

Somewhere Out There - My Bloody Valentine

By Dexdor

The afternoon was showered by warm rays of light, as if to attempt to calm everyone from the immediate threat that could now be seen in broad daylight. Giving the civilization a few last days of paradise before such a horrible event. One that would change the future of such a world drastically.

He should've been stressed. He should've woke up the same way as he did since that previous session they had; fallen asleep on the couch with several documents still in his paws. Restless, scrambled, anxious about figuring all this out in time. Stuck in a cluttered mess of an apartment, papers everywhere. Spread out on every surface that he could find to see how they all fit together.

But today was different. Today, the polar bear could relax with a warm cup of tea. As zen as the very sun in the sky, as he took a very long breath of relief. Picking up heavy footsteps from afar, just knowing it was for his door. Waiting for the doorbell... Ahem. Doorbell... Blinking at the door where the footsteps stopped, just wondering what was happening on the other side.

There it was, that near irritating *Ding-Dong* that was basically screaming to the bear *Time To Work!* Yet, he just couldn't be mad at it. "It's unlocked." Bartan said, rather pleasantly. Perking an ear at the deep noise in question from the other side.

"What do you mean, ***It's Unlocked?***" The voice growled from the other side, almost in disbelief until it tried the long door handle. Opening it and meeting those brown eyes with his own red ones. Thick grey scales and wings always made him look bigger than Bryce. "You realize that people could possibly still be after you-" Maverick stepped forward, onto a few sheets of paper and immediately stopped to look around.

"Eh." The white bear shrugged. "I'm Canadian. It's a hard habit to break." A neck curl from the wyrm, but a furry paw gestured him to sit on an empty couch. "Country of origin. It's an old stereotype."

"Of being what, exactly?" He half growled, not really getting much room to step as he made his way over to the furniture. "Careless?" Another grumble, taking a few sniffs in the air and trailing the scent to the tea.

"Lemon 'Relaxation' Tea. A recipe I got from Ipsum and Lorem." An eyebrow in question as the dragon attempted to get comfortable, fighting against recent wounds and nearly playing The Floor Is Lava with all the papers around.

"Lorem the... Herm-"

"If you must identify him as *that* of all things, then fine. He's far more than just a gender or condition, y'know." Bartan half growled at him, finally getting an angry response from the bear. "But yes,

Lorem grew the leaves, and Ipsum, his roommate, gave me the method." A bit of silence as those brown eyes glanced at the door. "Sorry that I snapped at you, but it's something he struggled with for all his life. It ruined so many relationships for him, to the point where he just wishes..."

"...How did you find out then?" A noise in question as the bear drank a little bit of that tea. "You've been hanging around with Bryce and that librarian, haven't you? How did you find out?"

"Well, I put it together during Bryce's BBQ, when Sebastian nearly let it slip."

"But Lorem was never mentioned during that-"

"Not in this timeline, no." Another sip as the grey wyrm just studied him. "Technically, Lorem told me himself before I went out with Bryce. But just couldn't hardly remember back then." A deep breath and he studied the larger one's red eyes. "He told you by now, didn't he?"

"...He mentioned something about Time Travel."

"Do you believe him?" The grey one didn't answer that. "No, I didn't call you over here to convince you of such."

"Then why did you call me over here?" Another sip. "Let alone, how did you get my number? Did we somehow become friends-?"

"Oh, actually... You guys have two Next Of Kin on your hospital records." A slight head tilt. "I managed to see Bryce's while he was in."

"And his Next are Zhong and Sebastian."

"Zhong and you, actually." Maverick curled his neck. "Sebastian is technically the next in line for a leadership position, and it would be best not to disturb him if the current chief was unable to carry that task. No offense, but you're kinda a loose cannon." A snort from the dragon.

"If you've seen what I have-"

"I know, I know. That's not me pointing blame or judging, it's just an observation." A bit of silence. "You get things done. Something the force is very thankful for. That me, Bryce, and Sebastian are very thankful for." Those crimson eyes trailed off into space. "Very. Thankful."

"Is that why you called me here?" A grin from Bartan. "...I don't like that look."

"Nothing bad, it's just... See all this?" He gestured towards the papers. "I figured this shitstorm out this afternoon. And this tea is really good." A near blank look. "**Really. Good.**"

"That still doesn't explain..." A deep breath of near relaxation while the bear finished the rest of the drink in a near single swig.

"Maverick. You need to get out of your house." A growl from him. "And I need to get out of here. Let's take a walk somewhere, just us."

A long stare from the large dragon as he attempted to sense any motives from the white one. Ever since Bryce got out of the hospital, him and Sebastian could barely manage to look at each other, let alone be in the same room alone for too long. Knowing something was up, and probably because of this bear. Yet, like his encounter in the plaza, Maverick couldn't read him. "...Where?"

A shrug. "That's up to you. Anywhere you wish." Another long moment of study. "Serious, all I want to do is talk and get out of here." Another long stare that was impressive for not even blinking.

"...One condition." Bartan nodded at him in agreement. "You let me search you first."

"Sure, I guess. Full strip? Or...?" A half a growl from the dragon. "You're not my enemy, Maverick. You never were." A bit of silence. "Just let me do a few things, make a list of groceries I'll need while I'm out, and you can search me before I leave. Or, hell, you can even watch me closely while I get ready. I don't care." A shrug as the white one carefully got up. Seeing the grey one do the same, and wait for the wyrm to get closer before changing rooms. Making said list while looking through the pantry and washroom connected to the bed room. One with a near perfect bedding still on it.

"...You haven't been sleeping here." A head shake from the bear. "Because of the reports?"

"I feel asleep everytime trying to make sense out of it all. Seriously, it's a damn mess."

Maverick glanced over at a few of them and half grunted at the thought of paperwork. "No wonder you want to get out. But why me out of everyone?"

"I'll explain that later, no worries." Bartan said, rather cheerfully. Almost worrying the grey wyrm. "All set?" A faint nod. "Alright, how do you want to do this?"

Another moment of study, and Maverick glanced around the bedroom. "Stand there." A solid nod from the bear as he did so. Feeling those strong grey paws start searching his legs and clothing. Detecting a few hard surfaces, but only trailing them to be buttons or zippers. Finding Bartan's wallet with identification cards and the like within, but nothing else out of the ordinary there. Though, getting a grunt from the bear when Maverick pawed at his groin. "What? Didn't think I would search there?"

"Nothing. You just pressed a little hard."

"Hard?"

"Doubt Bryce shared this with you, but our testicles are external. Kept in a small pouch between our legs, and they're very sensitive." A bit of a grumble from the dragon.

"...Show me." He nearly demanded, getting a casual shrug from the white one and watch closely as he unzipped those navy jeans. Revealing the white sheath and pouch, as well as a very small red tip. Another grumble left that grey muzzle as he nodded for Bartan to pull them back up.

"Trust me now?" No response, and the bear took a breath. "I know you have a hard time to, you're almost programmed to be that way from past experiences."

"You don't know me, bear." Maverick nearly growled, leading the way out and watch for the

furred one to follow him. Locking the door on the outside.

"Actually, I know quite a bit about you, to be honest." That time he got a full growl while the dragon lead the way. "You're cunning, intelligent, very strong-"

"Stop that." The wyrm grumbled. "I know what you're doing; you compliment others until they like you and you get in their head."

"And you don't want to be manipulated, I understand." That grey muzzle tossed at the bear's statement. "But why do you think I'm trying to manipulate you?"

"You tell me." A double take at Bartan as he noticed the white one walking a little funny. "Are you... Limping?"

"Only a little. I'll be fine." A very unsympathetic grumble left his plated throat. "Well, having you on my side would help, I suppose. But even your strengths wouldn't help me do much. The portal is closed, Maverick. It's not going to open again until we have the power to do so-"

"Something you're currently in control of." The wyrm snorted. "Maybe not in possession of, but you have..."

