

Somewhere Out There Act 14 - Here Without You

By Bartan Tirix

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It was a series of purrs, both his and hers that slowly got him awake. The warmth of the fires and that cool scent of the ocean created one of the most relaxing moments in his life. So much, that it felt like time stood still within that cave.

The black one was sleeping on his back, while the dark purple was using his neck and chest as a pillow. He didn't mind though, in fact it got him to smile. To wake up with her in his arms. A few rubs on his belly told him that she was awake. Spreading what liquids were still wet from the night's session. "M'morning..." He mumbled, slightly stretching and getting her to do a bit of the same. Slowly nuzzling her head and muzzle to his body until they were nose to nose. Greeting him with a soft kiss. "My Elexus..."

She smiled brightly at that. "You're too sweet." Another kiss, deeper than the last. One that eventually broke out and got the female to start licking outside his muzzle. "Last night was wonderful." She said, resting on his body while he stroked the back of her neck. Searching for the affectionate wounds.

"That it was. Possibly the best I've ever had."

"I know it was mine. You're much better than other males." Another nuzzle.

"Experience." He chuckled. "How long have you been awake?"

She stopped her purrs at that. "...How did you know?"

"Your paws. You can hardly keep them to yourself when you're thinking." He gave her a lick on the top of her head. Followed by a few more on her spines.

"My paws?" She couldn't help but notice that she was doing it again. "You're rather... Observant. I didn't even notice."

"I pay attention to things I'm interested in." It made her smile. "You tend to do that when you're thinking alot." It got the purple one to stop and pet his side, under the wing. "What were you thinking about, Nitaka?"

"...Just things." He stopped prying, giving her a soft pet on the jaw to tell her that she didn't need to answer. That in turn lead to more purring, but very soft. "Shroud?" He grunted a sleepy noise in question. "How many mates have you had?"

"I never really had one." He yawned. "I've had a few relationships with others, but never stayed long enough to find a mate."

"...So, are you planning to move on?"

The question stopped him for a moment. "I'm not sure yet. Moving out here is far enough really. I barely get any instructors anymore, so I don't really have a reason to leave." He gave her another lick. "If anything, I have a reason to stay."

"You are..." She smiled again, unable to finish her sentence. "Shroud?" Another noise in question. "...Can I tell you a secret?"

"You can tell me anything. Depending on how hard you're going to squeeze me if I let it out is based on how protected it is." Another chuckle.

"...I was only attracted to your color when I first saw you."

"I figured that." Another yawn.

"But after getting to know you..."

"You learn there's nothing to be afraid of..." He said quietly. Getting her ear to flicker.

"...My point is... There's someone else that I... Wanted to be mated to." She swallowed. "And... I don't think it's going to happen."

"Someone else?"

"...Because of that... Will you be my mate, Shroud?" They looked into each other's eyes for a few moments.

"Second place, huh?" He asked, breaking the silence. Though it hurt her for him to say that. He whispered to himself again. "When two rivers..." Then after a bit of silence. "...Yes. I will." That brought her smile back, and once again they kissed. A long tender one that made her lay on top of him. After she broke it, once again licking the scales around his black face. "Can I ask...?"

Her aqua blue eyes avoided his purple ones. "...It's..."

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The dim light only added to the warm comfort of his mattress, as if always knowing that this single bed was always meant for two. Perhaps more one, and one half. One half and a living comforter? Something along those lines. Though it was going to make a bit of a dent in his wallet, it was turning one of his worst weeks into his best. Feeling those white paws just stroke and relax his full body, finally done with those urges. At least for tonight, and nearly drifting asleep with those purrful hums. "I think about you all the time, but I don't need the same." It slowly whispered. "It's lonely where you are, come back

down... And I won't tell 'em your name."

A long silence as the two drifted in a sea of darkness and flickering candle light. The deep breaths of slumber being the only noise for miles, until... "Another one." It made the bear smile, nuzzling the small wyrm a bit. "Please?"

"Here I thought I finally got you asleep."

"Almost..." A blue paw found and lightly squeezed a furred one. "I just..." A noise in question. "I like the sound of your voice. When you sing." A chuckle.

"You should hear Zhong sing then."

"The store clerk?" A noise in confirmation.

"He's got a beautiful voice. Be it singing or, well... 'Singing', if you know what I mean." A small laugh from Lorem.

"I should be more surprised, but..."

"I do seem to get around."

"...Where did you learn to sing like that?"

"Years of practice." The white one smiled, nuzzling against that scaled neck and feeling that jaw curl up into one as well. "Music was a very big thing in my younger life. It helped me survive, and with it, I used to sing quite often."

"It's not that big around here. At least, not traditionally."

"I know." That white paw studied the blue one slightly. Making out those furred claws and smaller hands. "Not everyone in your world has these, something I've noticed when living with two... Well, let's call them more Primitive hands." A chuckle from the two. "Back where I came from... Everyone was able to learn a musical instrument, under the correct circumstances."

"And you?" A deep breath from that white muzzle.

"...Was too poor to really afford one. So I learned to use what I had instead."

"You learned it well then." That made the furred one smile, getting a few licks on the side of his muzzle.

"Alright, alright. But try to sleep to this one, okay? It's not good to keep your body up after such an activity." A slow nod as the bear got a small nearby drink first. Licking that blue neck a bit before starting. "A hundred days to make me older, since the last time that I saw your pretty face." A deep breath. "A thousand lives to make me colder, and I don't think I can look at this the same... With all the miles that separate, they disappear now when I'm dreaming of your face."

