to-"

"No, it's your nature to eventually make a mistake and dwell over that several dozen times, then convince yourself that you no longer deserve them." Another look away. "Everyone makes mistakes, bear. Even this furball, who is supposed to be 'God' in your stories. You need to stop living in the negative past and get over those events."

"It's not just that though..." Bartan mumbled.

"I know. You still get exhausted whenever you're around another

person. That's something I really don't have a solution for." The smaller one just shrugged and stayed quiet. Soon enough, the red tool started jerking a little bit as the Counterweight wrestled to get out of the pin, making the dragon purr. "I suppose I should finish you off upstairs." He smirked, glancing at the other bear. "Unless you want one as well?"

"Nah, I really shouldn't." Another playful nudge, and he pet the brass muzzle until the other white one demanded the attention. "Go make your messes, just wash yourself before you go back into the kitchen."

"*Fiiiiiiiine.*" He overdramatically tossed his snout, giving the smaller bear another lick before standing up and skewering the six legged one with his own weapon. Almost being able to hear those cries of bliss as he gripped the plated chest. "Enjoy yourself." Beo almost demanded. "I have work to do."

"Important work, I'm sure." A solid and proud nod from the brass titan as he started climbing up the stairs. Of course, flashing anyone who was staring at what they were probably missing out in, in the process.

With a deep sigh to relax himself, he at least didn't feel eyes watching him. Though, that pain began brewing once again, making those brown eyes study the now closed front door. As much as he wanted to leave, he wouldn't be able to go back home. Not to mention, he would rather not get sacked by the two little ones, giggling in a nearby decorated bush. Especially when he glanced over at them.

With another deep sigh, the bear got up. Knowing the kitchen was probably off limits, he headed over to the opposite wing of the dining area: what appeared to be a wreckroom, likely for the troublemakers. Granted, many of the objects would hardly be considered toys for their age... Whatever their age might possibly be. Instead of building blocks, they tended to have these large solid ones, possibly made out of a thick foam to stay together and support their weight. Quite a few were built into several large forts with bridges between them. As well as many humanoid figures with targets on certain parts. Many of them a bit lewd, half disturbing the bear. "Well... They've had the practice, by the look of it." He muttered out loud.

A large red dragon that was bipedal double taked at him, nearly making Bartan's fur rise up, as he didn't recognize it. Let alone notice it was in the corner the entire time. It took a few moments of study, but he pieced it together. "...Flyare?" The dragon rubbed the back of her neck.

"Y-yes." The red one said awkwardly. "Forgive my startling presence here, I was just..." Her lighter red eyes seemed to drift into the room behind

the bear, getting him to notice the main living room with about three floors. Many of it occupied with alot of the cast from Entropy's War, both pre and post. As well as a few others that remained outside of it all. "It seems no matter how many of these I've attended, Formal or not, I just..."

"I don't blame you one bit. I find I'm stricken with a sense of unbelonging myself." He smiled sadly at her. "It's nice to see you normal once again. Feels like it's been..." She nodded. "At least you can enjoy yourself and relax a bit."

"I might be without... 'Freayha', but I'm hardly relaxed in situations like this." She started studying the fortresses from afar. Moving in a strange mix between bipedal and a feral trying to be bipedal. It honestly reminded the bear of Zhai when he tried to walk like that. Granted, without the package displayed between his hind legs.

"...Tell me why." He asked softly, sitting down on a nearby beanbag chair that felt very warm and almost liquidy. Getting him to almost groan in embarrassment, knowing what it probably was. "I only ask because, I'm..."

"And you want someone else's explanation for once." He nodded shyly, getting the dragoon to take a breath. "As I said before, as a form of Knight, I tended several formal gatherings for many different things. Some were graduations, not mine specifically, some were more War Meetings, but they were hardly Social Events. Others attended, but Mingling was optional."

"And you never took that option." She shook her head.

"Outside of Exile and a few other comrades." Another breath. "He could always do it better than I could. I suppose I was more of a tag along, before he found Rynoa."

"His mate, yes." Flyare paused for a few moments before carrying on.

"But that was before... Freayha. Before I was trapped within my own rage and adrenaline. Even after Veritas made me normal again, I always felt... Distant from them."

"But Veritas is a land without pain. How...?"

"You describe it as a Pain, bear, because you don't know another word for it. That pain will never grow within a universe like such, but that doesn't mean it will go away." A sad look from those brown eyes. "I stayed away from others because... They knew Freayha. They didn't know Flyare. Those people knew of the things I have done, the murders I've committed, all in the name of bloodlust. They seen the worst of me."

"And that's all they will ever know." He finished, getting the dragon to nod. "Trust me... I know it well." A look at him. "When it seems all they know about you are stains and scars, why bother trying to change that...? That's all they're going to remember, that's all everyone will remember in the end, right? All the pain you went through, the things you've lost."

"But there are a few that seem to know both sides." A deep breath from both of them, as Flyare approached and sat down with him. Granted, sitting on the floor, but close enough to almost embrace. "Those who value your positive traits, no matter how horrible your negatives are."

"Like Exile."

"Yes." She faintly smiled. "Like Arson." A nod from him. "And... I don't know the others, I'm sorry."

"Beo." Bartan chuckled. "I guess Dia'vidd as well now."

"He's the...?"

"The one who changes colors with moods." A large nod in understanding. "Quite different from the dragons you grew up with."

"Which does remind me..." A noise in question. "Are you ever going to explain that further?"

"Odds are, I'll have to. Especially since Thea's junk can clearly be seen and noticed, whereas Exile's..." An awkward neck rub got her to chuckle. "It'll be in the next two chapters, I know. I'm thinking the third one, if I can squeeze it in."

"I'm actually surprised you choose us to use instead of... Well, anyone else in that massive list." The two lightly chuckled.

"It was a tough call, really. But..." A breath from him. "You two are one of the oldest characters I have. Exile was my first real one. I had this other... Prototype that is so embarrassing that he will never see the light of day." The two laughed. "I mean, I was maybe 11? 12 when I made him? He was your typical, anti-social bastard with some sword. Emo, powerful, no interest in relationships, and overall a boring character."

"But?"

"But... Exile sprouted from him. Personality changed drastically... He had a love interest that wasn't some damsel in distress. He had a group of people that were thrown together and all tried to work together. It was... Interesting. Even kept the sword after a few mods."

"And by few mods, you mean you mounted four Surface To Air Missile Launchers onto it." Another series of chuckles. "Something drastically impossible to use."

"Yes, yes. I know. But that was the point, that's who Exile was... Someone who could really do the impossible. Who could fight whatever the hell anyone threw at him, and never back down." Another breath as he held onto her paw. "He was Conviction. Iron Willed. Considerate of Others... He honestly didn't really have a flaw other than his Loyalty. Maybe a form of Discrimination against him, whereas he was an outsider, but..." A long silence between the two. "...He was my Hero growing up. A Role Model, when I desperately needed one. And you... You were his Loyal Companion-which makes you sound like a dog-I'm sorry." The two laughed awkwardly. "What I mean is-"

"I know." Another chuckle.

"You're not... Less than him, Flyare. And that'll be shown when you kick his ass in Anthem." One last series of laughs. "Try to enjoy yourself a bit. I can give you a suggestion, if you like." An awkward breath, but a nod.

"Okay. Sure. Who would come to mind?"

"Hmm..." He looked around both the Living room and the main lobby for a few moments. "Gorret over there, he's from E-W, just the late form of it. You already know Rixxix-"

"Would rather not talk to that one." A smile from the bear. "He'll convince me that Freayha is a good thing."

"I can't say I disagree, but that's a conversation for another time." A nod. "Sarious, the woman in the black poofy pants there, she's from Light Escapes. Stay away from the brown horse, he'll try to convert your very being into an essay. THEN proceed to chew your ears off." Another chuckle. "And well... Any dragon you see besides Thea. Only because he knows your..."

"Yeah... Thank you, Bartan." A nod, but he didn't let go of her paw when she stood up. Attempting to sit up on his own, the 'Bean Bag' made it very difficult until she helped him. Clearing his throat awkwardly, then giving her a hug.