"The formulas and documents to structure the power grid, something your kind really needs right now. Again, I get it." A bit of a heated breath from the dragon. "You want to know what I think?" No response. "I think you left the hospital early, and returned straight home. The same place where you nearly went insane trying to track down Reza. And now you're trying to do the same thing for me. Blaming me for all the bad things that's happened lately, and trying to pin *anything* on the Outsider to back up your claims." A heavy tap on the grey shoulder got the attention of those red eyes. "You were wrong about Reza, Maverick." A growl from him. "But *I* was wrong about him too. And that feels like a hollow victory, like one that hasn't even happened at all. Considering what's literally hanging over our head." A gesture towards the meteor in the sky.

"I get it." Bartan continued. "I really do. I felt the same way, but don't let it blind you from the real threat. If you don't want to trust me, fine. I'll accept that, because I cannot force you to. But I trust you." They started walking again, but those red eyes still studied him. "Truth be told, I relied on you every outcome, Maverick. I was always relieved to see you come to our rescue."

"What do you mean 'Our'?"

"Whoever I went with that night. Be it Bryce, Lorem, Adine, Remy, even Anne if you can believe that."

"Anna?" A grey eyebrow.

"Y-yeah. Force of habit." An awkward neck rub from the bear. "Point is... I relied on you being there. I relied on one of them finding you, and confronting Reza while I distracted him... I relied on you killing him."

"And that other one?"

"Izumi? ...She was kinda new. But you do realize now how much of a mistake that was-?"

"She killed our kind-!"

"I know, Maverick. Believe me, I know. And it's not like she wanted to." A growl from the wyrm. "She was a time traveler as well. Those who died, they were originally murdered by Reza. Nearly every time but this one." Another heated breath from the large one. "The evidence against him wasn't exactly wrong. You were normally correct about your suspicions, something we all should've taken seriously much sooner than later."

Bartan looked around the many buildings while they walked down the streets. Still unable to be reminded how close they were to the ones back home. "Humans suck, Maverick. Not all of them are bad, but they are far from perfect." The two locked eyes. "Izumi was one of those good ones. -That doesn't excuse what she's done, but... Vengeance isn't the answer. Being fueled by your vindictus only leads to errors."

"Are you saying all of this is because of me?"

"...Maybe I am." A thick stare from those red eyes. "Because right now, we're all relying on my makeshift solution instead of the person who knew for sure what to do against that rock. But that doesn't mean you should be punished for this, let alone blamed for it." A breath from the white one. "Doing such is only wasting our breath and time. Regardless if you did take out your frustrations on her or not, that rock is still there. Was always still there, and in through the portal; that's this place, but 65 million years later."

The dragon was quiet for a bit while the bear continued. "I don't want to blame you. I'm tired of trying to find someone to blame for all of this, of living these same few weeks over and over again. But I don't like you blaming me either, searching for any small thing to prove that I should be locked away or sent back for whatever reason. It won't resolve your problems. So, can we please just have a day where we're not antagonists to each other?" A long silence where the grey one half frowned, taking a breath for himself. "Believe it or not, there was a time where you actually thanked me for my work and contribution towards all these events."

"What was so different?"

"Well, the big one is that Reza was guilty, and you ripped out his throat. That, and I was shot in the leg. So, I donno. Empathy maybe?" A half a chuckle from Maverick. "Say what you want, but I can't shrug off a bullet wound like you can. Even Bryce was in the hospital longer than you were, with half the piercing wounds. And not by choice either."

"He was still subject to more, until you saved him."

"We." A look at the bear. "We saved him. I couldn't have done so without you." The two studied each other for a bit, and those red eyes trailed off to the background. Walking around Bartan and leading the way elsewhere, without getting any expected question about where they were heading to. After

traveling through a smaller warn path, nearly too narrow for such a large dragon, the two came up to a rather large tree. One with spread out branches that had some rough days.

"They tore it down..." Maverick said, getting a white paw on his shoulder and the two to lock eyes once again. At least this time, the red ones seemed to be letting go of a vendetta. "There used to be a treehouse here, one that the neighborhood runners built. One we used back before me and my brother learned to fly."

"Miles, yes?" Another look from those crimson discs. "I know about him."

"How...? Bryce?"

"Anna, actually." A noise in question. "She still paid attention to your work after your breakup, y'know. And, well... You know how good she is with feelings-"

"You mean, the empathy of a rock has more?"

"Exactly. She's got the emotions of a metaphorical cactus." A head tilt from the wyrm. "A plant back in our world, was covered in thorns or sharp needles. If you try to connect with her, you're only going to regret doing so."

"Yet, you managed to."

"Well, species leverage for one. Not to mention..." A gesture to go on. "I don't show it often, but I'm a very bitter person naturally. We met eye to eye, you might say." An exhale through the grey one's muzzle. "Does that bother you?"

"No." Another breath as the dragon sat down in the soft grass. "It's just... You seem to know too much about me, and I just realized that I know nothing about you."

"What do you want to know?" A look from the dragon. "Absolutely anything, but I'll warn you; the truth can hurt."

"...What are you doing here?"

"I'm getting away from documents."

"Not-!" A loud grumble from Maverick. "Not *Here*, but our world!" Bartan chuckled at that.

"I'm getting away from humans." A noise in question. "I'll be honest, I **detest** that species. That's why I'm working so hard to divert this damn rock. In our world, the future, dragons are only a myth. And humans become the dominant species, a crappy one at that."

"So you're in our world... Your past, because you want to get away...?"

"That, and it seemed like a nice vacation."

"Aside from the murders, you mean." A shrug from the bear.

"I know, but hey, you gotta take the good with the bad."

"The good being...?"

"Dragon tail." A noise in question. "You know what I mean." A loud grumble as Maverick covered his eyes with a paw.

"I'm guessing Bryce?"

"I'm sorry, you want a list? Again, I can remind you about the truth-"

"Right. Pass." Another chuckle as the white one noticed a small blush over his grey snout. "What's your biggest flaw?"

"Flaw? We talking physical?" No response. "Because it would be that bag you groped earlier." A grunt that time as that paw covered his red eyes again. "Truth be told, you sack us once in the sac, and we're down for the count. I mean, I'm somewhat resistant to it, but far from immune."

"-Moving on."

The white one smirked a little bit before walking towards the tree. "Otherwise? ...Probably my misanthropy."

"Misanthropy?"

"It's a term that means extreme distrust and dislike against the human species. Around here, it doesn't bother me so much, due to some obvious reasons. But humans are still everywhere in your world, mostly in lore or Television shows. Back there though..." A breath as Bartan turned around and carefully sat down. "It's a different story."

"...How so?" Those brown circles looked at the dragon. "I'm hearing you out, take it or leave it." It made the bear sadly smile.

"Honestly? It affects you daily, and in multiple ways. You don't want to engage in social activity, be it in person or not. You feel trapped in a world that is being slowly destroyed by such creatures, and all you can do is just sit there and watch. Powerless to stop the complete idiocy that infects them, that affects others. Including the ones you actually give a damn about." A deep breath as the white one gazed off to the side. "It effects how you see the world, take in information, and makes me predictable. Easily manipulated when someone knows about your weakness."

"And Reza?"

"...He was a partner by force, but before anything, he was Human to me." Another breath. "I want to stress something as well, especially from what I mentioned before: there is a difference between Human and Humane. Not all of them are bad, but Mother of God, I swear it's like most of them have a piece of their brain missing." A moment of silence. "It's something I still struggle with to this day. It's complicated but..." Another breath. "I was born human."

"What?" Maverick's neck curled.

"In my first life, I was born human. And all I could think of back then was how to become something *other* than. Locked into a world where that's all there was: humans and some animals. No other species or variety to break the mold even just a little bit. It felt magicless, dull and half empty. Overpopulated, and ignored from nearly every form of community." Another deep breath while the wyrm remained quiet. "And that was before the *wonderful* events that Reza's world brought onto themselves. So, yeah... Vacation would fit very well."

"What do you mean, Onto Themselves? I swear Sebastian said that it was something else that caused..."