The white one continued a little softer. "I'm here without you, lovely. Though you're still on my

lonely mind. I think about you, lovely, and I dream about you all the time... I'm here without you, lovely. But you're still with me in my dreams. And tonight, love, it's only you and me..."

The brown runner and drake walked down the hall, one after another. Remaining quiet about the situation, as if it almost felt wrong to really question the wyrmling so early. Though Sebastian's eyes were a little cautious when looking through the makeshift cell they made for the young one, seeing the lights completely off inside, as he carefully opened the door. The earth dragon ready for anything to scamper out, but nothing did.

A reach over to the lightswitch, and the two easily spotted the black one lying in bed still. Grumbling at the light, and the two larger ones spotted a chair moved just under the switch. But nothing else moved, including Harrak. As the two adults took a breath, they walked in and adjusted the table. Getting out several files and a recorder before being put slightly on guard when the black one started to shift a bit. "Harrak." The raptor started, not getting a response.

"Look... Buddy. I know it's hard to go through a loss like this, but we've already given you two days to grieve." Bryce said, a bit sadly. "This needs to be done." Another shift from the smaller one put a slight smile on that scarred muzzle, then a bit on edge when Harrak fell off the bed on purpose. Walking slowly towards the closed door before Seb started to get up. Watching the wyrmling climb up the chair and turn the lightswitch back off before turning about and heading back for the bed.

"Harrak..." The beige one started, sharing a look with the chief in the darkness before turning the light back on. Making the smaller one stop, turn around, and head back towards it. This time getting that light brown paw to guard the switch. "We need to do this, regardless of how you feel." No response, nor eye contact. A slight glance over at the tray of old food got Sebastian to sigh. "You haven't been eating still."

Again, silence for a long time. "...We do it my way." The small one muttered, almost thickly. Still not looking up from the floor. "Lights off. Or else you can just throw me into whatever dark hole that makes you feel safe." The two larger ones shared a sad look.

"Buddy... We can't take risks with-"

"I. Am. Helpless. If I could do something by now, I wouldn't **be here**." Harrak growled, slowly looking towards the cold food. "I've been making sure of it." The two shared another look. "Please... I just don't want to be seen."

"...We have your word that you're not going to harm anyone or anything?" A slow nod from the black one as Bryce studied him. "Look at me." He said a bit thicker, getting an almost hateful stare from those purple eyes. But still, the wyrmling nodded. The runner soon getting the signal to leave the lights off. At least they were getting enough light from the hallway to read the files.

"Let's start with your name." Sebastian said. "Your real one."

"...I don't remember it."

"What do you mean you don't-"

"Information. Gets. Lost Sometimes." The black one growled at the raptor. "This isn't something uncommon that happens when I die. I don't remember my real name right now, and even if I did, what would it matter? Not like you would know the difference."

"He wouldn't be in anyone's system if he was an Outsider." Bryce said to the beige one.

"That is, if this is the first town he's been to." A growl from the little one.

"What difference would it make if I were lying to you about the answer? About any of these questions? You're the one asking me, and I have no reason to lie-"

"That we know of-"

"Seb." Bryce interrupted, leaving him to take a breath. "I'm just going to assume that you're telling us the complete truth from here on out, deal? If you can trust us in the same way, we promise to give you a fair trial... Which, honestly, should only give you a slap on the paw at your age."

"For the thefts, yes. But for attempted murder?"

"And what does the large one get for nearly killing a child?" The wyrmling snapped.

"Maverick only went so far because he knew you could come back from the dead." Sebastian growled back. "Even then, he warned you not to try anything."

"Enough you two." The drake grumbled. "But let's start with that; the whole not staying dead thing." An irritated sigh from the little one. "I bet you get asked this a lot."

"Yes." The smaller one put a paw over his eyes. "It's been doing it for as long as I can remember anymore. I die, three hours later, I come back. Often healing a lot of the damage I took during the previous life, but not always."

"Which would explain your wings." The raptor added. "They looked broken on that night we caught you."

"Yeah..." Harrak muttered, looking back at the smaller ones and lightly flapping them without a flinch. "They're usually the first things to break, it's a wonder they're not brittle."

"So what does this Not-Dead thing make you? A ghost?" A shrug at Bryce's question.

"Some people call me that. But it doesn't fit the term."

"Then what are you?"

"...Immortal." The smaller one muttered sadly. Taking a deep breath as his stomach growled loudly and looking over at the food before caving in and eating some of it.

"Want me to warm that up for you?" The drake offered, seeing HARRAK pause and stare at the tray for a few moments.

"...I suppose I can't do it myself at the moment..." A breath. "No. No, it's fine cold."

"You sure?" A small knock on the window behind them got all their attentions, seeing the blue female point to the chief and motion towards the front door towards the building. "I think I have a visitor, you okay staying in here alone for a bit?" He asked the runner, seeing him nod almost immediately. "Try not to tear his head off, he might forget something."

"He's known about it for not even ten minutes, and already he's cracking jokes about it." The smaller one snorted as Bryce started to leave.

"That's our chief for you."