"...You want to know why I chose you?" No response. "...Because I think you're beautiful. Even as Freayha... Your most negative form... You're beautiful, Flyare. Something that I can never capture into words." Still silence, but a few heavy breaths and a tighter grip was felt. "Now let's go make fools out of ourselves by engaging into social activity." How he said that made her chuckle.

"You first." The dragoon smiled.

"Alright, but I better see you do it after." They let go, and he tapped her thick chest a few times. Taking a breath before moving into the crowded Living room. Almost feeling her stare into something reflective for a few moments before taking her own steps.

Hating that feeling of both invading personal spaces, and getting his own occupied with others. Nearly tripping over several tails and tickling a few wings before making it to a near vacant corner. Sitting beside a grey griffin who was clearly just staring at him. "...*Really?*" The bird asked, studying him with green eyes and getting the bear to double take awkwardly. "Out of all the people here, why me?"

"Do I need a reason?" The feathered one stared blankly at the bear for a few moments.

"...Yes. Yes you do!" An awkward chuckle at the sheer expression of the griffin. "I'm not joking, out of everyone from that series, you talk to the most bitter person in it?"

"Besides Helga, that is-"

"I gave her a run for her money, and she **Barely** had any screen time." Anton snorted. "Besides, I'm still more bitter, I'm sure."

"Not as good in bed though." A growl from the larger one, as the bear chuckled. "You just can't compare to that."

"Please, she's a flying fleshlight that can poke and prod others into squirting. Like that's difficult to do."

"To be fair, when you were doing it..." A hiss from that beak.

"Regardless, you're avoiding the subject. Why not talk to the lion thing-"

"Sphinx."

"Or Cybil-"

"Cennet."

"I don't care!" The white one laughed. "Instead, you interrupt my preening and enjoyment of-" He looked down at a now empty tray, displaying nothing but a few crumbs. "Where'd they go?"

"Are you sure you didn't eat them all?"

"Of course I am! Are you saying I'm fat?" Bartan looked down at the bird's belly for a moment, getting him to growl. "I am not, or never was fat-"

"Actually-"

"Am not-!"

"There was that time-"

"Or Never Was-!"

"After Dia filled you-"

"**Fat!!**" He hissed loudly, getting a few nearby people to stop and look at the two for a few moments. "I'm not!" He growled at them, finally continuing their own conversations while those green eyes glared at the bear. That is, until a few childish giggles came from behind a few chairs.

"I think I know where those treats went." The bird tossed his snout at him. "But alright, alright. I'll answer your question." Anton gazed at him intently. "...No. You're not fat."

"Well, that's one question." He snorted.

"And, well... To be perfectly honest with you, but don't tell anyone." A slight curl of his neck. "You... Were my favorite character in Destruction Preventer." An even larger neck curl with a look of both surprise and pride.

"**Me... Really?**" His tone completely changed, getting the bear to laugh a bit. "Tell me more."

"Aside from the already elegant form, you mean." Anton wasn't sure if that was a joke or not. "But really... I don't know. I just really liked it when you were shown and on screen. I kept wanting to know what you were going to say next, how you were going to insult those around you. Attempt to put yourself above them, regardless of knowing your own flaws. You held pain, great hurt that was half hidden. And that just felt real to me."

"Because I was you." He almost grumbled. "Metaphorically speaking. You were using me like that weird Cat-Ninja thing, as a soapbox to paint your very own pain into another character, as well as nearly make an excuse for how bitter you are towards others. Let alone, convince yourself that your self-inflicted Solitary Confinement is what you really want in life." The bear just stared at him for a few moments. "I'm smarter than the average *bear*, you see." A slight chuckle from him.

"As well as every griffin that ever existed-"

"That's just truism by now." He snorted, getting a sad smile from the white one. "How close am I?"

"...About spot on, really. I just don't show the bitterness very often to others. They don't need anymore negativity in their lives, but... I can't hold my cynical self back. The overall Misanthropy, I can hide. But that..."

"Yet, that makes yours truly your favorite character in that series?"

"D-don't get me wrong. I love Dia, Beo-"

"Who?"

"Dehoken-"

"Pardon?"

"Even Ressarkio-"

"Bless you?" A slight shove from the bear. "I'm serious, I have no idea who you're talking about."

"The Sphinx, you."

"Oh, you mean the lion with **boobs**?" A nod from the white one. "Great character design, by the way." An awkward grunt from him. "Really fit the entire tone of the series."

"T-that wasn't my *design*, a gynosphinx is a mythical creature." A toss of his beak. "Seriously, look it up. Half lion, half human female. Breasts and all."

"I'll take your *word* for it."

"Which means you won't." The bear shook his head.

"And who is this Dia you spoke of?"

"The one who stole your spotlight by the end of the series." A grumble from the griffin. "Well, that one. To be frank, you were supposed to be in another."

"Was I?" A solid nod from Bartan. "And why was I excluded from this series?"

"Well, the Anton I was planning to use was actually a bit different. There was another side story that really didn't have much to do with what

was going on, but I won't say anything about it past that. Just in case I find something interesting to do with the other two characters it involved."

"Yes-yes, that's all very interesting, but back to me."

"You were supposed to be in The Wrong Side Of Heaven, actually." A curl of his neck. "Have you read that one?"

"Never even knew it existed." He seriously said, getting the bear to chuckle at it regardless.

"Well, it was about Dia's father, Hay-"

"Don't bother. I don't care."

"At least you're honest." The grey one snorted at him. "But the previous Anton I was basing you off of had a specific set of skills. Illusions, forms of Deceptions and whatnot."

"And Elegance?"

"Iiiiiif you want to call that a superpower, sure. And you were probably going to end up in many pissing contests with Haytre about who was better-"

"Me, of course."

"Far from it." A loud growl. "I'm sorry, but his father is just ridiculous when it comes to pure power, aggrogance, ego, and magnificence."

"Everything great you've said up until this point has now been neutralized. Congratulations." A series of chuckles from the white one.

"And I'm not even done yet." A loud groan. "I mean, it would've been comical in certain places and whatnot, but it would've also been horribly predictable. And I didn't like that."

"So you replaced me."

"With that thing over there, to be exact." Bartan pointed at Feyon Feyris, the Kveldulf on the other side of the room.

"...What is that?"

"That is your replacement."

"No, seriously. What **Is** That."

"Something I found far more interesting than a griffin." A look of raw, undiluted hate from those green eyes. "Because, though they can be pretty

to look at, warm and cuddly-"

"Don't you even think about stealing a feel! Your membership has been revoked for life."

"They were still predictable. Almost boring in a way, and other than the pissing-"

"Leave!" The griffin hissed. "You've disturbed me enough." He grumbled, only getting the bear to laugh and raise up.

"Good talk, Anton. We'll talk about renewing your contract sometime." A growl from him. "Would also be nice to see you get mounted by another dra-"

"**Leave!**" Another hiss, and the bear raised his paws. Taking the small stairs up to the second floor.

This one seemed a little more crowded, but mostly on the outsides of the room. Though there was a few of them below, there was a lot of windows that nearly made up the outside walls. Even if the measurements of the wreckroom and... Whatever was north of this one, didn't add up, the view was very pleasant. But not of the suburbs that the home rested on. It was more a large snowy meadow with the northern lights painting the sky with its very own beauty.

It was nice to see so many of his characters enjoying the view, socializing and having a good time. It was never something he opposed of, but just an event he couldn't make himself a part of. It felt like an intrusion, being a third wheel and not really belonging with the main group. With all their attentions onto the breathtaking view, the white one snuck past. Only to get a pair of maroon eyes to look at him very funny. Double taking and almost freezing in place when the bear noticed.

"...Heyyyy..." Bartan almost whispered.

"...Heyyyy..." The dark blue dragon repeated, almost as awkwardly. Not really knowing what to do, the bear quickly sat down beside him before anyone else noticed. "Okay, now you're just making it worse-why are you making it worse!?" The larger one hissed in a whisper, hoping no one else seen them.

"I don't know! What am I supposed to do? Make a break for the stairs?"

"You're asking me!?" Thea grumbled. "I've got to be the worst person to ask when it comes to social activity!"

"Besides me, you mean."

"Do you really want to turn this into a contest?" He snorted.

"Good point, odds are it'll get some attention." The bear sighed a grumble. "How did you even get here anyway?"