"It technically was a solar flare that messed everything up. Their society at that point relied so heavily on technology that it microwaved basically everything they had. But overall, it only harmed anything digital, computer based, and the power grids. Not many were really harmed by the flare itself."

"Then why is your world in ruins."

"*His* world is. Mine is... Already gone." A breath from the bear. "But mine was a lot like his: same species, and same bad habits. One being, they never let go of war."

"What do you mean?"

"You had wars here, yes? I've read about them in the library." A nod from the grey one. "What's interesting is, I've never seen a weapon that wasn't natural or had an alternate purpose since I've gotten here. Closest thing is some kind of shackles."

"That's because we don't have them."

"You don't Need them. As Anna pointed out to me already; humans really got the short end of the stick when it comes to anything natural. They have posable thumbs, and therefore rely on tools for just about everything."

"Including defense. Much like that weapon Reza was carrying around."

"The revolver, yes. It's a type of gun." A noise in question, and Bartan took hold of a nearby stick. Finding some rather smooth dirt, he began drawing a bullet for the dragon. "What you were technically shot with was a small piece of metal, one shaped with some aerodynamics. This 'Bullet' is incased with a small shell, and directly behind it, there's a type of powder that's extremely volatile."

"I'm following you." A nod from the two.

"If something strikes the back of this, that powder will ignite. Creating a great pressure very quickly, and sending that bullet straight forward at a ridiculous speed. We're talking close to 2,500 feet. Per second."

"And his weapon has multiple of these?"

"Had. And yes, a revolver normally carries six shots before needing to be reloaded. But bullets are not easy to make, let alone from scratch. So he only had so much with him."

"What does all of this have to do with his World?" The two sat down once again.

"Humans have fought wars constantly throughout their existence. Even when at peace, they made the biggest mistake of always keeping some of those weapons on hand. Too many of them. When the flare hit, it sent sparks out of nearly every outlet connected to the power grid. Setting most homes on fire, and that normally is devastating enough. Now picture warehouses full of giant bullets and bombs. Ones that could wipe out entire cities on their own."

Maverick was quiet for a few moments as the bear sighed. "Because they couldn't truly make peace among themselves, unable to really trust one another... Even if they were literally the same damn species, they ended up screwing themselves over. All that survived the explosions died from the fallout or radiation caused by them, creating endless forms of illnesses and cancers and ruining their atmosphere." A deep breath, nearly of anger from Bartan. "They. Fucked. Up, Maverick. Time and time again, they find a way to make their lives, and the lives of their kin a living hell. It's in their nature to destroy themselves."

"Then why help them? Why represent them as an Ambassador?"

"Because I stupidly think from time to time that they can change. When really, they're better off just going extinct."

"And that's why you're helping us so eagerly. Because..."

The white one gestured around their world. "Who wouldn't want to save this? Who wouldn't want to be here, even if there's an impending doom overhead? The first night I woke up in the fields by the portal and seen Remy, I thought this place was Eden." A noise in question. "Biblical garden. Think Paradise. I mean, anything besides human is better than, but..." A breath from the bear.

"You think that we deserve better."

"You're living in peace, after only three wars? Bryce often said that these murders and recent events have been the worst this place has seen. Even in the cities, outside of illness outbreaks, nothing like this happens... Izumi wanted to save this place, so badly that she did the unthinkable for someone in her position. Again, not defending her against her execution, but... She seen no other way."

"And if you think I didn't kill her, then what?" The wyrm almost growled.

"You want to know what I'm planning, is that it?" No response, but those red eyes studied the bear. "I'm planning to divert that meteor, away from here. I'm planning to help you guys clean up, send a few generators through the portal. Exchange for a form of curing cancer, then destroy that gateway."

"Destroy it?"

"Humans will only find a way to conquer this land. They may seem peaceful now, but if their

future kin start to think otherwise..." Another breath as those brown circles drifted off to the side. Towards where the portal might be in the distance. "They will only taint this place. They're an acidic species that will only destroy what they attempt to survive with. That's what they are, Maverick. That's why I don't want them here, why I argued against them sending Reza."

"Yet you couldn't convince them."

"...No. I thought I had, but they sent him before I even knew about it. By then, he was here..." A deep sigh from the bear. "I knew right from the start he would screw up. And he did so, just by arming himself."

"You're talking about when he shot me at the portal." Bartan nodded at the dragon's statement.

"If Reza didn't bring that damn gun, something he *wasn't* supposed to in the first place, he would still be alive. Those victims would still be alive, Vara would still have her father, possibly even her mother still alive. They could've been out of here by now-"

"But then we wouldn't have enough power to stop the meteor." A moment of silence, then a grin started to form over that white muzzle. One that was creeping Maverick out a little. "What?" A quiet chuckle made him half growl and whimper. "What."

"You want to know why I was *really* happy today?"

"If you keep smiling at me like that, then no." The wyrm snorted.

"Don't tell anyone just yet, but... In those documents, I found something." A noise in question. "Izumi knew about this meteor coming for a very long time, and she prepared backups. Plural; Backups, for power. Just in case there wasn't enough, or if something happened."

"What do you mean?"

"I found a hidden list with several other sources for creating enough power. Providing that A: those devices are still there, B: still functional, and C: if her instructions work..."

"Then we might actually have enough...?" A light of happiness was shown in those red eyes when the bear nodded. Like being washed with the hose of relief, getting him to sigh. "I can't believe this. You're not pulling my tail, are you?"

"I'm not. 100% series, but don't get your hopes up too quickly just yet. There are still many things that could go wrong; the big one being that a lot of these alternatives may be buried from that collapsed building."

"The one where Reza died." A solid nod from Bartan.

"I've already requested Sebastian to get a team to clean that up ASAP, but didn't get the time to explain why yet. So far, you're the only one who knows." Another breath of relief. Feeling so hopeful that the grey one actually smiled a bit. "Feels good, doesn't it?" A nod in response. "The only bad thing about this is; I can no longer use the 'We Might Not Make It Through This' line to convince people."

"Convince them of what?" A sly look from the white one, and the dragon sighed. Half rolling his eyes at the statement. "No wonder Bryce likes you." A chuckle from the smaller one.

"...Say that everything is going to be alright, what would you do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Would you change?" Maverick didn't respond, but he was thinking about it. "Stop being such a workaholic?"

"I work the way I do to get results."

"I know, I know. And you're damn good at it. Let alone, it's better than the other extreme. But..." A breath from the bear. "It takes its toll on you." Silence. "Much like how it takes its toll on Anna. It's why you guys broke up, according to her."

"...It's the truth, to be honest."

"And she works the way she does because she's finding a cure for her cancer-"

"Which is something needed in this-" The dragon stopped himself, studying the bear once again. "...*Her* Cancer...?" A faint nod from Bartan. "She never..."

"Anna didn't tell me either, Remy did. And she was not happy about that, however..." Those red eyes stared into space for several moments. "If we can get that cure, she wouldn't have to work this way. I wonder what she'll do..."

A long silence between the two as a pleasant breeze swept through the area. "Why did you invite me?" A noise in question from the furred one. "Why invite your enemy?"

"You don't honestly still think I consider you my enemy, do you?" No response. "I like you, Maverick. Even if you don't feel the same way about me. Maybe it's the dragon part itself, but... I've liked you ever since I seen you. Was almost envious of Reza that he got a more handsome bodyguard than I did-"

"Don't start with this again." The grey one grumbled, placing a paw over his eyes.

"I mean, don't get me wrong. Sebastian is pretty fine looking. He just looks more like a raptor than a dragon to me."

"A what?"

"It was a dinosaur that used to live on our planet, probably around this time period. You look more like our classic dragons: feral -as in; four legged, wings, flexible and powerful tails. Ability to breathe fire. Let alone, the big one: Intelligence."

"You're doing it again." A noise in question from the bear. "You keep trying to flatter me."

"Does that make you uncomfortable?" Only a grumble in response. "I could tell you the bad stuff

to the lore, if you like."

"It would be a nice change."