The drake left the room, only to see the bear coming down the same hallway with a box. Though it brought the brown one a smile, it also worried him to be so close to the case. Regardless, the white one knew everything about it by now, it was still the thoughts of danger that got to him. "Enjoying your time without me?" BARTAN teased him.

"More like surviving it." He playfully snorted in response, giving the bear a big hug after the box was set down. Driving that muzzle into the furry places and taking deep breaths, barely grabbing that wonderful scent and making him purr.

"Careful big guy. You still have work to do today."

"I know, but damn do I ever miss you." Another deep inhale. "And this smell... Seriously, I hope this is permanent after this."

"I hope not, you're already starting to swell." A double take from the drake, then at the bear's field of vision from the hug. "I'm guessing, anyway."

"Well, then you know me too well." Bryce purred. Pulling him a little closer and into the field of view from the window. "What's in the box?"

"Some lunch for you and Mavs. Cooked by the greatest in the town."

"...Adine?"

"-Yes." They shared a chuckle. "We both know-"

The drake left the room, getting the runner and wyrmling to almost stare at each other for a bit in silence. "Where have you been living all this time?"

"...In the forest. I found a small cave that seemed abandoned. Maybe it was some kind of camp, I

don't know..." Harrak shifted the blankets a bit to get more comfortable.

"This is the same place where you were keeping the yellow one?" No response. "We never got her name-" Sebastian looked up from the files to find the wyrmling staring furiously out the window. The thin spines that made up his mane slowly rising up, those ears flat against his head, and his breathing morphing into thick growls.

"...Adine?"

"-Yes." They shared a chuckle. "We both know-" A sudden thump surprised the two as the black dragon attached himself to the window, clawing at it furiously and cursing several times. All until the beige one tackled him down out of view once again, causing the bear and Bryce to just stare at where they landed. "Heyyy Little-Buddy."

A double take from the earth dragon that time. "You know him!?"

"Yeah... I was thinking it couldn't be him, but what you told me yesterday really seemed to fit." A study from those golden discs. "He, uh..." Once again, the black one appeared behind the window, clawing at it again and hissing drastically. Barely seeing Sebby come up from behind, this time with the blanket and once again pinning the wyrmling to the floor. "He might not like me too well."

"That's an understatement. Seriously, I think he takes the cake already for being the one around here that hates you the most." The two continued their conversation without looking up from where Sebastian and Harrak landed.

"Even that cleaner from the motel?"

"Second place, bear. Second place."

"Yeah, I think you're right." The table from inside suddenly got pushed back a bit as the two wrestled. "Can I...?" A look that time from Bryce.

"Calm down!" The runner growled, finally pinning the skittish wyrmling now wrapped completely in the white blanket. "What the hell's gotten into you-?"

"Did he force you to do this!?" Harrak hissed, still trying to squirm out of it. "Is he manipulating you from the sidelines as well!? All to make my life miserable!?"

"What are you talking about?"

"How much do you *really* know about that bear!?" The beige one curled his neck, glance though the glass at the furred one and chief looking like they're in a serious conversation. "What has he told you!? You keep accusing *me* of lying all the time, how often have you questioned him of the same!?"

"Hey, he's saved our lives dozens of times already-"

"And that makes up for all the bad he's done to others!? All the people he's let die!?" Those faded purple eyes looked at the more dense ones in disbelief. "Have you ever stop to think what his end-goal was in all this!? How long have you known him!? I've been alive for **Eons!** I know what he's done!!" The runner's silence eventually caused the smaller one to calm down. Barely noticing the drake open the door and overlook the two for a moment.

"Any possible way you can keep him restrained?" Bryce almost grumbled, like he just lost an argument. "The bear wants to talk to him alone."

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The sun was slowly creeping in, letting it's rays scout and invade the room mostly full of pillows and blankets. As well as one large black beast that was half grumbling when such trespassers reached his eyes. Shifting a bit before hearing a small yelp from a woman under the covers, getting him to stop, lift himself up, and shift around where the noise came from. The small giggles helping him decipher where the woman laid, and curl his much larger body around her. As well as shield their eyes from the light with a dense black wing. "M'remind me again why I left windows in this room." He grumbled, getting her to chuckle.

"To better air this place out, Atlas."

"M'I can just remove the wall entirely when we want to do that." He grumbled while yawning. Snapping his jaws a bit before nuzzling into the blankets. Feeling a soft hand dig out and scratch his chin, instantly getting him to purr. *They used to be much softer...*

"Well, you can remove the windows if you like then. I don't mind, but the sun is nice. It keeps the place warm."

"I can keep this place warm too." He half snorted through his purrs.

"You keep this place too warm." The large one couldn't grumble at that, completely submerged into her strokes and scratches. "If winter hit this place like it did others, then maybe the wood stove would be more helpful."

"Not to mention the damn birds enjoy making nests in the flu." The dragon grumbled. "I guess I couldn't expect the Feys to guard it all the time."

"Especially in the direct sunlight." It made the two smile, finally opening his eyes and picking out where her sky blue ones were in the darkness. *They've never been so beautiful...* "I wonder where they are now?"

"Living in an igloo, I imagine." Atlas grumbled, getting her to chuckle. *Why do I miss that sound*

so badly...? "Means less sweeping for you and Elexus."

"Yes, but it's not that bad now that he's grown up a bit more."

"And he stopped that horrible habit of eating off the floor." Another snort that made her giggle, making him sigh heavily.