"That badger is like a bully." The blue one snorted, getting Bartan to half chuckle. "Seriously, what's with you and strong women?" The bear just shrugged.

"I find them more interesting. I don't like damsels or the classic Princess. Reminds me way too much of stereotypes that I detested growing up."

"So, Damsels in Distress: Being weak, helpless, and overall just a pain to those around them."

"As well as a few other stereotypes. Dragons being the enemy, for example." A hot exhale that was mostly in anger worried the dragon for a moment. "I see it so damn often, both in videos, games, stories and movies. *Dragons are the bad guys because it's epic.*" He mocked them. "Same goes with anything that's even **Remotely** interesting. Dinosaurs are the *antagonists*, and *humans* are always the **good people**. Because: **REASONS.**"

Those dark red eyes shuffled around, but constantly glanced at the white one, until he sighed to cool down. "Sorry. It just steams me. I absolutely despise playing the role as the Human Hero. Sure, they're often the bad guys in some result or another, but they're almost always the good guys. Even if it's just one of them, like Guardians Of The Galaxy."

"I thought you liked that movie-"

"I do, I do. But I didn't really care for the main character. I liked Rocket the best, then Groot. The rest, I just didn't care for. They could've been out of the entire movie, and I wouldn't miss them." Another sigh.

"Because...?"

"They're too human looking. Seriously, a few body markings and a different color skin. This is the exact same reason why I dislike Elves too. You can add little features like making them shorter, or giving them pointy ears, but regardless, they're still walking pork." Another heated exhale.

"...How in the world did you hide this from people for so many years?"

"Talent, and alot of it." He flicked a rounded ear. "Not to mention, I am

living in a world with them. It's kinda hard to say or talk about how much you detest their own species as a whole and keep the conversation pleasant."

"I'm sure it is." Thea muttered. "...You half remind me of Krow, to be honest."

"He got sick of it just as much as I did. Granted, minus the love of dragons." A slightly worried look from the blue one. "No, that doesn't mean I'm going to randomly give you a pawjob in front of a crowd, don't worry."

"Noted." He rubbed the back of his spineful neck. "I guess I'm just so used to people wanting me for their own personal gain that..."

"I know... I know." The bear exhaled again.

"I never understood why though." Those dark red eyes studied Bartan for a few moments, looking for an answer.

"...Probably because that's what I often feel like. Something I know I'm not alone in. Many people in the world feel like they're being used by others near constantly. To the point those people feel like they're entitled to occupy you. If you somehow decline, you'll upset them. Make them feel bad, neglected, or even abandoned."

"Much like how I felt like when I first got out of that castle." A nod from the white one.

"It sneaks up on you. Before you know it, you feel like you're living *for* them. Existing for the sheer purpose to be used and discarded." A moment of silence. "A Deeply Heart-Felt Goodbye, To The Part Of Me That Died, When I Decided To Put Others Before Me."

"You've said that before." A surprised look from the bear, got those frilled ears to tint red. "I've... Read a few things while you were working on a few other things."

"I'm guessing Fear Is The Weakness?"

"As well as that sex story you made." An unexpected chuckle from the bear, made the dragon release a noise in question.

"Counting Stars. That was just silly, I can't help it."

"I haven't read it all yet. Just started, but..."

"What about Destruction Preventer?" A shake of his wedged head. "Read that one first, or else Counting Stars will make even less sense. And if you enjoy the adultery in that one, you'll enjoy CS."

"Maybe after I finished Light Escapes." A slight groan from the white one made an ear flick.

"Sorry, I just have mixed feelings with that one." A gesture to go on. "How far have you made it?"

"Just finished Intoxicated. Dark as the night, by the way." He snorted.

"I know it, but damn did it ever get your attention-how are you able to even understand that?"

"What do you mean?" Thea curled his neck.

"I mean, your upbringing/world doesn't consist of a lot of technology and-" A snout toss interrupted him.

"That doesn't mean I'm incapable of understanding it. I mean, it took time, yes. But I've also been talking to others and watching you play games from time to time. It's the same idea as putting yourself into one of them."

"And the jargon-?"

"Is explained. I mean, a few things elude me still, but not enough for me to get lost. I think one was Cooldown that was overlooked."

"Oh, just the time it takes to be able to use a skill once again. So, if you use something like a tailwhip for example, and it's suddenly disabled for 3 seconds before you can use it again: those three seconds would be your cooldown." A large nod from the scaled one.

"But again, it hardly mattered. And I think the only one that half did was the big attack Endzeit did that made him small at the end. Even then, it's cooldown was displayed in a different form." A slight nod from the bear. "But what do you have against the series?"

"...I just think it should've been a little better. And during those three months writing it was a little tough. I guess I have this constant negative mindset while struggling to write it. I just had it in my head that it was supposed to feel like my own personal experiences. And when I tried to put them on digital paper..." A moment of silence. "I liked Sarius and Endzeit, they had good chemistry together. Especially with almost having to trust one another. Honestly, I would've liked to be in her shoes. To be in a game like Skyline with an intelligent pet that could break the game."

"Because it gives you a slight feeling of control, right? Not because it gives you an advantage."

"Well, that, and playing with that braided weap-"

"Annnnd moving on." The dragon grumbled, getting the bear to smirk. "What about that ending?" A slight noise in question. "Of act 2, I mean. Still need to finish the third."

"Oh, you mean her leave?" A nod. "...Does it disturb you?" Thea awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck. "The concept of departure has always been something I longed for, to be honest. And I don't mean the Want for Death. But to just want to leave a world that you clearly don't belong in. A world that only knows of your faults and tragedies, that know a label that you clearly despise and refer you to that word no matter how many times you tell them to stop."

Some silence as Bartan continued. "If you don't enjoy playing a game that you feel is a waste of your time, then why bother continuing to play it? Being part of a world that makes no sense to you? Being in a situation where you're trapped or cornered? Why bother **Staying** in it?"

"I-I get it, but..." A soft furred paw stroked the dragon's haunch.

"You haven't been around a Force of Death. Grew up beside one like I was. I'm not afraid of Departures of any kind, because I've seen it all. Felt it all... Experienced it all." A slight nod from the blue one. "Yet, I still don't know what that makes me."

"Makes you...?"

"I've mentioned this before in Vendetta's artist comments that... Anthem doesn't really have a main Theme to it. The same thing goes for your own personal character traits." The dragon's neck curled. "I can't think of word to describe you, Thea'daisis. You seem to jump so irrationally that you don't really seem to be anywhere." Just a strange look from those maroon eyes. "For example, Krow is rude. Zeltra is proud. Roe is... A little mysterious, but he's also nice and protective. And Flyare is-"

"A complete nutjob?"

"Not-So-In-Control, yes. But she's also damn Loyal. Just to Exile more than anyone else." A moment of silence. "What are *you*?" A moment of thought, and the large one just shrugged his wings. "That's what I mean, and I'm afraid that is also from me."

"You?"

"I... I've never fit anywhere when it came to any sort of community. I never felt like I belonged to any group of family or friends, always referring myself as an odd wheel. I enjoy some games, but I'm not a Gamer. I used to draw, but I was never an Artist. I spent the last three years writing 28 stories,

but I don't consider myself a Writer. I barely identify myself as a male, yet I don't even know what that's supposed to mean. Let alone, I don't have a sexuality to call my own, but a scrambled mess that can only be summed up to: 'I Like What I Like.' Which is hardly an answer to begin with." A sad look from those brown eyes. "I have no idea what I am... But I know what I am not."

"Which is?"

"...Human? A Social Animal? A Furry? ...And I half worry that Bartan is on that list-"

"Which is *be-yond* confusing, because isn't that the same name of the six legged white...?" A nod. "So, when you say Bartan, you mean that thing?"

"Or even me as you see here. This... Bear. Is it really me? Is it what I'm defined as overall? Stained with the very chains around my neck as a symbol of me being Guarded from both Trust and Love for so long?" He gestured the black markings around his furred collar.

"Is that what...?"

"They're handcuffs. Black Shackles of Restraint to signify that I could never trust another human being for as long as I lived. At least, not in the way that most people would assume." Some silence, until a blue tail and paw attempted to comfort the white one.

"...What happened...?"