"Alright, well... One of the big things is: if they're not intelligent enough, they're very vicious and territorial. If they are smart enough, they can be rather deceptive. Dragons were often said to like treasures as well, being notoriously greedy. They either take what they want by force, or enslave another species to do it. They're also told to be wielders of powerful magic and many other supernatural abilities. Because of all this, they're often the antagonists in many human tales; the idea of the weaker species being able to rise up and defeat something that seems impossible in comparison."

"Do you like such stories?"

"I **hated** them growing up. I still do, to the point where it makes me furious." A near heated breath from Bartan. "I liked dragons, a lot. Same could be said for many anthropomorphic creatures, aside from inanimate objects-" A grumble from the grey one made the bear chuckle. "Too many syllables?"

"You lost me."

"No worries. Anthropomorphic means; giving something non-human abilities that a human would have. The big one being intelligence and self-thought." A grey eyebrow raised. "Again: humans thought they were alone in the world as the only intelligent species. It was only natural for them to think up other creatures that could possibly have such traits as well. Basically, giving them nearly the only interesting thing about humans; their minds."

"That's it? Just intelligence and the ability to grasp things easier?"

"Well, they do have one other trait that they don't really consider as such." A gesture to go on. "Humans can adapt very well to their surroundings. It takes time, but they do have the ability of adaptation towards their environment. They can be somewhat easy to kill, but if they survive, odds are they can bounce back from a lot of wounds."

"What are you saying? That Reza might still be alive?"

"Oh, no. That guy is dead as a doornail. But don't underestimate them if more come through the portal. Just saying."

"You're still avoiding the question." Maverick grumbled. "Why invite me? Why do you want to talk to me out of everyone else who would be a better listener?"

"Well, you're not doing bad at all, if that's what you're wondering. Aside from that, is me not liking you enough of a reason-?"

"No. It isn't." A pondering glare from those red eyes. "There's another reason, I can sense it. Now tell me." It made Bartan's face go a little cross, but he took a breath and nodded.

"Maverick, can I ask you a bit of a personal question?" A low growl left his grey plated throat.

"When was the last time you got a hug?" His neck curled at such an odd question.

"...What?"

"When was the last time someone hugged you? Or that you hugged them? When was the last time you were involved in some actual companionship-?"

"No." The wyrm shook his head, almost violently. "Now I see it, why Bryce and Sebastian have been acting funny. You did something to them, didn't you?"

"Kind of, more of requested something-"

"Well, my answer is No." He snorted at the bear, not expecting the light shrug from those furry shoulders.

"Fair enough, but that wasn't what I was asking." Another neck curl. "After Anna... After Miles." A growl from the dragon. "When was the last time?" No response. "I've been there, y'know. I know what it's like to shut yourself in and guard your heart-"

"What could you have possibly lost?"

"You want a list?" Bartan asked thickly, not getting an answer from those red circles. "I've lost one too. Then another following her image. Two sisters, gone not even two years apart. Both taking their own lives-"

"You haven't seen someone you love succumb to a disease-"

"My Father Did!" The bear growled back. "Maybe it wasn't one that made him a murderer, sure. But I had to take care of him for fifteen fucking years! Sit there and watch as he slowly aged backwards, unable to keep who he actually was in a single god damn moment. Constantly losing more and more of himself the longer he attempted simply Think!" Silence. "I'm not saying mine is worse, Maverick. You can't measure pain that way, but don't Dare think that these last few weeks was anything I haven't seen before!"

Bartan continued. "I know about loss. I know about depression. I know what it does to you, how it changes you. I know the pain never fades, so you do something to help forget about it. You occupy yourself just to numb the damn thing and help you forget. Tell me, how many hours of work have you put in since? How much more was that spent on your own time?"

The grey wyrm still didn't respond. Just stared at the bear, barely blinking. "What's going to happen when you prove me guilty or innocent? Who's going to be the next on your list that you'll obsess over and over, unable to rest completely because you're afraid of seeing him in your nightmares again? Who's going to be the next one? And the next one? All just to occupy yourself and relieve the torment of loss? What's going to happen that day when you're obsession and vindictive nature that this pain has turned you goes against another person you care about? What's going to happen if it turns on Bryce?"

The dragon was tense, but still didn't say anything. Trapped in a staring contest that the bear

forfeit. Taking a deep breath before getting up from the grass and started to leave, now noticing that those red eyes were not staring at him, but into space. Perhaps something else. Still, there was no movement or resistance when Bartan placed a paw on his shoulder, slowly going in to hug that broad neck and finally hearing a deep exhale from Maverick. "If you want to talk, you know where to find me. You're not alone in this, Mav. You never were." When there was no response, that white paw gave him a few taps and the bear left.

Thick purrs filled the room, as the earth dragon was muzzle deep into his work. Already tasting that orange flavor and now just tormenting the bear. Nearly getting him to hiss with every breath as that scarred maw drew out all the fluids from that weapon. Lightly pulling Bartan by the shaft around the now cleaned up apartment, from one area to the next. One room to the next, as he attempted to find that messy bedroom once again. Too enthralled in his work to just look, then again, where would the fun be in that?

The phone rang, instantly giving Bryce an idea, an opportunity for a little revenge. Pulling and pushing the whimpering bear towards the loud tones, nearly making the white one run into the stand and knock the phone over. Hearing him take a few breaths to compose himself before answering it. Nearly wearing the same grin that the drake had over his scarred muzzle. "Hello?" A thick lick across that weapon's ridges made Bartan almost hiss at such a strong wave. Really rushing and making the bear's conversation difficult. "Yeah... I can do that, sure." The tone actually got Bryce's attention, almost wondering if something was wrong, and the look on his furry muzzle said it was something serious. "Alright. I'll be there in a bit." He hung the phone up.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing terrible, Bryce. But..."

"You gotta cut the session short, I'm guessing." A bit of a shy nod, and he could tell Bartan wasn't himself. "You sure about this? I mean, I guess we could always resume later."

"I don't think this can wait. Are you okay here alone?" The brown dragon shook his head.

"I'm not comfortable being here solo. Especially if that cleaner comes back, I don't want to be blamed for painting the walls again." A half chuckle from the bear. "I can just head back home, don't worry."

"You sure? You're not going to pass out in your afterglow or something, are you?" Bartan half teased, getting dressed quickly.

"It wouldn't be the first time. But thanks for the concern, I'll be fine." The two shared a small kiss. "Besides, I already got my taste and session done. I suppose I could always try mounting you-"

"You know the rule. No more attempts until we're in the clear. Until we know we're not going to

get sacked by that meteor, then you're not getting into this tail." Another kiss. "Walk safe."

"You too."

The nights were definitely darker than he remembered. The cloudy skies mimicking a thick fog of faint mist and a snowstorm of ash. Minus the dried flakes and something burning. He could smell someone's late night snack cooking to a crisp, but couldn't tell exactly where it was from. Regardless, he knew the paths and the silhouettes nearly by heart all the way to the two black towers. The ones that made the portal.

However, that wasn't really his destination, just a form of direction. Arriving to a small crossroad near some farmlands that he's crossed a hundred times by now. Then looking down the dark left road, approaching rather cautiously as he didn't know these paths too well. "Over here." The bear heard the grey dragon's voice off to the side, into the forest.

"My eyes aren't that great in complete darkness." A bit of a grumble as Bartan heard something, then felt a large appendage tap the his side. Touching the thick armored scaled surface with plates on the bottom.

"I'll lead you." A noise in confirmation as he followed that grey tail through the woods, until he started seeing some lights in nearby caves. "Watch your step." He did so, following Maverick into the large cave. One with some furniture around. "This is often called-"

"Cave camping, I know." A look from those red eyes, ones that were almost so used to the amount of information in that furry head by now. "Sebastian actually, our first 'Date' was in here."

"Date?"

"More just a spur of the moment hangout spot. We played a card game and slept together." A bit of a grumble. "He's a rather nice blanket."

"Did I interrupt something?"

"Nothing that couldn't be picked up later, no worries."

"That would explain why you smell like semen and... Is that Fruit?" A nod with a bit of shyness from the bear. "Do I even want to know?"