"What's wrong?"

"...I'm dreaming again."

"What?"

"I'm dreaming about you again, Tia..." He barely made out the woman's sad smile from the shadows. "I know it because I miss you."

"You always have me, Atlas."

"And you don't call me that unless we have company over..." A couple of strokes along that black muzzle invited it into her naked form, and he took it. Nuzzling up against her chest as that plated old heart ached and everything faded.

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The bear walked into the room and turned the light on, instantly getting the dragon still wrapped in the blanket to grumble. Giving him a violent stare and a growl as he stayed on the bed, watching the furred one close the door behind him, and nod at the two officers watching intently. Ready to charge in and detain the wyrmling using any means. Still, for the moment, the two just stared at each other, until those brown eyes looked down towards the tray of food that was knocked down from his earlier tantrum. Watching the furred one start cleaning it up a bit and set it aside on a wheeled cart, then notice those gemstone eyes just stare at him, almost curious this time. "What?" No response. "You know why they're like this-"

"I can only assume you've gotten under their tails by now." Half a shrug from the bear. "Typical of you."

"I'm a person with simple needs. Arguable 'Needs' vs wants." A bit of a growl from the smaller one. "I didn't expect to see you here."

"Of course you didn't."

"I mean that. Out of all the places you've been or could've gone to." Another intense stare. "Must've just been dumb luck-"

"Or *someone* changed the odds in their favor." That time it got Bartan to be a little cross.

"...I see how it is." The little one growled at him. "But that's not me."

"Like hell it isn't-"

"I'm not the one you think I am." A long silence.

"You can't prove that." A breath from the bear. "No matter what, you can't prove that."

"You're right, I can't. You're just going to have to trust me." Another growl. "What do they call you here?"

"You know that-"

"Actually, I don't. But I can use your real name if you like." A thick stare from those purple eyes. "Or I can go with another. Shroud?" A deeper growl. "Atlas?" Another one that was almost a roar. "Pseudo? I mean, we could go with the draconic stuff, but we both know how bad I am to pronouncing things." A questionable stare that time. "Really, for the longest time, I kept calling Bryce there Bruce." A glance at the drake who was still watching them a bit intently. "Sebby wasn't so bad. But I still couldn't help picturing him to be a Jamaican Crab."

No response from him, but the bear just overlooked the wyrmling. "I'm surprised you could do those things while you were this young. I thought you needed to be much older in order to access your Atonements."

"...Just old enough." He finally answered. "It seems to be slowly letting me use them younger and younger."

"Just takes a very very long time to make a difference. And with every death sending you back about a week..." The smaller one finally sighed, letting his head just hang in near depression. "I know... Kinda. Every experience is different and it effects them in every way, but... I know hard." No response. "Can I trust you enough to untie you?" Silence, but Bartan took a step forward and started to anyway. Almost being able to hear the earth dragon's growl from the hallway.

"Bearr! What are you doing!?" But the smaller black one didn't move. Even after being freed from the blanket and stroked by those white paws a bit.

"When did you end up here-?" That black muzzle bit down on a finger as it was climbing up his jaw, making the bear yelp and growl a bit, especially when the younger one didn't let go. "This hurts a lot more than I expected it to...!" He grumbled, trying to wiggle it free a bit. Instead, grabbing a frilled ear and causing Harrak to release and yelp loudly in pain. Enough for the white one to withdraw his appendage and let go of that ear, making the two growl at each other.

"Why the damn ear!?"

"You bit me!"

"Wouldn't you after all the things you've done!?"

"You're still mistaking me for the other bear!"

"Like hell I-" A double take at the small amount of red within the white fur, then the wyrmling noticed the taste of blood in his mouth. Studying the furred one for a few moments before speaking and hearing the door open up from the drake. "...You're really...?"

"The younger one, yes." Bartan grumbled. Seeing the two officers look back and forth between the two outsiders. "I suppose I'm half to blame, but still. Not to the degree you think." With a few more moments of study, Harrak laid down. Almost giving the signal towards Bryce and Sebastian to return in the hallway, not without another set of growls.

"Try anything like that again, and I'll be the one to kill you." The beige one growled at the black one.

"After me, of course." The drake that time, as they left. Closing the door behind them, and hearing the black one sigh after.

"You bring it on yourself, Atlas."

"You say that as if I'm doing this on purpose." He snorted at the bear, taking another breath and flopping that wedge shaped head on the bedding. "...I hate this."

"Which part?" Only a grumble from the wyrmling was made out. "...Do you want me to do it then?" Those purple eyes looked at him without that head moving. "Would that earn your trust?"

A few moments later, Bartan left the room. Instantly getting an eye lock with the other two dragons, then a double take from Maverick coming down the hall. "Bear, what the hell!?" The grey one growled, trotting his way over. "That better not be the room-" A glance inside and he tossed his snout. "Bryce!? What the hell!?"

"Oh, that is not the worst he's done today." The chief grumbled, letting those red eyes study the wyrmling for a few moments.

"Is he unrestrained-!?" The wyrm tried so hard to retain his roar, giving a near death glare at Bryce, who did the same with the bear. The furred one getting that same glare from all three dragons in the hallway.

"I know, I know. But he's no longer a threat-"

"You're bleeding." Maverick growled.

"Only because he thought I was someone else." Bartan said thickly, getting a couple of puzzled looks.

