

*Marion blinks, a long yawn escaping as she felt around on her left side and then to her right. Not only was one warm body missing, but two. She jerks upwards and gazes around the dark room, finding no sign of the other two girls that she was sharing the bed with. Throwing on a jacket, she walks into the kitchen, but no one was there—the clock on the oven reflecting time, 1:39.*

*She left the house and heads out the backdoor to the dock leading to the lake. Sure enough, she spots two figures.*

*“I know beauty sleep is important to me,” she jokes, gaining their attention as she ventures closer, “but if we’re having secret meetings about how to prank Chris, then I want to be included.” Marion’s mouth shut when she was finally close enough to make out facial expressions, Amari’s eyes were wide, and Sydero’s grim expression was unyielding.*

*“What happened?”*

*“Nothing –,” Sydero immediately begins to say, but Amari cuts her off.*

*“Syd had a nightmare.”*

*“And like I told her, both of you can go back inside.” Ignoring that statement, Marion made her way to one of the dock’s short pillars, pulling herself on top and swinging her legs as she looks at Syd.*

*“Another?”*

*She rolls her eyes, “can we just all agree that nightmares for me are more like unwelcomed dreams, and that’s it. If the puppy gets a nightmare, then, by all means, make a big deal. But not me.”*

*Amari grabs Syd’s hands, “they’re a big deal to us.”*

*“She’s right,” Marion agrees, “what happened? You used to never have them. And now, all of a sudden, you have them every other night.” Syd glances from Marion to Amari and raises a brow.*

*“It’s just because I’m sleeping. Can’t have a nightmare if you’re too busy just staring at the ceiling.” Syd sits, her back against the same pillar that Marion had claimed, her head softly leaned onto her leg. “You guys make it way too easy to relax. And so, nightmares.” Watching this exchange, Amari decides to plop down into Syd’s lap.*

*“Nope! Now I’m feeling a bit lonely up here. Make room.” Not waiting for them to act, Marion jumps down and cuddles up to Sydero’s side, reaching out to grab onto Amari’s warm hand.*

*“If you both stayed inside, then we wouldn’t be having this problem,” Sydero growls, though even she had no intention of moving. The memories of the nightmare felt distant, almost as if she hadn’t had it at all. She struggles to remember what it was about or why it had caused her to get out of bed.*

*“Do you want to talk about it?” Marion asks. Sydero leans her head against hers while bringing Amari closer.*

*“No. Even if I did, you guys kind of made me forget what it was even about,” she snickers.*

*“Always here,” Amari giggles.*

*“Yea, good luck getting rid of us. The next step is to make it to where you don’t feel the need to get out of bed.” Sydero gazes over at Marion, having no doubt that if anyone could make everything go away, it was her. Her heart shifts, and her eyes close. They’ll head in, but at that moment, it was better to forget and just be amongst those closest to one’s heart.*

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A cold chill runs down Amari’s spine, and she brings her coat closer as a response. Snow, once an enjoyable experience, was now nothing but a nuisance and a slight trigger. It constantly reminded her of *that day*, how in less than a few minutes, it had fallen to pieces. How once the pure white fragments were sullied by splashes of red. Or how the screams competed with the howling wind. She squeezes her hands, catching sight of the rose gold bracelet that adorns her wrist. A wave of sadness hit her; the force so strong it had her stumbling back into someone.

She turns, her eyes first catching sight of the dog tag necklace that was the same color as her bracelet. And though she couldn't see the words because of its positioning, she knew the same promise was etched along the metal that was engraved on her charms.

*Always.* But sometimes always wasn't long enough. Sometimes it was a couple of minutes, sometimes it felt like a lifetime. In her case, it was a month that stretches on for an eternity. A piece was there, but the whole would never be achieved.

Sydero closes the door behind her, her face unnaturally stoic as she eyes the sky, taking in the deep blues and creams. According to the sky, it would be a relatively clear day, mild snow at best. But she was an expert in understanding how fast things like this could turn.

"Here," Sydero voices, passing the helmet back and forth in her hands before extending it for Amari to take.

"But what about –," Amari starts, immediately halting her tongue when she sees the look that Sydero gives her.

"Just take the damn helmet," she growls, pushing it into Amari's chest and walking off, ending the conversation at that. Amari clutches it close, trailing her finger along the gold embroidery and then to the crimson text that spells out Sydero's name. It was a gift from Marion, Amari remembers that. Just like she remembers the joy that appeared on Sydero's face, followed by the jokes about how she would never wear it and didn't need it. But no amount of teasing could wipe that look off of Syd's face, pure and uncensored admiration. It felt like forever since she's seen that look.

She was brought out of her thoughts by the sound of Syd starting up her motorcycle, giving it time to warm up.

Amari meanders over, her fingers nervously tapping the helmet, "would you like to bring something? I normally do. Well, sometimes. The others do a lot though. Like this –," she quiets herself. Her rambling became less due to her active mind and more to forget. The more she talked, the more she pushed the truth away. It softened the blow. It made everything she lost feel farther. She had gotten better, but habits were hard to lose, especially when they caused such a euphoric and surreal feeling.