"...I was broken by them. Not just one person, but many... You might as well call them Monsters. Malefactors, really, because Monsters were never this brutal." A slight whimper from the dragon, whereas he didn't know what to say. But the white one sighed and slightly nodded, leaving after giving his muzzle a few pets.

Climbing up the last set of stairs, the final floor held the same window outside. Just with the added bonus of a glass roof as well. Allowing sights towards the stars, where many of the people occupying were lying comfortably on their backs while chatting. Granted, not all of them.

One especially caught the bear's eye: a snow leopard. Leaning on the guard rail while looking out, displaying her rather uncomfortable looking mechanical tail. A series of black spades with many red lights throughout, glowing like the very creature was breathing separately from the feline's body.

Eventually her grey-blue eye caught him staring, studying the male

herself for a few moments then finally identifying who it was. "You are...?" She asked to make sure, but still didn't quite get an answer. It wasn't uncommon for people to stare at her different features, no matter how hidden they were in her baggy clothing. Save for the left eye, constantly closed but reflecting every light displayed on the abyss metal on it. But there was something different about his brown eyes. Almost a guilt being shown through the lenses. "Bartan, right?"

The bear didn't really know what to say. Words escaped him, but actions wouldn't. He took a few steps towards her, getting the leopard to fully turn around with a mug of hot tea in her left metal paw, and almost defending herself with the other until he quickly went in for an embrace. Holding what remained of the organic side as tightly as he could, and getting the feline to grumble. "Why does every guy want to hug me?"

The cyan gerbil was humming loudly to the large headphones around her neck. Working on a large chart that had three columns to it: A small one for a three digit number, and two larger ones for names. Having the entire thing nearly complete while munching on a plate of Dia's fresh cookies, she approached a funny looking hat. "Ready!" She cheerfully shouted, and the hat belched loudly. Coughing out two small sheets of paper with names on it, giggling after reading them. "Well, they're going to have some fun."

Once again writing them down and reaching for another baked embodiment of delicious regret, the plate was completely empty. Oh well, she'll just have to steal some more later. "Ready!" She shouted again, getting another belch from the hat and hearing two childish giggles off behind the desk. Almost purring in curiosity, the female looked over to find the smaller wolf and wyrmling munching on the last of her treats. "How many of those have you two had tonight?"

"Not enough." The white wolf chirped.

"But Beo made us stay out of the kitchen. There's not a whole lot of room in there with the three dragons."

"Only three?" She asked, getting their heads to tilt a bit and ears perk. "Right, Khol's a bad cook." They giggled at that again, coming out of hiding and looking at that strange colorful fedora.

"Where did this come from?" Lexar, the scaled one asked.

"Doesn't look like anything dad would wear."

"I got it from Dehoken, who said, and I quote: The Contents Of This Box Shall Never Be Seen By Any Feline Kind. When I informed him I wasn't a cat, he then threw it into this room, claiming I was safe from the curse." Their heads tilted once again. "I really didn't want to ask. But I used it to draw names for the..." She trailed off, not really knowing how to explain the perverted game to them. After a moment of studying her, they looked at the board, which clearly read:

"Sex...?"

"Shuffle?" The two looked at each other, getting Lillith to whimper slightly.

"Ask one of your dads to explain it. He doesn't pay me enough to-"

"Oh, we know what it is." The cyan one once again froze in puzzlement.

"They've explained it to us in depth many times to make sure we understood it."

"...How old are you two again?" The two shrugged and looked at the board again.

"Why is this spot blank?"

"Beside the Feys?"

"O-oh... I'm a little puzzled in how to do them, to be honest. They're... Like, two people, but in one body. We can't really separate them easily without complications, so I was just hoping maybe I could find someone who could..." She rubbed her arm a bit shyly, not really sure how to explain it. "I was half thinking maybe Zhaiothe's Sister Lycrri'd and Zian Ziou, but..."

"Why don't we do it then?" The gerbil's blood froze stiff in awkwardness when the brass one suggested that.

"Yeah, we want to be in the shuffle too!" A whimper from her.

"W-what!? I can't...!"

"Why not?" Rev asked, tilting his white head a bit.

"We've done it before." A sharper toned whimper from her, though his brother did nod in sync with him, she couldn't help but be torn between completely embarrassed, and furious at someone...

"You... What?"

The hexeped moaned awake in his land of pillows. Though alone, he still felt warm both inside and out from the session his husband delivered. Almost wanting more of it, but at least he was past this shaky demand from his lower region. Taking a few breaths and moments to relax before rejoining the party outside the room.

The large doors shut as the Counterweight shook the fog from his head. He half thought about asking the brass one to stop teasing him so much, but then again, the bear really did enjoy it. Not to mention, it made him a bit excited to think about this evening's entertainment.

Speaking of which, the gerbil assigned to the matchup was walking quite quickly towards him. Granted, not thinking a thing of it as he came to a stop and waited for her. "How is everything going, Lillith-?" She grabbed one of his ears, and he yelped out a bit at the forced tug. Though it didn't completely disable him, it definitely concerned the white beast.

"*What is **Wrong** with you!?*" She hissed in a whisper, getting a noise in question while trying to turn with the twist. "Your freaking kids just told me that you...! And Beo...!" A slight whimper from him as he raised up two paws to surrender.

"I-I can explain!" He kept his voice to a whisper as well, though the look on her face didn't believe such words. "I mean it, h-hear me out!"

"You let your own two sons, who are **Clearly** underaged, join in on your...!?"

"Lillith...!" Another whimper, but a bit more stern. Getting the female to stop and take a breath. Letting go of the ear, and seeing him lay down on the carpet floors. "I know what it sounds like-" Before she could speak. "Believe me, I know. And we've..." A breath from him, trying to find out where to start in all this. "They... Knew about our sessions for a while. They enjoy sneaking around and spying on people, you know how wyrmlings are. And they seen us do many things, even after we've caught them hiding."

"And so you decided-"

"Again, let me explain. They seen it as something playful that me and Beo do together, a game they wanted to be a part of. Where I'm gone so much, they wanted to spend more and more time with me and us together. -Even after we've explained to them dozens of times that it's something they aren't ready for."

"And so?"

"We left it at that, until we started catching them trying it on each other..." A whimper from her as she leaned up against the wall.

"I swear, your entire family is just..."

"I know. We didn't expect it either. So me and Beo had a talk with each other, then with them. Explained everything that we did, how everything worked... Tested them many times to make sure they really did understand the *Logical* side to it all. They have the lore downpacked, and know how things... Work. But that still didn't stop them from trying-"

"But they're brothers!" Lillith hissed.

"I know! They know! But they are inseparable. And when they started sneaking into our room while we were asleep..." She covered her face and whimpered as Bartan rubbed the back of his neck. "That was kind of the last straw. Beo didn't want to punish them for trying, I didn't really want to either. They're young, yes, but they're damn smart. Experienced, even. They have good instincts and morals. To punish them for attempting it would either teach them that it's wrong for the rest of their lives, or make them want it even more. Let alone, it wouldn't stop them... With each other."

"Are you really trying to justify Incest?"

"Personally, I grew not to see a problem with it-" A look of disbelief. "As long-! As long as the main purpose is not for sake of breeding or procreation. That, in itself, is very bad for the future, and later on will cause alot of problems. But if it's just for..." He half shrugged, still getting that look of both defeat and disbelief.

"I can't believe you." She grumbled.

"However, we don't do it when they're young." An odd look. "Tell me first, what happened? How did you find out?"

"They wanted to be part of the shuffle, and they said you've done **it** before."

"But they never said how?" The gerbil studied him for a moment, but shook her head. "They have adult forms. We gave them their very late adolescence as alternate forms, so that they could enjoy it more. Used what they learned how to do, and change back and forth at will. They know and understand the risks of having different partners, procreation, you name it. Probably know it better than you or anyone else here."

She sighed a grumble while the bear continued. "If they want join in, let them. They've been wanting to try it with someone different for a while."

Another grumble. "I know, you find it strange, maybe even offensive. But they were raised to see it as a form of play, which it kinda is. Granted, they wouldn't ask just anyone to attend such a game." A groan this time. "Who is left on the shuffle?"

"Only the Feys so far. I kinda got stuck, not really knowing how to deal with them."