"...The... Older...?" Bryce started, and seeing him nod. "It's real then? You actually did meet your future self?"

"How else would you explain this?" A gesture towards his pants, and a shrug from every one of

them. "I know it's farfetched, but..."

"What now then?" Sebastian asked after a bit of silence, hearing the white one sigh through his muzzle.

"I'll answer your questions." A look inside at the wyrmling. "About him."

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The warm sunlight was slowly creeping up his black body. From the curled tail around his paws, to his shimmering haunches, now changing to a bright cyan as he purred a bit awake. Moving his stiff back and changing his position in his sleep. Though the sun was not in his eyes yet, it was still rather bright towards the window.

The wet pillow he rested his head on brought back memories, cooling the tone of his scales to a very deep blue. It's a wonder he could even sleep last night, let alone so well. And just thinking about them made his heart ache.

He knew it, so well and for so long that they would eventually stop. He could even see it inside them from day to day, slowly decaying in a strange way. As their bodies would wear out over time, eventually giving out in the process everyone called Aging. Something he's never seen his father do though, nor the Kveldulves much.

With a heavy sigh, Dia got up. Overlooking his large room, one that's been remodeled several times just to fit the dragon. He got his father's size, that's for sure. It was hard to believe he used to be able to fit inside a small crib. To only come up to his mother's knees. And that memory circled back into a heavy sigh.

But he couldn't stay in bed forever. As comforting as it was to just remain into a deep sleep to escape from the pain of loss, he would just have to deal with it. Even if just one day at a time, one pawstep at a time. Eventually leading him out to the castle, for once not smelling the aroma of breakfast. Or any goods baking. He never knew he would miss that so much.

But the weather still tried to comfort him. Hiding the bright, harsh sunlight behind some clouds while his blue eyes adjusted to the green landscape. The wind blew gently, almost leading the dragon where he needed to go. With a heavy breath, he followed it towards the back of his home.

Memories recalled to the days when he first learned to fly. Finally overlooking his island and realizing how massive it was. Yet, so small compared to the rest of the world. But his father cleared a lot of it. Allowing room for the little one to play in the large fields. Moving the gardens towards the back after a sudden tide rising nearly ruined the food they had. And of course, he would still be there. Never moving from the spot the younger one left him at.

His father always looked bigger than him. Even if they used to tell him that they were practically the same size. It brought a sad smile to Dia's face, knowing how insulted it made the larger one. But the

thing about Atlas was, his black scales always looked more threatening than Dia's ever did. His wing design, and many scars on his body displayed so much experience and pain the older one went through. No wonder he always seemed bigger, older, and more powerful. A hard thing for a son to follow within his pawsteps.

Though he barely flicked an ear towards the younger one coming close. "You're still here?" Dia asked him, only getting a faint nod and not looking away from the pair of gravestones that he made. The younger one just laid down beside him, looking at them as well.

"...How did you sleep?"

"Alright. Was surprised that I was able to, really." The blue one muttered, getting a large black wing covering him.

"...I heard you." Atlas said, getting the younger one to lower his head. "It's good that you did, Dia'vidd."

"...You didn't though."

"I did as well. I just tore out my voice box so you wouldn't hear." The black one sadly smirked at his son. The two laid there for a long while, letting the warm sun comfort them.

"...Where do you think they are now?"

"...I don't know. But I know what happened to them." The statement worried the blue one. "It's just something you cannot fight against. And doing so will only get you, or others into trouble, Dia."

"...What about uncles? Where are they?"

"They, along with your sisters, probably headed up north somewhere." The two smirked a bit. "You know how they detested the heat."

"Yes. They couldn't get enough of the cold. Remember that freezer you built them once?" The two chuckled a bit. "Every day, sometimes in the middle of the night, they would pester you to make it colder."

"It must've been negative forty Celsius by the end of it, before I told them to go live in the north pole." Another chuckle. "Who knew they would actually consider such a thing."

"...I wonder if they should know about...?" He motioned towards the stones.

"Likely, they will have expected it soon. And probably even informed them about it as well." A heavy sigh from the large one. "You should look for them, when you can."

"I was planning to." Atlas nodded, still staring at the graves. "Does this mean you're...?"

"...I can't stay here forever, Dia." It made the younger one faintly whimper. "I should... Keep moving. And you should too."

"...Maybe."

"No 'Maybe' about it." Those purple eyes half scolded him. "Do not stay here, Dia. It will only bring you loneliness. And that will only ruin you." The large one got up. "I was planning to level this place out. Perhaps sink it into the waters so no one would corrupt it, and..." It made the younger one whimper. "But I'll leave it the way it is now. If you need a home, or somewhere to stay, it is yours now Dia'vidd. Even if you find someone to spend your life with, you may bring them here. But do not remain here alone, understood?"

"Yes, father." The blue one got up as well, giving the black dragon a hug and turning pink when it was returned. "I love you, Haytre." The large one double took at him. "Tia leaked it out."

"Of course she did." He tossed his snout, glaring at the gravestone. "Even in death, you're still tormenting me." Atlas smirked at it.

"Nonsense. She just taught me well." Another tight squeeze. "Thank you, for everything, Father."

"You're very welcome, and I... love you too." After a semi-awkward moment, the black one cleared his throat. "The entire world is yours now, Son. Do what you will with it." He nodded, getting pried off the larger one. After exchanging a few licks, Haytre took off to the skies. Disappearing quickly into the distance with a loud roar.