"Probably not." A bit of a grumble. "At least not right now, anyway." A full one. "I'm surprised you even called me, to be honest."

The dragon sat down, looking away into the darkness that lead further down. "I wasn't going to. But..." A paw on his shoulder made those red circle look at it. "I don't have many friends, bear. Not since after..." A heavy weight and breath made Maverick lay down, expecting Bartan to take a seat on one of

the chairs. Surprising him when the white one ended up sitting down right into his plated chest. Taking one of those grey, rough paws into his own and setting it on his lap. Nearly getting the larger creature to whimper at such closeness.

"Go on. Talk." A few moments of study, and the wyrm took a deep breath. "I'm not here to judge."

"...How much do you know about that day? How much do you know about him?"

"Miles?" A nod. "He was older than you, I think." A fainter nod that time. "But not by much. Lighter color than you were as well, let alone different eye color. Yours is a dark red, while his was actually a very light blue. Almost cyan." Another deep breath, one of mourning. "He was taking medication while you were working, but the force kept you busy. So busy that you couldn't look after him that much, not that he was incapable of such a thing regardless."

"If only I did back then." A few heavy taps from that furry paw.

"Don't do that, Maverick."

"Do what?"

"Blame yourself."

"But it was my fault-"

"It was *not* your fault. It was *no one's* fault. Understand?" A moment of silence, and he nodded. "I know the rest of the event past that, how Bryce got his scars. And how you..." A deep breath nearly deflated the dragon.

"...I can still taste it from time to time, bear." He mumbled. "I spent days in the hospital, wondering if I was suddenly contaminated by doing that. And worried that Bryce was as well."

"That's why you couldn't stay there. Everytime you were wounded, you needed to get out of there because of those days?" Maverick nodded. "Go on."

"...I just couldn't get rid of it, no matter what I ate. All I could pick out was that warmth, almost hot... So I..." That paw rubbed his. "The way our fire works is a concentration of two liquids or something. When there's enough of it in one area, and it's exposed into the air, it self ignites."

"...You burned out your sense of taste, didn't you?" A faint nod. "That explains quite a bit about the stories at that BBQ Bryce had."

"About them putting that flat rock in my food? Yeah. I couldn't taste it, and well... It's not uncommon for us to eat some stones once in a while. It helps our jaw strength and digestion from time to time." A noise in confirmation. "There's also something else about that BBQ that Bryce hinted at. My breath weapon..."

"He did mention something about your aim with it. Granted, I've never seen you use it."

"That's because those openings... They're a little warped after I burned my..."

"So instead of coming out in a solid torrent, it's a wide, hard to control spray." The grey one nodded. "Something incredibly dangerous to use then. But you make up for it with your muscle."

"You could say that." A breath. "Though I can no longer literally taste him, I still can't help but be reminded of it everytime I eat. The lack of taste only reminds me of what I've done to my very bro-" Another heavy tap, this time much harder.

"You're doing it again, Maverick." A bit of a growl at the bear. "You're blaming yourself-"

"That's because I'm the one to blame."

"No, you're not."

"I killed him, bear-!"

"You chose between Bryce, your best friend, and a brother you've already lost! You Chose Correctly! That doesn't come without its burdens, but damnit you made the right call!" Bartan growled back, still holding onto the wyrm's paw rather tightly. "Blaming yourself doesn't do anything good for you, for anyone. Including Miles. Do you really think he'd want to be remembered as that? As this event?"

"...No."

"Then don't." A paw up against his grey muzzle. "I know it's hard. Fucking hard, Maverick. And it doesn't get easier, as much as you want it to, it won't get easier. But with the right thought process, it can be tolerable. The first thing you need to do is stop blaming yourself for the loss. Accept that it happened, and feel free to remember it in their honor. But Mother of God, don't you ever start living just to please them! They are gone, you can't gain Miles' approval that you're doing something right." A sigh in defeat from the dragon. "You miss him, I know. It's really hard not to. But if you drown yourself in those feelings, you'll never heal."

"And if I distract myself...?"

"You're just putting off the acceptance. Sometimes that means you need to feel sadder and just break down. There's no shame in that, Mav. But you will feel better." A long breath, and a few drops could be felt against his white neck. Rubbing that muzzle back a little bit and feeling another few droplets on the other side. "This right here, is your body's natural response to pain. It happens for a reason, Maverick. And it happens to everyone. No matter how tough or strong you are, delaying this is like ignoring a crack in a dam." Another breath that was nearly shaky. "Feel free to hug me too, I don't mind. I'm just a big old teddy bear." A bit of a chuckle.

"...You are rather soft."

"My jacket is, you mean." Bartan started taking off his tops, getting a bit of a groan from the larger one. "You don't need to be reminded of it. This way, you can't tell how much you've done. That,

and if anyone asks, I can say I slipped in a puddle or something."

"Yet, managed to get your shirt and jacket off in time?"

"Now you're poking holes into this. Don't poke holes into this." A chuckle and a very deep breath. Slowly, the wyrm started to move the bear on his back, and rest his grey head against his chest. For once since that awful event, he confided against someone who wouldn't judge the dragon. Emptying those eyes until he could no longer release such substances. Not getting a single complaint from the white mattress as those paws held him.

"...Bear?" A noise in question. "...Where do I go from here?"

"You find something."

"Something?"

"Something worth living for. But don't live for the dead." Only a faint noise in response. "I'm not going to lie, it's nearly impossible to completely heal from this, Maverick. But the weight will get lighter if you let it. You just need to find your 'Something'." Silence, but Bartan could tell he was pondering. "Maybe I shouldn't be suggesting these, but..."

"What?"

"Lorem's is his garden."

"Garden...?"

"He loves plants. It helps him relax, that, and Ipsum's tea... Damn, I love that tea." A faint chuckle. "But it's how Lorem copes with his pain. Remy enjoys his Video Games. Adine has flight, something I'm rather envious of at times."

"You're not the only one." A loud noise in question. "She's a wyvern. They have much better control of flight than our kind. We can fly easily, but..."

"It's a bit clumsy." A low growl from the grey one, making the bear chuckle a bit. "You know you were going to say it, no growling at that."

"That doesn't give you permission to do so." Maverick snorted. Taking a deep breath afterward. "...What about Bryce?"

"Well, he does actually *enjoy* drinking. Some of it is to numb the stress of your job, but he actually does enjoy doing it. He also likes working out quite a bit."

"Working out?"

"Exercising. Admiring others who do it as well. I suppose you could add sex in to that pile-" A loud groan from the dragon.

"I swear, that's all you think about."

"I'm not going to lie; it isn't. But a large percentage of it is." Bartan teased. "Point is, you don't really need to find just *one* thing. You can have multiple, as long as you find a way to enjoy yourself."

"So, distracting."

"-It's not the same, Maverick." Silence. "You'll know the difference when you start."

"How?"

"You'll feel happy." The only response was a deep breath, one of almost defeat. "Can I try something?" A noise in question. "I know you'll probably be against it-"

"No." He grumbled at the bear.

"Why not?" Another grumble that was nearly a growl. "That's a serious question, Maverick. When was the last time you've ever had something like that? With Anna?" A moment of silence, as those red eyes tried to look further away. "You know, growing up I thought I was completely Asexual."

"What?"

"It means, not attracted to anything. Basically, lacking a sex drive to begin with. Didn't help that I was surrounded by a species I didn't find attractive, but while everyone else preferred something, I was left with no feelings towards... Anything."

"What do you mean Preferred Something?"

"Remember when I said humans were stupid?"

"I don't think you've ever said that."

"You know what I mean, you." A playful shove that was probably barely felt from that grey neck. "But they have this dumb idea that they need to like an entire gender before a person."

"...What?"

"They call it Sexuality and Gender. Basically being attracted to 'Only Females' or 'Only Males'. Something I've never understood, to be honest."

"I'm not following you."

"Maverick, you're not supposed to fall in love with a Gender. You fall in love with a Person. Perhaps maybe that's all you need is to find that." A faint noise in response. "Just don't think that it's impossible to find, that's what I did."