"Well, then they would be perfect." A look of worry. "Ask them yourself, if you like. Ask them if they are ready. They will look you straight in the eyes and give you a solid nod. Not joke about it, not be shy or feel awkward. Maybe a little excited, but again..." She covered her face with her paws for a moment. "I actually assigned you this little job because I didn't think you'd ever meltdown like this." He teased, giving her a nudge.

"Fine. But only if the Feys are okay with this. And you're asking them."

"Deal." He licked her, and she retaliated with a few taps. "Who did you pair me up with, by the way?"

"Wouldn't you like to know." He provokingly purred at her, helping the cyan one up and heading downstairs.

"Seriously, enough with the hugs." The snow leopard grumbled, half prying the polar bear off. But he didn't let go, getting her to sigh and take a sip out of her tea.

"...I'm sorry."

"For what, exactly? This?" A shake of his head was felt.

"...For leaving you." A noise in question.

"You didn't *leave* me. Red Hypergiant just ended. There's a big difference."

"I... Don't mean that."

"Hmm?" When Thais got no response, she tapped him hard a few times. "Come on, that's enough." With a deep breath, he let go. "That's who you are, right? The Writer?" A shy nod from him. "Nice to meet you, I suppose."

"Sorry, I just..." He took a breath. "...Sorry-"

"Heard that one before." She smirked the best she could, whereas the left side of her muzzle was black as well. "Try a different introduction."

"Y-yeah..." He awkwardly sat down on a couch. "Bartan." She gave a puzzled look, and he half nodded. "Yes, like the six legged furball."

"So, you're both named Bartan." She sat down as well, trying to keep her sharp hind claws from raking the furniture.

"Well..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "We're... Kinda the same perrrrsonnnn." He awkwardly mumbled, still not getting relief from that strange look. "I'm... Supposed to become him in the future."

"...In the future?" It was barely a question, more like a statement of disbelief.

"In the far... FAR future." The leopard half chuckled. "It's a God damn mess, and stupid hard to explain."

"I'll pass on it then." Another sip of her tea, and that guilty look was in those brown eyes again. "You are not allow to give me another hug, at least not until you tell me why you're staring at me like that."

"I just..." A swat from her, at least with her organic paw. "Okay, okay. I just... Feel guilty about it. About you."

"For what?" She half grumbled. "I don't like being pitied."

"N-no, it's not exactly pity. I mean... I've done things to you, but no worse than anyone else here. Khol over there, the silver dragon lying on the floor, I killed him in the first act of his story. Then made his mate suffer for it for like... 500 years-? AndNowISoundLikeASadist." He rubbed his eyes. "You were just... And you deserve-"

"Do not say another hug."

"...YouDeserveAnotherHug-Ow!" Another swat. "Okay."

"Next time, it's the claws." She smirked a bit. "Is it the cybernetics? Because that makes a lot of people feel awkward-"

"It's not that." A gesture to keep going was mistaken for another swat, causing the bear to flinch for a moment. Clearing his throat while rubbing the previously hit spots. "It's... Thais."

"Of course it is-"

"As in... Your name." A moment of study. "You were... Somebody else. Someone I let down."

"And you want to hug this person?"

"...I don't know." A sigh from the feline.

"Who was she?" He gave her a painful look. "Talk, or get the claws."

"What's with me and strong females- She was an artist. One that... I don't remember how I met anymore. I did my usual back then, commented on her work with walls of text. Thoroughly making suggestions, but in a very positive way. Thais liked it, to the point she admitted to me that she drew for the sheer sake to hear what I had to say about it. She did wonderful things: dragons, humans, animals, flowers and details so wonderfully." A breath. "...She reminded me of Roxann."

"Who?"

"My second sister. The first one that died in March 2007. Rox used to draw extremely well also. The only reason why I could comment like I do was because she needed someone else to view her work. A fresh pair of eyes, and I was always around."

"Fair enough. What happened to Thais?" A sad look from him, and she lifted up a paw.

"Alright, it was the summer of '08. I was caught in this stressful whirlwind between my best friend and my youngest sister Betsy. They were both basically living in that house, while I was taking care of my father that had Alzheimer's, but he wasn't too bad then. Still able to walk, get coffee or snacks. Able to get out of a normal chair on his own." A strange look from that eye. "It happens... You almost think they're faking it at first, but... They really do fade away before your eyes."

Bartan continued. "I was caught between those three, trying to keep everyone happy. Getting so little sleep, trying to keep up with my comments and whatnot with about twelve other people on DeviantArt, then trying to keep peace in that damn house. By the end of the summer, I was so God damn exhausted, I never wanted to see another human being again. I never wanted to speak to them."

"And Thais was part of this website?" A sighing nod. "Was her last name even-?"

"Norris, yes. And she was the person to draw the avatar that I use on nearly every site." An exhausted breath. "Even after my little break from

people, I kept in touch with her for a while. Talked about random things, like how she wanted to find her own animal. One that would symbolize herself. I don't know why, but I always thought of her as a bird. However, she chose-

"A snow leopard..." He nodded, almost getting a tear in his eye. "So, what? You based me off of her?" He lightly shook his head.

"No. Just those two things really. But it was enough to remind me that I left her behind, because I just couldn't take it anymore. Trying to keep people happy and satisfied, draining every drop of energy I had. I remember feeling physically sick. Migraines, high blood pressure, insomnia, the pain of loss and lack of identity. My only relief was what I always did: Video games. One specifically after Betsy died-

"Guild Wars?" A rather surprised double take from him. "I was talking to Eman earlier. Mentioned the game when we were on the subject of Charr."

"It's a wonder you were able to get that out of him."

"Oh, he didn't speak fondly of them at all, no. But he didn't seem to be haunted by his past." A bit of silence from the polar bear. "But go on. You started playing Guild Wars."

"Playing it...? I was addicted to it. It was the only thing I could bring myself to do during the day. It helped me cope, physically heal up."

"But wasn't that a multiplayer game?"

"MMO, yeah. But... You could do a lot of things solo. Nearly everything solo." A breath. "So, I did. With the exception of Cameron, who bought me the game in the first place."

"And in return, you neglected everyone on... That site." She snapped her fingers, trying to remember the name.

"DeviantArt, yes." A deep sigh. "And I also left her behind. One of her only few friends, devoured by his own illnesses, limitations, and a game."

"And you're blaming yourself for this?" He looked away. "Dumbass. That's not your fault-

"I left her behind-

"*You were **Sick!***" She hissed at him. "Probably depressed from losing so much, I know for sure I would be! Everybody has different reactions when it comes to forms of medications-Even if it's the idea of being smothered by 'Friends and Family' believe me. You tried that! It didn't work! You Tried Something Else! It worked!"

"But at the cost of them-"

"Which were an expense to you! As harsh as that sounds, it's the damn truth." He exhaled defeatedly. "You don't work yourself to death for other people, especially if they're alive and well-"

"Then what good am I to others-OW!" Another swat, this time with claws. Drawing a little bit of blood on his arm.

"No good dead, that's for sure! No good exhausted! -Or Sick! You did what **you** needed to survive! If they can't understand that, then they were never worth your time to begin with!" She grumbled quietly. "You need to stop this. What's done is done, accept the changes- whether you like them or not." She tapped her thigh, hearing the metal skin make a strange sound. "And get over it. You left, just as they left. There's no reason to fight to get them back. Especially if you don't need them." His gaze remained low and his muzzle shut. "Do you?" It got his attention.

"...I don't know-"

"You do know. And you've survive this long without them. Stop clinging to them. Don't out-right reject them if they ever want to catch up on lost time, but don't wait around for them to return. That's not how time should be spent, especially now where there's someone else for you." A long silence as she took a few more sips out of her tea.

"...Can I...?" He almost whispered, getting her eye to roll and almost glare at him.

"Are you going to stop with this clinginess?" A sigh from him then he nodded. "Then yes, you can have a sip-" The bear hugged her again, and she grumbled loudly. "Clearly, there is a language barrier between us." Bartan half chuckled at her. "You need to let go."

"And forgive myself, I know. I will."

"Well, that would help too, but you need to let go of me, or else more people are going to want hugs. I really don't know if I can handle that black bull and the brass one."

"You're just that loveable."