With a heavy exhale, it was almost instant. The impact of loneliness that the large one warned him about. Looking at the graves one last time, her voice echoed in his head.

*"Everything Eventually Comes To An End..."*

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The four entered the chief's office, after giving another officer some guard duty for a bit. Sitting around and getting comfortable as the bear looked around. "I remember the last time I was here."

"Yes." Bryce half purred, yet grumbled. "You didn't finish me off."

"And got punished for teasing you later that night."

"Good times..." Sebastian grumbled a bit. "But don't start with that again."

"You'd change your mind if you snorfed him, Sebby." A questionable look from the raptor. "Sticking your nose in his fur and breathing in. Snorfing."

"Why would you say that-?" A double take from the beige one as Maverick got a little curious, smelling the furred neck then purring afterward and giving it a few licks. "Enough of that, you. We're on duty."

"I missed you too, buddy." Bartan hugged the grey one for a moment, but stepped away so they could think clearly. "Where do you want to start?"

The three looked at each other, and they motioned Sebastian to do so. "What's his name? His real one." Bartan took a breath at that. "Do you know it?"

"I do. But out of respect, I can't tell you." A noise in question. "For him, to know his real name is like a gift, to others he cares about. It's something you earn, not something you're told."

"Hence the aliases." A small nod from the white one. "The many aliases."

"The *Many*, yes." A breath as he looked towards where they were keeping the wyrmling. "But with every new name brings new wounds."

"Which is why he constantly changes them." Bryce added, getting a nod.

"So what name did he give you?"

"Harrak." The wyrm answered him, getting a faint nod. "Is that a new one?"

"Yes..."

"And already tainted, I see." Another nod at Maverick.

"What is your relationship with him, bear?" A puzzled look from everyone in the room at Bryce. "Not to sound jealous, but... Curious."

"I barely have any relationship myself, aside from being kidnapped once."

"Burlap sack?"

"Yeeep."

"I'm getting you one of those for your hatchday."

"Please don't." The two chuckled, as the white one continued to answer Bryce question. "But... Does have a bit of a relationship with..."

"The older you." Seb answered. "Your... Future self or whatever?"

"Yes. Goes by the same name, so it's a bit complicated. Let alone, difficult to tell us apart." A breath. "He can't help but blame me for the things the other one did... Or going to do, apparently. It's-it's a damn mess."

"I'll say." Bryce snorted. "I'm barely following what you're talking about."

"And I've explained it to you at least three times to far-"

"Details, bear! Details!"

"So what is Harrak then, Bartan? A Force?" A double take from the bear at Sebby.

"Force...? Nope."

"One of those Counter-whatsit?" A slow headshake at the drake.

"The Terror thing?"

"Terror...? Terrasque?" A nod from Maverick. "Nnnnope." All three of the dragons slowly tilted their heads at him. "He's a dragon?"

"But he's special, right?" The raptor questioned.

"Kind of?"

"He has superpowers, Bartan." The grey one snorted. "Special definitely fits."

"Well, when you put it like that, yes. But he was... I mean..."

"One thing at a time, bear. Start at the beginning." A breath, and a nod at the chief.

"Alright. Where Harrak comes from, all dragons grew up and attended a 'School' of magic."

"The Atonements." A solid nod at the beige one. "He's mentioned those to me."

"They're basically a form of manipulation towards a certain 'Element' so to speak-"

"This is starting to sound like one of those videogames, bear." Bryce grumbled.

"Well, you're not wrong. But where he comes from, no one was able to learn more than one Atonement... Let alone, no one ever heard of a Black Dragon."

"What do you mean by that?" The grey one grumbled.

"Have you ever seen him change colors yet?" The larger two tilted their heads, then looked at Sebastian. Who was nodding. "That's him channeling a certain Atonement. When a dragon learns one, their scale color changes accordingly. As in, permanently. After Harrak learned all of them..."

"He turned into all the colors... Black." A slow nod at Bryce.

"The extent of the chief's knowledge: shapes and colors." The raptor teased a bit, getting a playful growl.

"But they were also afraid of such a thing, whereas it was never done before. For a long time, he hid among them, channeling one Atonement for the longest time, but eventually he messed up. Got spotted either changing them in front of others, or appearing black to them."

"...You described these disciplines as schools?" A nod at Maverick. "So odds are they would consider learning multiple of them as...?"

"Greedy? Perhaps disrespectful. I don't know, it's been too long." A bit of silence. "They basically exiled him without saying such. And from there, he was feared though the lands by everyone."

"What about the 'Coming back from the Dead' thing then?" A look at the raptor for a moment, and the white one took a breath. "Something to do with the Atonements?"

"...No, actually." Another breath. "What drove Harrak to learn the other schools was the death of his brother. He was learning the Atonement of cold, and accidentally froze his lungs solid attempting an experiment."

"Are you serious?" A faint nod from the white one, getting Bryce to half glance at Maverick afterward.

"Think of it as instead of you guys exhaling flames..."

"You inhale by mistake." The grey one mumbled, almost instantly getting all the dragonkin in the room to feel uncomfortable about their breath weapon. "I'm not sure if that's even possible for us."

"I don't know, but that's how his brother died in Harrak's arms. He was trying to thaw him out, but..." Another breath. "That wasn't the end of Shea. During his afterlife, he was becoming a disciple for the Force of Death. Think... Reaper, if you have those here."