"Yet, you seem to be getting around a lot."

"Well, I've been here for a lot longer than anyone would expect. But even before this, I ended up finding my wife through the hardships of pain." A noise in question. "It's an opened relationship, so no. I'm not being unfaithful with what I'm doing here. But rest assure that everyone here has wanted to

participate with the session, even if they felt it was a little awkward at first."

"Yet you keep pressuring me to attempt to be part of your game."

"Is that what you think?" Only a bit of a growl in response. "Maverick, I use intercourse as a means of healing. As a gift of relaxation and pleasure, not just for myself or my own pride. I offer these things because I think it's healthy for everyone here."

"Are you being serious?" The wyrm snorted.

"Very." Bartan chuckled. "When someone is interested in you, be it your body, your mind, or your personality, it makes a world of difference."

"And you only like me because I'm not human."

"Again, is that what you think?" No response. "I like you because of how reliable you are, Maverick. Though your personality could use some work, I understand why you're like this. Anyone who's been through pain would understand." A few strokes from those white paws as they started to lift the dragon's head up to see each other's eyes. Getting a bit of resistance, eventually locking. "As you've probably noticed lately, a lot of people go through pain."

"...Yeah..."

"It's not impossible to find. You just need to start searching. Just don't be desperate, no one really likes that." A bit of a grumble from the grey one. "Now, I'll ask you one more time, Maverick. If you decline this time while looking me in the eyes, I will drop it permanently." A bit of a sigh from the wyrm, knowing what it was. Yet, this time, it held uncertainty rather than annoyance. "Would you like to have a session?"

"...Do you really believe that it will help?" Maverick asked after a long silence.

"I know it will. But only if you're willing to do so. If it's forced in any way, it will only do harm." Another long silence as those red eyes trailed off, struggling with the idea of decision. "It can be scary to let yourself become vulnerable, I know it. But only for the first time."

"...Can I ask what exactly you were planning on doing?"

"Yes, you have complete control for the first session, Maverick. I'll explain anything you want me to, but it's probably better for you to experience it firsthand. However, I will not harm you in any way. If I do, you can sack me to unconsciousness or whatever you wish." A grumble from the grey one, but a breath of indecision regardless. "I can still tell you, if you want."

"...Alright. Do so."

"Fair enough. My plan is to just massage you, starting with your neck and head, then moving down once I can get you on your back." A bit of a growl as a grey paw covered his eyes. "If you keep locking yourself down like that, it won't help. From there, I was just going to help you release."

"Release what?"

"Tensions, and give you a pawjob." A grumble. "Maybe a muzzlejob." A louder one. "But again, that's up to you."

"...And nothing else?"

"Unless you want something else." No response. "Maverick, look at me." A breath and he did so. Those red circles still on the fence. "It's your decision, 100% yours. You called me out here, I'm yours for the night. If you don't wish to, that's fine."

"...And I interrupted you."

"Don't think you need to make up for that, Bryce was already satisfied by the time you called." A low grumble was left with his breath. "On a side note, my room cleaner is going to hate me." The wyrm exhaled loudly, almost rolling his eyes. "We could just lay here for the night, but I can't feel my legs." A glance downwards. "You're rather heavy, but I like that." That time a full snout toss as the dragon got up allowing Bartan to do the same.

A look around the dim cave lights and Maverick just couldn't completely decide. Getting an empathetic paw on his shoulder, causing the two to lock eyes again. Another deep breath, and the wyrm gave the hardest nod he's ever done in his life. Laying down on his belly and near submitting himself towards the bear.

His heartbeat increased as the dragon carefully listened to what the bear was doing. Like waiting to be executed by those soft paws, releasing a shaky exhale when they came close to his closed eyes. Touching his muzzle and starting at the bridge of that snout. "Relax. It will only be harder if you don't relax."

A faint nod and another deep breath, then another as those paws went to work. Softly stroking between and around his eyes, those black dulled claws lightly digging into his scales. As if scrubbing the hardened shell that built up over so many years. But Maverick was finally tired of the self-inflicted torment, not even recognizing it as such until the bear stated. He was tired, and willing to move past it. Even if it meant making his own life vulnerable.

The wyrm concentrated hard on two things; his own breathing, and every little white fiber he could place over his head. Making those hardened scales click loudly several times as shivers ran down his spine. Studying those movements flowing from the center of his head and part outwards in circles. Trying to move with the design of the scales while nearly cleaning them off all the grime the large one couldn't get himself.

For several minutes, that's all it was. Once in a while moving down the side of Maverick's face, but nothing provocative or arousing. Just relaxation, enough for him to start letting go completely and faintly purr at the gentle movements. Moving further and further back towards his neck.

But Bartan was also doing his own studies on the dragon while pawing at those morphing scales. Ones that seemed rather identical to the spineful manes he was used to on dragons, but cut very short

and almost hardened. Yet, they looked naturally like this; not quite horn density nor sharp, but solid enough to prevent much movement.

That was to say nothing about the markings. Dozens upon dozens all across the wyrm's face and neck, each possibly telling a tale or a struggle. Be it in youth or just recently. One specifically that looked rather recently, possibly getting nicked by a stray bullet and giving the bear a look from the inside. Reminding him almost of bark from a tree; made in layers.

Still now was not the time for the white one to think of himself. Instead, continuing his work around those smaller 'horns' that made up the dragon's mane. Though, he started to see something, time and time again. Eventually stopping and getting up towards the table. "One sec." He said, getting the grey one's attention as Bartan found a small plastic knife. "Are you okay with me using this?"

"What for?"

"There's a lot of dirt and grime on the back of your neck, between your scales. Odds are just something you can't reach in the shower." A bit of a grumble. "I can't do you any harm with this. I even think your eyelids are too thick against this type of 'weapon', if you can call it that. But it's entirely up to you." A moment of study from those red eyes and they closed. Laying that grey head back down on the smooth stone floor.

Once again, a sign of trust that made the bear smile. Returning to his spot and cleaning those scales to the best of his ability, let alone in the low light. Breathing new life into scales that have been smothered for so long. Brushing off what he could, but at least loosening what has been stuck there for some time. Getting up once again to find a metal bowl, then look around for a moment. "Is there running water nearby?"

Maverick looked at him for a moment, then sniffed the air a bit. "Should be some over there, but watch your step." A nod from the bear as he started to move forward carefully. "Would you rather me do it?"

"I'll be okay." The grey one watched him closely from afar, just now noticing how much that white coat seemed to stick out. Even when he was almost completely out of the wyrm's field of vision. Soon completely returning and holding the bowl over the fire for a bit.

"...Why are you white?"

"Polar bear. Technically, our fur is more Clear than white, but that always made me feel a little naked." Bartan joked. "Really, it shows the skin underneath a little too much, so I had the fur dyed white to make sure it stays this way. Otherwise, I would constantly look like a mess." He returned to the dragon, while getting his shirt. Soaking a part of it and cleaning off Maverick's neck of the dirt.

"Yet, white is so easily seen around here. How would you hunt?"

"Around here, yes. But where my species originated from; the far northern areas where there's a lot of snow, everything is white. And I don't hunt often. I've got nothing against eating animals, but I don't like hurting them."

"Why?"

"Because I respect them more than I do humans. They symbolize what I wanted to be when I was stuck in that life." The large one went quiet, not really understanding what he meant by a second life, yet he didn't feel right asking about it just yet. "Is it warm enough?"

"...Yes."

"I don't want you getting ill, is all." A faint mumble from the dragon was the only response as the bear continued washing the back of his neck. Massaging many of the tougher spots in the meantime, and once again getting the larger one to purr at the rhythm of the strokes. Even doing so for a few minutes after he was completely cleaned, slowly easing to a stop before speaking. "Are you content with me moving on, Maverick?"