"And Uncomfortable." She grumbled. "Or at least should be. There's literally dozens of others that would be a better choice to hug besides me."

"They don't deserve one as much as you." Thais sighed halfheartedly, but didn't struggle against the white one. At least, not until after a minute, then some scampering could be heard. As the brass wyrm came around

with a bag strapped over his neck, he pulled out a ticket and handed it to the bear. "Hmm?"

"Enjoy!" He scampered off, passing out a few others as the white one studied the three digit number on the slip, then half groaned.

"Been targeted for some performing arts, I see." The leopard teased.

"Apparently, and against my will. I don't remember signing up for this."

"Well, too bad. You don't want to disappoint them, do you?" Those brown eyes half glared at her.

"Must you prey on my insecurities?"

"Yes. That's what you get for hugging me." She gave a few taps. "Like the squirt said, enjoy yourself with whoever you get."

"And if it's you?"

"You really think I would participate in something like that?"

"I donno, I wonder what those attachments could bring to the bedroom."

"And now you've gone too far." She smirked again. "Now get down to the first floor, or I'm throwing you down."

"Yes Ma'am." The bear smiled back. "...Thank you, Thais."

"You're welcome."

The polar bear made it down to the first floor. Going north through an occupied storage room, then back to the far end of the lobby, he spotted a few familiar faces. Two human women giving a big pink dragon a large hug. The scene made him smile, though almost embarrassed when he put himself into the dragon's shoes. Still not quite understanding it.

But, in fear of the leopard detecting such emotional distraught, he moved on to the back veranda. Night fell quite quickly, leaving the backyard illuminated with the large moon, colorful lights, and the snow. Glowing almost cyan in tone with the lights it attempted to reflect. A deep breath of cool winter air, and Bartan was taken back to a better time. That is, until he started hearing a strange stretching sound.

Observing the darkness a little bit, he swore he heard a small, squeaky voice say "Release The Catapult!" Then a loud snap. Almost instantly, the bear's

muzzle met with a rubbery pancake that nearly made him flip out of sheer impact. Hitting the floor harshly and getting him to grunt through the breakfast item attempting to swallow his face.

The object was resilient, ridiculously so when he attempted to pull it off. Fighting with it for nearly a minute, behind the soundproof glass of everyone else inside, until: "That's where I put that!" It was suddenly ripped off like a Band Aid, making the white one yelp loudly and catch his breath. "I need to put a leash on this thing."

"And a shock collar." Bartan grumbled, looking up at the red haired man in avian sunglasses. A white, tall coned hat that read 'Dance' was worn on his head, while he was sporting a terribly colored pink and green jacket. "...What are you...!?"

"I'm Pickles! The Magical, Gift Giving, Bear Saving, Slapjack Raisining, Hat Wearing," The bear grumbled loudly, holding a paw to his eyes. "Water Skiing, Coral Diving, Moonwalking, Egg Licking, Beaver Tailing, Party Fluming," A louder grumble. "Real Estate-o-phobic, Nightmare Fueling Stuffed Sea Creature that leaves presents in your Nostrils!" The man said very happily. "And you've been quite turquoise this year...!" He pulled out a list and a monocle, going down the list for several moments before looking at the bear for a few more. "...Who are you again?"

"Bartan?"

"Bartan... Bartan... Nope. Never heard of you. I'm just going to squeeze you between the talking horse that needs a decapitation-"

"A What!?"

"Decavitization. Because he has been in the sweeeeeeeets tonight, yo!" A slightly concerned look from the bear. "We'll just put you here, above Silent Moonlight Dragon and-wait. Why's Deaneil on this list? Oh, wrong list-Oh Well!" He got out a feather quill with clearly no ink on the tip, and started writing with it upside down. "Let's see... B. R. Two Q's. An Egg Hatching A Pyramid Head. That Same Egg High Fiving A Building Made In 1872. A Third Q. B... B? Nah. Has to be the Y."

"That's... That's not my-you know what? I don't care." The bear muttered.

"And a doodle of a cowboy. Got it! Sign here, please." He handed over a form that read: 'All UR Blahs R Belong To Pickles.' Sighing slightly irkfully, Bartan wrote down Dehoken's name and handed it back. "Excellent! Now for your gift!" He pulled over a large burlap sack that looked very familiar to the bear, and threw the form inside. Then reached in, withdrawing a large box

that was clearly the size of the entire sack, and placed it in front of the bear.

The white one looked at it almost hurt. Then very uncomfortable when the man sat down across from him, pulled out a camera, and started filming him. "Well, what are you waiting for? Open it!" He cheerfully said to the bear, only getting an uncomfortable grumble from him. "What's wrong? Don't you like presents?"

"...Last time I really got one was when I was 12. Well, like this-"

"You mean from a burlap sack?"

"N-not quite. I've gotten gifts since then, but..." A gesture around them, including the several people now looking at them through the window. "Not like this..."

"SMILE EVERYBODY!" Dehoken took a picture of them with an extremely bright flash, blinding most of them and making the larger ones fall backwards. Granted, only hearing the noises of cardboard cut-outs hit the ground, which made the white one feel better about it. "Okay, ready to flash again."

"Kinky." He grumbled, though he did feel a little better knowing no one else was watching him. With a deep breath, he pulled the lid off of the box. Almost expecting it to explode, or throw a pie in his face. When nothing happened, he looked inside the box a little puzzled, until he was blinded by the damn camera flash.

"Got it!" A small piece of paper came out of the older style camera and the man started waving it through the air to cool it off. "It'll be a few minutes until. But go on! See what I foun-got you!"

That discomfort again, but the bear reached in. Pulling out object after object. "A rubber bean? Stale cracker. An... Expired bottle of water-"

"Only the water is expired, but the bottle is still good!" He said rather cheerfully, getting the white one to sigh.

"A steel bolt with a tag that reads... 'Little Bastard'? Isn't that the cursed car from the 60's?"

"Details, details!"

"A Jigsaw Puzzle Piece. Some colorful Feathers. Half an onion ring?"

"I'll take that." Arson came out of nowhere and yinked the snack food before disappearing indoors once again.

"I swear, she loves Onion Rings more than me." Bartan mumbled. "And finally: a d8 [8 Sided Die] with random desktop icons instead of numbers."

"Don't forget the box! The box is the best!"

"Where did you find these?"

"They were just knocking about in the basement. Why? Is there a problem?" Dehoken asked, but didn't wait for an answer. Instead, just looked at the picture closely and took a deep breath of satisfaction. "Best picture of you ever taken!" He handed it to the bear. "You're welcome."

Bartan looked at it uncomfortably, not expecting to see a very very up-close snapshot of the man's eyeball instead of himself. It took a moment, but the bear started laughing at it. "You've got to be kidding me."

"Told you. People won't believe it's even you!" He took it back when the white one delivered. "I'll send you a copy. Maybe even one big enough to side this entire house with!"

"How would you be doing that? Aren't you still at war with office supplies?"

"Nah, I'm past that. I'm into..." A comically long deep breath of relaxation. "*Something **Fresh***."

"...Febreze?"

"How did you know?"

"Lucky guess." He grumbled.

"Anyway, apparently they didn't like me blowing bubbles out of their children, so I ran it by my war consultant." The Screen flashes to a vending machine that sells candy bars briefly. "And he gave me the get-go! Now I just need to find an eleven year old can of molasses, four toothpicks a week from retirement, and a cannon that's so loose, it's stable!"

"Perfect plan. Nothing could go wrong." He chuckled, shaking his muzzle. "Thanks... Pickles."

"You're welcome! Just spread the cheer, especially to that black dragon. He is very grumpy during the Fiddlehead season!" The man got up, but slipped on the slapjack from earlier. Making him stumble backwards, flip over the railing, and fall into the bushes. After several large, earth-shaking crashes, they stopped. "I'm okay!"

Another smile and a shake of his head, and Bartan got up. Leaning

over a different railing while looking up at the stars above. A few minutes later, the pink dragon came out, smiling. "Hey."

"Hay is for horses."

"Don't tell that to Artheas, apparently. He says it's very bland." The two chuckled, as the dragon sat beside the bear. Looking in the same direction for a moment. Until the white one started speaking up.