"Takers, you mean?" Half a shrug, but a nod at the runner. "...His first was...?"

"The first time Harrak died. But Shea couldn't accept it. Instead, he revived him and ended up morphing... Using computers as a metaphor: he altered Harrak's code so that he couldn't easily be found. In the process though, Shea melded his own soul with his brother's by accident." A sad smile from the bear. "He had great ideas, but terrible performance."

"And this made Harrak nearly impossible to be found. Yet..." The drake started, staring over though the walls towards the wyrmling.

"He kept coming back every few hours when his body ceased functioning. If it was destroyed completely, he would rehatch elsewhere."

"In the world?" A head shake at the grey one. "Universe?"

"Anywhere."

"And that's how he got here." Sebastian stated, getting the nod of agreement. "How do we stop him?"

"From doing what?" Bryce grumbled. "We're dealing with a basic God here, we can't do anything about that."

"He has to have some sort of weakness, doesn't he?" Maverick added.

"Guys." They looked at Bartan. "You might be angry at me saying this, but you're looking at the

'problem' like a human would." A few grumbles from the other three males. "You want to know how to deal with Harrak? How to keep him from, say, wrecking everything you've made here? Don't give him a reason to."

"That doesn't work, bear." The raptor grumbled, getting a bit of a harsh stare from those brown eyes.

"Why was he stealing money?" His neck curled at the furred one's question.

"Because he wanted to save..." The chief started.

"Close, but did he try anything else beforehand?"

"He tried talking to the doctor about her condition." The wyrm added, getting the three to look at each other. "And was rejected. Cast out as if the wyrmling's idea was foolish."

"If he really is immortal, then it makes sense why it sounds like we're talking to an adult with him." The earth dragon stated.

"Bryce." Bartan said, getting his attention. "You told me yesterday that you didn't believe he should be punished." A faint nod and a bit of a worried look from those golden eyes. "I know it sounds scary to hear all this, what you're dealing with. But does it alter that belief in any way?" A few moments of thought, and he shook his head. "Then don't give him a reason to detest. Be it you guys, this town, this planet. I'm not saying worship him, Harrak's grown up enough not to expect that... Let alone knows the outcome of such things." The room fell quiet around them, as the dragons looked at each other and slowly nodded.

By the end of their meeting, it was time for lunch. The larger two willing to share what the bear brought with the runner, but he wanted to feed the wyrmling first. Getting the group to wait outside the room while Sebastian when in alone, by request. Closing the now dark room door behind him, and turning on the light to find the black one still there. Curled up in the sheets with the end of his tail sticking out. Setting the tray of warm take-out on the cart and uncovering the depressed dragon who wasn't moving. Awake, as that darker purple eye looked at the faded discs, but didn't move.

Still, the raptor kneeled down to appear level with him. Taking a breath before speaking. "...I'm sorry." A frilled ear flicked. "I took your case so seriously, vigilantly that I swear I was doing the right thing. It's my job to take these things as I see them." No response. "But I took it too personally, to the point where I thought you were just nothing more than a troublemaker. Even after... That event a few days ago." That smaller eye closed, and the black one took a breath. "I didn't see you as a person anymore. I didn't see you as someone trying to do the right thing... And I'm sorry for that, Harrak." That eye opened up again, looking at the raptor for a moment. "He didn't tell us. Said something about being respectful to you. You gave us this name, that's what we will use, until we earn your real one."

"...What did he tell you, then?" The wyrmling mumbled, and the runner got up for a moment. Reaching over towards the warm tray and placing it nearby for the smaller one to start eating. All before

getting a chair for himself.

"Only the basics for now, I suppose." A slightly sad look from the younger one, as the raptor motioned for him to eat. Taking a deep breath before doing so. "Though, he did tell us about your brother..." A heavy sigh from Harrak, and he got a beige paw for comfort. "Maverick... The grey flier, lost his brother somewhat recently too. A few years back. Things around here haven't been too settle this past year, I suppose I'm still on edge because of it. I suppose we're all still on edge because of it."

The small one faintly nodded, but remained silent for a bit longer. "...Maybe you don't want to talk about it just yet, but it has been two days."

"Actually..." A noise in question from the runner. "I was talking to..." A glance back at the window. "The grey one."

"Maverick?" A faint nod.

"Why anyone would name a dragon after a butterfly is beyond me." The black one snorted, getting Sebastian to chuckle a bit.

"See, I always thought it was the other way around."

"That some dragon named Maverick discovered butterflies?" Another snort.

"A species of them, yes." A bit of a sad smile. "Speaking of names... Did you remember hers yet?" A heavy breath from the wyrmling. "I know, I'm prying open old wounds, but there's a lot missing out of this case that we'll need to fill out."

"You couldn't just get the name from the medical records?"

"We don't usually get them from a local clinic. That's more of a blessing to those living in the forest areas. They get to stay off the records, if they so choose." A bit of silence. "We don't have to do it right now, but the sooner this gets done, the sooner you can get out of here."

"And be put where?" The black one half grumbled.

"We... Haven't decided yet." A sigh from him. "So far though, we got a confession that you robbed a few places, but... With your intensions of trying to save another person... Trying to help a stranger you didn't even know... We're thinking you shouldn't be punished." A look at Sebastian. "It was the bear that gave us the idea, really." A snout toss from that black muzzle. "Not exactly this time, but he suggested it before during another person's trial."