Once again, the wyrm felt stuck with his words. Still unsure if he really wanted to do this, let alone with someone he nearly considered an enemy a few days prior. Yet, he couldn't look at those brown eyes, worried that perhaps the white one would see the fear Maverick was battling with. *Fear? Is that really what this is?* He snorted at the very thought, likely sending mixed signals in the process. Regardless, he forced his heavy grey body up. Almost glancing at the bear's direction before finally caving in, carefully laying on his back and remaining stoic. "...I'm... Trusting you."

"Thank you." Bartan said, rather sincerely. Carefully standing over those wings and taking one of his larger forepaws. Massaging the near aching pads that have been dismissed of such weight for the time being. Then moving down the arm and shoulder, across the chest to the other paw. Sitting on that armored underside and getting an uncomfortable growl from the dragon, but no resistance. "If you're uncomfortable, tell me."

"...I'm uncomfortable." The wyrm grumbled, feeling the white one get up almost immediately. "N-not really your position, just..." A heavy breath from Maverick. "Continue." A moment of study, and Bartan sat back down. "...A little lower." A noise in confirmation, and he moved down a bit. Making out a growing shaft underneath him, as well as a bit of an uncomfortable grunt.

"Here okay?" Not really a response, but no resistance either, so the bear continued. Working the stress out of those paws for a bit before going back up the shoulder and chest. Starting to move down a bit, there wasn't much he could do against these plates. They didn't even look that dirty, really. Aside from the usual before a bath, though many marks were still visible. He began to wonder just how many conflicts has this dragon been through.

Regardless, Bartan made his way lower, carefully stepping around the hind legs and wings once again while getting quite the view of the thick tower. Though, not paying attention to it just yet, instead going around the dragon's haunches. Another area that seemed rather neglected, granted, within reason. Soaking that shirt once again and washing the areas, but not without getting a couple of uncomfortable grumbles. "I might as well do it while I'm here."

"If you wanted to just bathe me, I would've chosen a different location." Maverick snorted.

"Is there a hot spring nearby?" A whimper left the dragon's throat at the serious question. "Or can you make one easily? This water is getting colder by the minute."

"You're joking." The grey one almost growled. "Just do what you want to do and get it over with."

"This session is not about me, Maverick. It's about you." Bartan bluntly replied. Hearing the dragon sigh heavily after several moments before getting up.

"This is a mistake." The wyrm mumbled, making the bear's heart sink a little bit. Though wondering why he was moving away from the exit. "...Grab a torch. You'll need it." A moment of staring, mostly in surprise, but he did so. Gathering his clothing at the same time and following the dragon deeper into the caves. Starting to hear a lot of running waters after several minutes. "We used to come down here when we were wyrmlings."

"You and Miles?" A noise in confirmation.

"Along with our parents from time to time. It's a little shallow, but..." Another deep breath and the dragon started climbing into the heated pond. Getting a few grunts as his body got used to the water, and hear the white one do the same. Only making Maverick more uncomfortable as he started to lay down, feeling the bear go straight to work. "...I was expecting this to be different, honestly."

"How so?"

"By the way you talk about our species and..."

"You thought I was going to make this about me?" No response, other than the deep breaths of relaxation while the warming waters did its work. "I've seen enough of it, to be truthful. Enough so that it no longer incapacitates me when someone flashes their package. I'm not saying that it doesn't excite me, but it won't distract me from a request. And right now, you need my focus, not the other way around."

"You make it sound like you've been waiting for this for a while."

"I know pain when I see it."

"Is that why you're helping me?" The grey one almost grumbled. "Pity?"

"More like empathy, it's a wonder you don't understand that yet." Another snort. "I do it because when I was going through it, I wish I had someone to do it with me. Eventually I did find someone, but at the same time, she was broken as well."

"...I'm guessing your mate?"

"Wife, yes. Mate is just a vague term, especially when I have three of them." A loud noise in question, but that didn't distract the bear's sights. Still focused on those haunches and tail. Scrubbing those paws and unintentionally tickling them from time to time. "Opened relationship. Just making up our own family for those who want to join. No rules, other than respect and be decently humane towards others. Granted, that shouldn't be anything than the social norm, one would think."

"That doesn't really sound like a family-" A whimpering growl when that cloth skimmed over his tailhole.

"What does a family sound like?" No response. "I never really had a good example of one, to be honest. So I suppose that's why my own version of it is so different."

"It just seems odd, is all."

"You mean the multiple mates thing?" A bit of a mumble from the dragon. "That's what usually makes other feel awkward. I just never understood why."

"Why what, exactly?"

"Why stay with just one? From what I seen here, you don't have any discrimination towards sex or gender, which is good. Aside from a few exceptions where people mistake it for a Condition." Bartan said that last part a bit thickly, but took a breath to compose. "Yet, I still don't see others having multiple mates. It doesn't seem to be frowned upon at least, but then again, it doesn't look any different."

"What do you mean?"

"An opened relationship is more like having Friends With Benefits."

"...What?"

"Another human phrase apparently. Means there's no issues or hard feelings when it comes to sexual relationships-" A grunt from Maverick. "with friends. Just appreciate them a little bit more, that's all it really takes. Yet people find it so awkward, I never understood why."

"It's just... Unheard of."

"You've never thought about getting under Bryce's tail?" Another loud grunt that time, and a paw over his red eyes. "Or stroking off Sebastian, maybe giving Zhong a little tongue-?"

"Stop!" He growled, getting the bear to chuckle. "They're co-workers. That's how we keep things civil in this world."

"You say that, and I can understand where you're coming from. But humans do the same thing, and well... Besides, Zhong isn't on the force-" Another loud growl. "And he does appreciate a little tongue-" That grey tail gave the bear a swat, pushing him into the hotsprings with a loud splash. A few moments later he resurfaced. "Point taken."

"It better be." Maverick snorted.

"Side note, looks like I'm done with this." He threw his shirt outside the pool and moved in closer towards that lower weapon. Putting a gentle paw over the red flesh and nearly getting a whimper from the larger one. "Are you comfortable with me continuing?"

"No." The wyrm grumbled.

"No one is their first time." Bartan chuckled, but he got the motion to continue anyways. Finally taking the time to study it as the base pierced above the water naturally. A little bit pink at the tip, and gradually getting darker as it descended. Getting to a deep red by the time the flare folded outwards into a dozen fleshy spines, with its own trail on the bottom half.

By the time it reached the protective slit, the weapon was nearly black. Able to clearly see the ridges along its base from the faint shine the water and light gave. Taking the time to study it with his own furry paws while the dragon composed himself. "Relax. It's quite lovely."

"You say that about all the dragons, I'm sure."

"You're not wrong, but that doesn't undermine the statement. You've got quite the tool here, it's a wonder you don't show it off more." A growl from him this time. "I suppose when it somewhat looks like everyone else's-"

"I-I! Never-I!" A flat out hiss from Maverick made the bear chuckle. "You're not making this easy!"

"I think I'm making this rather easy by doing all the work. You're the one making it hard." A growl from the larger one. "*Very Hard.*" A louder growl and another chuckle. "Okay, that one was all me, I admit it."

"Keep that up, and you're getting the tail again."

"Alright, alright. I believe I've tormented you enough." A grumble from the grey one. "But seriously, try to relax. No paws over eyes, but you don't need to make eye contact. Close them if you like, and just relax." Another deep breath and Maverick did so, still feeling those wet paws slip up and down his member slowly. Taking great care of where their claws tread, while washing out the spines that guarded such a shaft.

It didn't take long for those waves to start fluttering his plated chest. Forcing it to expand in deep breaths and making the dragon purr louder over time. Nearly following the movements of those paws as they slid up and down the red walls. In sync at first, but then started to separate to their own paths, swaying the dragon's haunches and shoulders to the motions.

It was all rather pleasant, far from what the dragon expected from such a creature. Perhaps it was the time spent here that made the white one so comfortable and willing to do such a thing. Yet, even though they just started, it felt like a wonderful experience for Maverick's body to have. One that was completely new, nearly zenful.