"Lately I've Been, I've Been Losing Sleep.
Dreaming About The Things That We Could Be.
But Baby I've Been, I've Been Praying Hard.
Said No More Counting Dollars, We'll Be Counting Stars."

Dia joined in. "We'll Be Counting Stars." The two smiled at each other and nodded before going on in sync.

"I See This Life, Like A Swinging Vine
Swing My Heart Across The Line
And In My Face Is Flashing Signs
Seek It Out And Ye' Shall Find

Old, But I'm Not That Old
Young, But I'm Not That Bold
And I Don't Think The World Is Sold
On Just Doing What We're Told."

The Dragon only.
"I Feel Something So Right
Doing The Wrong Thing."

The Bear only.
"I Feel Something So Wrong
Doing The Right Thing."

The both of them again.
"I Couldn't Lie, Couldn't Lie, Couldn't Lie
Everything That Kills Me Makes Me Feel Alive!

Lately, I've Been, I've Been Losing Sleep
Dreaming About The Things That We Could Be
But Baby, I've Been, I've Been Praying Hard
Said No More Counting Dollars
We'll Be Counting Stars

Lately, I've Been, I've Been Losing Sleep
Dreaming About The Things That We Could Be

But Baby, I've Been, I've Been Praying Hard
Said No More Counting Dollars
We'll Be, We'll Be Counting Stars!"

The two laughed into the night, the bear a little more so. "That was ridiculous."

"It's a good song." Dia nudged him.

"Oh yes, I love it myself. But it's not what I was talking about." Another chuckle, especially after the dragon's scales turned purple. "There you go."

"Ridiculous would be a good choice of word then." The larger one smiled shyly, getting a pet on the muzzle.

"That's not to say it wasn't enjoyable. It's still one of my favorite pieces, let alone arguably my most popular. It's just..." Another faint chuckle, and the dragon leaned on. Getting a welcoming few pets that returned his scales to a thick pink. "Can we have a Serious talk?"

"Sure."

"I really think of you more than just a sex toy." That burst Dia'vidd into laughs, making the white one do the same again. "I'm serious though. I really do, but it's just so much fun to...!"

"It's fun on both sides, to be honest. As ludicrous as it turns out to be. Especially when you try to fight it with logic." A lick from that red tongue. "But don't be ashamed-" Dia stopped for a moment, studying those brown eyes. "Is that what I am? Your shame for liking such things?" It made the bear exhale.

"To put it negatively, yes. Probably not completely defined as that, but I am a little... Shy about what I like. I'm still slowly coming out of my comfort zone when it comes to experimenting with these things." A bit of silence, but a few nudges to let him know there wasn't any hard feelings. "Perhaps you're just my way of coping with it. Learning that there's nothing to be ashamed of when it comes to these fetishes. I mean, some of them I like, some of them I don't."

"Oh?" A sly look from those blue eyes.

"The drug thing in Zhai's act 6. Khol was feeding him some herbs that made his balls produce more seed in order to get those stones to drop faster. Whereas he was still coming out of those wyrmling years then. Which leads to the next one: Wyrmling, or cub or whatever. That's a bit of a line for me, but it's a little different in that situation."

"Go on."

"Well, Zhai had already grown maturely before. Though his body was currently behind then, he still knew what his actions were and accepted them. So, to me, it's more of a size difference rather than cub... But not far across the line. So, that was a bit awkward."

"Any others?" A series of chuckles. "You can tell I've gotten used to such talk since I moved in."

"I bet. You're living with the horniest, six legged bear in existence." They shared a small laugh. "Bestiality is a bit of a sensitive subject outside of the furry fandom. Again: Act 6 - Exodus, when Zhai mounted Lady Irone, most could consider that bestiality. But to me, there's a difference. I mean, it's Feral, yes. But bestiality usually has this lack of intelligence and moral standing. The animals are often forced into the relations, or were taught to do them. Zhai... He knew what he was doing, and he made the choice to carry on with it. It was a decision made by him, not an order or command to follow."

"I'm following what you mean. It's difficult to think of such things even having a will of their own when they don't exist within a certain reality. So Intelligence does fit, to a degree." The dragon nodded. "Any others?"

"Not that hasn't already been explained."

"What about same sex relationships?" A noise in question from the bear as they stared at each other for a few moments.

"...Have you not read like 80% of my works?" A small laugh.

"Yes, you do have alot of Male/Male relations, but rarely any Female/Female ones, is what I mean." Bartan half shrugged, but nodded. "Any specific reason why?"

"Not really..." A moment of thought. "I think it's because, media where I live tends to use the Lesbian card alot to introduce people to same sex relationships easier. People tend to like females better for some reason. I mean, it's been fantasized for ages within those programs and such. The '**Exotic**' idea of having a Three-Way with two women, or even Twins- Which is Incest, by the way."

A chuckle from the large one. "Yes. Yes it is."

"Yet, they never seem to think of it as such. I guess it half turned me off on the whole idea of it. Everytime I nearly attempted it, it reminded me of that media coaxing people into liking it. I know I haven't really done a F/F

relationship past Zhai's sister and old mate, but..." Dia just shrugged his wings. "Besides, there's only so much you can do with a hole." Another chuckle. "You can lick it, finger it, stuff objects in it. After that, I'm out of ideas. If you're just going to have a fake mating tool in there somewhere, why not just use the real thing instead?"

"It does make things better."

"Especially packages as well equipped as you are." The large one blushed. "As well as the idea of multiple loads. Added pressure, knots. I don't know, I just like it better. But only if it's..." A noise in question. "I... Cannot stand human males-in the sexual sense. I have nothing against people being human and male, let alone liking another one. I just get repulsed seeing it."

"That's a bit strange."

"I know! Yet, if they're two foxes, I'm fine. Dragons? I'm down. Octopi, a little weird, but okay. Anything besides human. I can tolerate the kissing, perfectly fine with the hugging and other gestures of affection. But below the belt, I just don't want to see. Not on human, and it's a turn off to see that... 'Equipment' on something non-human."

"Is that why...?"

"Most of my males tend to have rather 'Colorful' weaponry? Yes. Because I just can-NOT stand humans. And this will go onto a misanthropy rant if I don't stop now." A few nudges, and the bear half hugged the muzzle. "So yeah... Sorry for using you and Beo as my 'Balloon Makers'." A small chuckle. "But, you won't be the last."

"So I've heard. Rumors about some lightning dragon within Fear Is The Weakness."

"Yeah... Siggy has kinda entered the stage, but nowhere's near your level yet. So, if you do get him in the shuffle, be gentle." A playful nudge from the large one. "Any other questions that come to mind?"

"Hmm... Popping?" A snout toss from the bear got him to chuckle while turning purple again.

"I honestly don't know. It feels like the session finishes to me, that's all I got." He awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck. "I mean, you can be just left there waiting for it to drain out, but that just feels like you stop just before climax to me. Almost Orgasm Denial."

"I donno, I get off on both quite well."

"Says the dragon with near infinite loads." A playful purr and another

few nudges. "You make people happy though, Dia. Including me." That made him smile brightly. "Though, I might not be able to put you into another story, due to the amount of power you tend to have, a few guest spots will be opened if you ever want to get laid." The two laughed.

"Well, you put my father into a series of his own, so I'm sure you can think something up." A lick from the pink one. "But that does half remind me..." A noise in question. "I heard Arson was in Fear/Weakness, but she didn't do much. Beo's been in a story of his own so far, and a main part of DP..." The bear sighed. "Any specific reason why? I'm just curious."

"...How much do you know about Anne?"

"Well, her first name now." They chuckled. "Other than what she is-"

"I'm not really talking about the Counterweight Arson either. I mean, they're kinda the same person, but just as much as I'm like Bartan." His head tilted and frilled ears perked. "We're... Different, but kinda the same. CW Arson and the Volratter Arson are quite different." Dia'vidd looked into the windows, spotting her from afar. "That would be the Volratter, the original one."

"Vol...Ratter?"

"A very-very-VERY long and complicated story. To sum it up into one sentence: she's a being made purely out of condensed Time and Space. Almost like a shapeshifter, she's a living weapon that had a previous Mortal life." A very confused look from those blue eyes, as they shifted back and forth between the two white beings. "I know, I know."

"What the living... **Flumbaskets** happened in Entropy's War?" The two chuckled. "But okay, that doesn't really explain much about her little screentime."