"And you're following his pawsteps. Wonderful." A snort, but the raptor took it lightly. "You actually trust him?"

"...Yes." The runner honestly answered. "We all do, which is why we're rather protective of him. Some of us more than others."

"Figures." Harrak grumbled, then too a breath. "...I suppose I'm going to have to as well then too,

huh?"

"If Maverick could, then I'm pretty sure you can. Even he used to consider the bear an enemy at one point."

"What happened?" It was barely a question, getting the smaller one to stop, mid-chew, and just place a paw over his eyes. Groaning. "Don't tell me."

"Alright." Several moments of silence.

"Are you sure he's not the same bear?"

"Well, technically he is." The two glanced back at the three past the window. "...Kind of...? It's all very confusing."

"You think it's confusing now, try throwing sex into the mix. Sex makes everything more complicated." Harrak snorted, feeling a questionable stare from the runner that made his frilled ears go flat against his head. "Don't-"

"Has he ever-?"

"-You're asking me!?" A shrug from Sebastian. "I don't know!" The stare didn't lift, getting the smaller one to grumble. "...Probably."

"I could see it happening."

"It's not that hard to imagine, just a big ball of white fluff rubbing against each other."

"Along with some black." A half a grumble. "As well as some red." A louder grumble, making the raptor smirk. "This is fun."

"For you maybe." Harrak snorted. Taking a breath and looking off to the side. "...Senithia." A noise in question. "Her name was Senithia... I kept getting it mixed up with others."

"Others?"

"...She had the same eyes. Same exact shades of a few I fell in love with over those..." A few pets of comfort. "One of them even promised to find a way to end me. End this cycle..."

"But she died before..." Another heavy breath and a few tears fell from those deep purple eyes. Feeling the gesture to come closer to the runner so he could be picked up and held, but getting a bit of resistance. "I'm not here to judge you, Harrak. I won't." As much as he detested being treated as a child, the wyrmling took it. Curling up to those white underscales and just taking heavy breaths to compose himself.

"...You said earlier that something happened here..." A noise in confirmation. "...What was it?"

Outside, the three watched the runner explain and talk to the wyrmling, while eating their own

lunch a bit. At least seeing them talk normally, no longer treating the wyrmling as a criminal. It was a rather pleasant sight, to be honest, making the bear wonder what would become of the wyrmling. "Bear?" The drake got their attention. "Remember when I told you how I got this scar on my muzzle?"

"The cave incident, right?" A nod from the brown one.

"I never felt so helpless there, being trapped in a hole which I couldn't escape from." He looked at the furred one, then Maverick for a moment. "I've never really been depressed that much in my life, so I can only imagine that's what it feels like to be..."

"Pretty much..." The grey one admitted, looking back at Harrak. "...How does he get his powers back?"

"They'll return with age. If I remember correctly, each death puts him back about a week or two."

"And he grows...?"

"Quite a bit faster than your kind would, by now." A look at the drake. "What're you thinking?"

"Well, I can get him some community service as punishment that would go under the radar. That way, no one would really look deep into the reports we've already sent." A faint nod from the white one. "But..."

"But?" The grey one asked, looking at the chief as well.

"He's going to need a place to stay." The three looked at each other. "I know you never wanted hatchlings, bear, but..."

"Harrak's hardly a hatchling." The white one tossed his snout. "Ohhh, this is going to be interesting."

"That is, if no one else wants him." Maverick grumbled, over-looking the wyrmling from afar. "We'll just have to see what happens." The other two made noises in confirmation.

"Bear, why does he hate you?" A grumble from the furred one, as a white paw covered his eyes.

"I barely know half of it, but..." A nudge from the two for him to continue, let alone a few inhales a purrs. "Easy you two. You're still on duty."

"Seriously, you've got to get this scent in a bottle..." Bryce murred loudly, licking at that white fur.

"I already have." Excited purrs that time, as well as some tail wagging. "Settle down, both of you. But from what I can tell... Not sure if you guys have it, but some dragons tend to have an obsession with shiny or valuable objects."

"Not unheard of around here." The wyrm stated.

"Well, Harrak got the addiction at some point... And well..."

"Your future self beat him out of it?"

"More like sex'd him out of it, Bryce." A double take from the two. "I kid you not. However, Harrak claimed it was rape, and well... That's just the start of the list."

"...Rape?"

"He doesn't like males that well, love." He replied to the grey one.

"So, are we going to have any problems between you two?"

"Shouldn't. But he might have a hard time letting go of what happened." A bit of a grumble from Bryce, and he got a pet on his shoulder. "Don't worry about it, I'll find a way to make up for some of it."

"Using your special talents, I'm sure." Another purr.

"He's a child, Bryce."

"A child as old as all the atoms on our planet combined, according to the bear." The drake snorted. "If anything, it's a grey area!" Maverick covered his eyes with a paw and grumbled.

"...Do you guys like the taste of Black Licorice?" The two double took at the bear.

"Of what?"

"Maybe you don't have it here. It's a type of candy."

"Why do you ask?" Maverick grumbled, giving him a suspicious stare. Causing the white one to look at him blankly for a few moments.

"...No reason."

"...You paused there for a moment, bear." The drake grumbled. "Why."