That was until that muzzle added a few kisses, making the wyrm feel a bit awkward again. Then the tongue added to the massage, doing its own form of cleaning around the thick flesh. Adding whimpers into his purrs until the larger one was used to it. Though, the longer the bear did it, the better it seemed to feel. However, he couldn't help but think that maybe the spring's temperatures were masking some of the movements. The dragon could swear he was feeling fangs, almost gnawing at the larger points as it was climbing up.

A few licks at the tip got a pleasant growl from the larger one, as he felt those teeth again.

Making almost a yelp and opening his red eyes to see the bear begin taking the weapon into his maw. Staying completely still as the word Muzzlejob started echoing through his head, now making sense what the white one was talking about. But he also claimed that it wouldn't hurt, so Maverick kept his trust in the bear.

An experience that he did not soon regret, as the sudden motions started to amplify those waves. Escalating those purrs into deep growls of bliss, as that maw and tongue went to work. Slaloming between the bottom column of thorns, tickling where it was the most sensitive and getting the tool to throb a bit at such attention. Barely even noticing the very faint clawing of those fangs, let alone identifying it as a danger.

Not even when Bartan started twisting his head with the motions. Moving up and down the upper half of the weapon and let its own forms of defense scrape against his inner maw. Giving off its own pleasure from the ridged style of the roof, letting the grey one start to sing into the faint light. At first able to keep it inside the dragon's mouth and barely overcome the sounds of the water, but the more the bear kept at it, the harder it was getting.

It was when those paws started stroking his inner thighs, just outside that weapon's protection, that Maverick couldn't contain himself without a struggle. His lips and muzzle arcing upwards like he was angry, breaking that vocal barrier that he made and allowing his noise to seep through. Faint whines at first, growing into louder and louder whimpers of bliss.

It was when Bartan started to move with his work that concerned the wyrm, moving towards the larger one's side and being cautious about his wings that were still under the waters. A better position for that muzzle to take more of that weapon easier, feeling that flare start to widen the bear's throat the deeper it went. Whimpers turned into yelps as he felt those furry lips climb down the shaft further and further.

Yet, the feeling was unreal. Those fangs growing tighter and tighter against his flesh, making the tool throb with excitement and release a few squirts down that throat. As if to warn the white one not to go any further, not to get too close. But he didn't listen, knowing what was just out of reach of those lips. Keeping with the progression he just obtained for a few minutes before venturing down further and finally hitting the first set of ridges. Letting the dragon squirm a little bit as they threw oversensitive waves into his titanic body. That tail thrashing through the waters and a few claws into the bear's back, out of instinct than anything.

Within moments, those yelps morphed into hisses and growls. Racing the wyrm's heart in his chest, being fueled by an energy he's rarely felt. Especially like this. A lot of it starting to concentrate on his lower region, just below where those paws were massaging. Feeling it start to build up, greatly when Bartan touched those ridges towards the base of the weapon.

Jolts of white were constantly leaking from its tip, as the tower washed the back of the bear's throat. The throbs and jerks trying to get the rhythm to move faster, along with the dragon's breaths. His grey paws, both fore and back, clawing or raking as those haunches attempted to wiggle free. Almost thrusting into the white muzzle, forcing him to take more and more of that shaft. Reaching a new ridge

every several thrusts, that flare widening the bear's throat little by little.

But Bartan chose his breaths carefully. Getting close to take the entire weapon, but knew it would likely be impossible without a safety net of sorts. Still, that doesn't mean he couldn't attempt the third ridge out of five, slowly moving out the red weapon from his maw. Regardless of the resisting paws on his furry back that were in denial. Almost begging for just a bit more attention to the area.

A full pull out and a few licks at its tip while those furry paws stroked it a bit. Washing it once more and snapping his Ursidae jaws a bit before parting them once again over that flare. Nearly getting a whimper of thanks from the wyrm as that tongue slowly washed the top side of his tool. Once in a while pulling out the liquids within and using it to grease up the upper half.

But Maverick was getting restless of the teasing, the bear could tell. Taking more in and reaching down towards those ridges once again, just touching them with his lips and sending the larger one into squirms. Reaching past them towards the second set caused the tower to jerk and throb against his jaws. Then a bit further towards the last set-

However, the grey paws couldn't sit still anylonger. Pushing Bartan forward to forcing him to take the third and fourth at once, as well as the flare into his throat. Nearly locking it in there as that energy below those furry paws rose and rose. The fleshy rod thickened inside the bear's mouth, pressing up against his fangs as Maverick roared into the air. Just as that first torrent passed through the length and the white one held his breath.

The pressure was almost tear-jerking, spraying directly into the furry one's throat and stomach. All while those scaly paws were keeping him in place. It only took a few for him to start to feel full, and if he was anything like Bryce, there was a lot more to go. Thinking quickly, Bartan pressed into the dragon's tailhole with a couple of his fingers. Making the wyrm squirm a bit, enough for the bear to withdraw from the pin with a few coughs.

A thick stream of white ropes shot through the air above them, reaching past the dragon's head and even out into the darkness past the pond's limits. Still helping the dragon through such a forceful orgasm as it caused his entire body to move with it. Those haunches and tail thrashing wildly with every jerk of the weapon. Wings, chest, neck, and shoulders bracing backwards with every torrent that splashed into the waters. Splashed onto his chest. Then finally his belly.

Though the pressure was fading, the substances were still flowing through at an impressive rate. Even after stroking through the shaft and ridges, more and more of the white seed was still pumping out. Eventually provoking the bear to try it anyway, regardless of his statement before. Attaching his muzzle against the tip once again and feel it quickly fill up with an odd taste.

When he had enough, Bartan let go and just focused on getting the dragon satisfied. The flow of white eventually coming to a steady stream as the grey one caught his breath. Still getting twitches and sparks of energy that was still left over as the bear climbed up to meet his muzzle. A few stripes just barely missing that opened maw as the two touched noses.

He was too tired to fight against it though, nearly dazed but happy enough to share that kiss.

Until he felt that tongue for the first time, nearly covered in a layer of slime. It wasn't until a large glob of near pudding like density that everything clicked it. Making him growl loudly in question before tossing the bear off him and into the waters.

Against his body's shaky warnings, Maverick attempted to get up and spit out the strange substance. Washing it from his mouth, only feel like he got more of it that was probably floating through the springs. Nearly roaring in displeasure. "**What The Hell, Bear!?**" Yet, Bartan was only laughing. "Did you *just*...!?"

"Bryce acted about the same way." Half a gag from the dragon. "Be thankful you can't taste it-" A loud growl that time.

"I can still feel it!" Maverick tried to wash his tongue off. "I think it's still moving..."

"You'll live."

"Likely, but that's what's regrettable about this." He snorted at the chuckling bear. "You didn't say you were going to do that!"

"I know, I know. That one was for me, I admit that. But otherwise, you enjoyed yourself, yes?" A bit of a growl from the larger one as Bartan came close. Putting a paw on his shoulder. "How do you feel? Aside from slightly pissed at the Snowballing."

"Snowballing?" He half grumbled at the white one, but understood what he meant. Taking a breath to study himself and shake off the horrible idea of such a thing. Let alone, the idea of Bartan doing it with his Boss. "...A little tired, but..."

"Lighter?" Another moment of study and he nodded after a breath. "It's just the beginning too. You can recover from this, Maverick. You just need to believe you can."

"As well as find *something*..." A nod as the bear gently pulled him back into the heated waters. Only getting a snout toss for resistance. "You realize you just polluted this place."

"We'll clean it in the morning. It tends to harden up and move towards the edges in clumps, much easier to deal with." A loud groan as a grey paw covered the dragon's eyes.

"You say that as if you did this before." A shrug from the bear, but an interruption before he could speak. "Don't tell me, I'm better off not knowing what I'm bathing in."

"Wasn't this timeline anyway. So, we're only bathing in your own release."

"That doesn't make me feel better." Maverick snorted, not expecting the white one to cuddle up next to him. Over his wing while the wyrm was on his back once again. Taking a deep breath before wrapping an arm around the wet fur and just hold him back. That exhaustion soon starting to fog his mind, but pleasantly. Making the wyrm almost feel lighter... Weightless...

Weightless And Loved.