"Well... Her story is a bit complicated a kinda long, so I won't bother explaining it just yet. But... She went through alot of hardships while I was going through them myself. We were both alone at the time, both in pain. Though that pain wouldn't go away so easily, we... Didn't have to be alone."

"So, you comforted each other?" A slight nod from the polar bear. "And then...?"

"I never loved another person since the one that shattered me into pieces. I honestly didn't think I could again... She disproved that, or at least narrowed it down." A deep breath. "Arson's been through enough; she lost her first love. Lost her brother Saber-"

"Saber?" A nod from Bartan. "The fox guy I was with when I was a wyrmling?"

"Yeah, but she was only separated from him. They lost their parents very early on, maybe when she was like 8? Anne even though she lost Saber for years, while losing her own identity several times. Lost her body, her sight-" A double take interrupted the bear.

"...She's... Blind?" A solid nod in confirmation, even when the dragon looked back at her again. "Seriously? I swear she's making eye contact with people."

"Arson learned how to use some psionics, and thanks to Downe; Saber's best friend, she learned how to almost... Astral Project her vision, I guess you could say. She doesn't see with her eyes, but she can 'See' 360 degrees around her." A neck curl. "Don't feel bad for her, she technically has better vision than we do."

"But her actual eyes don't work." Dia half asked, getting another nod.

"Anyway, my point is... If she's going to be a guest star, or even put into another story... A: she's too powerful to really put anywhere. It's a wonder I'm putting Ricon in one, let alone her. And B: ...Anne has suffered enough. If I put her into a story..."

"You think she'll suffer more." The large one said sadly.

"I know she will. It's my job as a writer to torture the ones I love." A heavy exhale from Bartan, and he got a few nudges. As well as a pull to hug the dragon, and he did so.

"You make us happy in the end."

"Not always." He mumbled, getting rocked a bit by the larger one.

"But it's still worth it." The two looked each other in the eyes. "It is. Trust me." A faint nod, and the doorway opened. Seeing the white fox with a plate of onion rings walk through and give a faint wave.

"Mind if I have him before the shuffle starts?" She asked, getting a chuckle from Dia and a nod.

"Does remind me, what did you get for a number?" The dragon questioned the bear, seeing them both pull out their slips and gaze at the unmatched number. "Oh well. Another time perhaps."

"Yeah." Another quick hug, and he went back inside. Leaving Arson and Bartan to hug each other in the cool air. "Finally got some, did you?"

"Yes, there will be no stonebreaking tonight." The two chuckled, as she held up half a ring for him. "Merry Christmas."

"**Wow.**" He said surprisingly, taking it and studying it for a few moments as she chuckled. "I swear, I just *had* one of these." He ate it.

"Yeah, well. I owe you one, so."

"I don't think that's how gifts work." The bear nudged her, sharing a kiss as she set the plate on the square railing. Pulling his paw and leading him onto the iced pool. Letting him get used to his balance on it before casually skating across the smooth surface.

"Don't I get a song?" She teased, making him double take.

"You heard that? -Nevermind, you hear everything."

"I think you just called my ears big."

"Well, big in a good way." He licked one until it flicked. Almost stinging his muzzle at the force of it.

"And yes, everyone heard that. We were actually singing along for quite a bit of it. Well, those who knew the words." He chuckled.

"Fair enough." He overdramatically cleared his throat.

"If Someone Else Showed You The Way." She chuckled as the bear continued.

"Would You Take The Wheel And Steer?

It Hurts Me That You're Not Ashamed
Of What You're Doing Here

If They Jumped Off A Bridge
Would You Meet Them On The Ground?
Or Would You Try To Claim
That It Never Made A Sound?" A nuzzle from the fox.

"I was thinking about something else, actually." Arson said.

"Oh? Well, let me have another shot."

"Granted." Another tease.

"I Won't Suffer," A murr from her. "Be Broken.
Get Tired Of, Or Wasted.
Surrender To Nothing
Or Give Up What I
Started. And Stop This

From End To Beginning
A New Day Is Coming
And I Am *Fin-al-ly* Free." A small laugh from her. "Satisfied?"

"Just one more. I like listening to you." A nod as he smiled.

"Shakedown, You Make Me Break
For Goodness Sake, I Think I'm On The Edge
Of Something New With You.

Shout Out, Don't Drown The Sound
I'll Drown You Out, You'll Never Scream So Loud
As I Want To Scream With You." A nudge to keep going.

"Standing There With Your Smile Blinding
Your Eyes From Seeing
My Face As I'm Dying, To Figure Out A Girl

But She Drifts So Far Away
I'm On Her Coast
So Maybe I Should Stay
And Map Around Your World."

"Okay, last verse." He chuckled, getting a slight shove. "Do it. I Command Thee."

"You Don't Do It On Purpose
But You Make Me Shake
Now I Count The Hours
'Til You Wake
With Your Baby's Breath
Breathe Symphonies
Come On Sweet Catastrophe

Well, Maybe This Time
I Can Follow Through
I Can Feel Complete
Stop Paying Dues
Stop The Rain From Falling
Keep My Ocean Calm
This Time I Know
Nothing's Wrong

So Don't Say
'These Currents Are Still Killing Me'

And You Can't Explain
But The Wind Went And Pulled Me
Into Your Hurricane." They smiled as they shared a kiss. "Sounds like old times, doesn't it?"

"Not that old." She playfully grumbled. "But I do miss those days sometimes. No matter how hurtful they ended up."

"We kept each other alive." He mumbled, as he held her close. "Did you ever think we would make it here?" A nod from her. "I mean... Like this?"

"I expected it to be hard. And in a way... Some part of me didn't believe we never would." She looked into his brown eyes for a moment. "I just didn't listen to it."

"Because your Faith was holding onion rings." A chuckle from the fox. "But I hear you." A bit of silence as they skated a lap.

"...Did you ever listen to it?"

"From time to time. I can't help but hear it out. Like an annoying child, it screams at the top of its lungs and demands to throw in its two cents." A faint chuckle, even from him. "But Doubt is always going to be there. It's always something to keep in mind. Makes me less gullible about the world around me, but at the same time..."

A little more silence. "...How are you?" A look from Bartan that was rather calm, yet blank. "I'm fine where I am, nothing seems to change. What about you?"

"...I'm." A breath. "I'm fine." A playful shove and he half smiled. "I mean it. Seriously. Nearly every year, something bad happens. Break-ups, storms, **Summer**." He grumbled, making Anne laugh. "But this year...? 2016? Nothing. The winter was fine, not a terrible amount of snow, but not too much. The spring was late, meaning it stayed cooler than usual. The summer was probably at an all-time low. No hurricanes, droughts, Tropical Storms. No computer fails, no negative attention from something I've done..." He sighed.

"You make it sound like a bad thing." He raised an eyebrow at her. "I know, I know. Pessimist should be tattooed on your forehead."

"Which would probably save me alot of explaining." The bear grumbled. "But I just feel like something bad is going to hit. And I can't help but wonder what it's going to end up being, let alone how to prepare for it."

"And there's just no possibility of you believing that good things just can't happen to you?" She asked, but didn't get an answer. "I know, you've

dealt with it constantly. Knowing it will always get worse and worse, but... It doesn't always have to."

"I know... And I do appreciate what I have. Just... What happens when it's all taken away from us?" She took his paw, and looked directly into those brown eyes.

"Then. You Fight For It." A moment of silence. "But not a moment earlier. You will be fine, Bartan. Because my instincts, my Faith says you will be. And everyone in that house will be willing to fight for you as well, save for maybe Anton and Sig'eaal."

"Yeah, I kinda burned the bridge with Anton, and Siggy's too lazy." They chuckled.

"I heard that." The scrawny brown dragon grumbled, his head outside of the doorway. "They're getting everyone to head towards the rooms now, and for some reason wanted **Me** to tell you." Siggy snorted.

"You were right by the door!" Nalchulus grumbled from inside.

"So!?" The smaller dragon hissed, shutting it and leaving the two outside to chuckle.

"Showtime, I guess?" She teased.

"I suppose so. This'll be an interesting story to tell."

"Wait until next years." The bear tossed his snout.

Part 2 will be posted very soon.