Sydero speaks, “if the snow comes down faster. We’ll head back early.” Amari deflates, wondering if she heard anything she had said.

“Syd,” she starts, “maybe we should talk about this.”

“There’s nothing to talk about,” she growls. “The fact that I’m even entertaining this and going with you is where the conversation ends.” And there was truth in that. It had been two years since Marion had died, and Syd had never visited the grave. Each time Amari went, she urged Syd to come with her, even attempting to trick her. But the cambion never did. There was always a reason why—something that needed to be done or someone that needed hunting. They had good days, days where laughter was rich and for a minute, they forgot that a massive cloud was resting outside their door. Moments where Amari, for even a fraction, saw the light coming back to Syd’s eyes. But they also had plenty bad moments. Moments where Syd refused to speak and refused to let her in. Moments where Amari snapped at her, screaming for reasons neither of them could actually explain. It had lessened, but only because they chose to ignore it.

“Alright,” Syd huffs, sitting down and revving the engine, “let’s get this over with.”

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Gazing around, Sydero was reminded why she hated graveyards. A waste of space, a vortex of paranormal energy, and a depressing aura. The last one was the main reason. You looked around and was reminded of what would soon await you, what would await everyone. That was something she didn’t need a reminder about. She didn’t want her legacy to be shortened down to a few words and numbers etched onto the stone. She didn’t want to become just another waste of space to be trampled on by strangers.

“Syd,” Amari shouts, pulling on her sleeve. She nods to the side, and Sydero obeys. The walk to the appropriate grave was short, and Syd ignores how fast Amari was able to find her way. Syd stays back, allowing Amari to walk closer on her own.

“Hey, Marion,” Amari stutters, wrapping her arms around herself, “I ... didn’t bring anything this time. I don’t know why. Well, I did, I guess. I brought Sydero. Remarkable, right?” She rubs at her eye. Perhaps it was the company, but Amari couldn’t go on. It

hurt. God did it hurt. Nevermind that she had done this numerous times without worry, she couldn't do it now.

"Does it ever get easier?" Syd asks.

"It does actually," Amari chuckles, wiping her eye with the back of her hand, "easier but not better. You can go." She frowns but steps up, her eyes gracing the tombstone for the first time. It was rectangular with Roe's full name, but that was it. It was a hunter and specialist tradition to put nothing further. Wayward eyes didn't need to know more about the deceased, they either knew them or didn't, and that was it. Resting in front of the tombstone was an assortment of things. Some even seem to be recent.

There was a picture of Roe with her uncle, propped up by a candle and a few scattered petals from a Mexican marigold flower. On the other side rests an empty alcohol bottle with lavender garland sticking out. On the ground was a small figurine of a dog with qualities equivalent to Anubis as well as a bouquet of flowers with angelic appearing feathers sticking out of it.

Sydero reaches for one, twirling it between two fingers and looking at the surrounding area. She had only just now noticed the immediate area around the grave was brimming with life, or as much life as winter will permit. They were an assortment of colors; none did she believe were actually native to the land. The prettiest was a lone coral one that stands out amongst the pearl-colored snow.

Easily, Sydero could put a name to each thing left. It was when she saw the small, velvety box that her throat decided to run dry. In the middle was a sparkling ring with a beautiful gem. Sydero didn't have to lean forward. She knew the single word that was etched along the gem's surface. Her eyes follow the curve of the tombstone until she was once again staring at the name.

Marion Roe.

She remembered ...

*... fire. The stars shining brighter than any day as if even they knew they were receiving a bright soul. The snow had decided to stop falling, out of respect for just one night. She felt nothing, not the tiniest thing. She searched and searched, but it felt as if even*

*her heart had stopped beating. Something inside of her said that she could stop breathing, and she probably wouldn't even register that.*

*She saw, but she didn't feel. The wind, the fire dancing meant that wind was present. But she didn't feel it. Nor did she feel the heat of the flames. Someone was hanging onto her, crying into her shoulder, but she didn't feel their weight or the wet tears on her shoulder. She felt distant and unattached.*

*It felt like her nightmares.*

Only she didn't forget. Not this time. No matter how much she wanted to.

It felt like someone was squeezing her heart with all their might. It was the feeling of drowning amid an ocean of black with a distant, rising sun. There was hope on the horizon, but it did nothing but tease the drowning sailor, promising that sanctuary was close, but the depths were closer.

Sydero drops to her knees, her eyes widening as tears lined her eyelids. Amari makes a move but then retracts, telling herself that this was Sydero's time. She needs to let her have it.

"Oh fuck," Sydero manages to get out, her chest constricting, her breathing shallow. It hit her. After all this time, after the numerous lies and ignorance. It was all now hitting her.

Roe wasn't coming back. Roe was dead.

The whimper starts off low, building momentum as it crawls up her chest and then dallies in her throat. When it finally decides to release itself, it was followed by short gasps. Sydero gazes everywhere, trying to ground herself. But there was nothing but endless sky and towering trees.

Amari abandons her state of neutrality, no longer caring for the consequences. She sinks down to her knees and wraps her arms around Sydero, bracing herself for the harsh treatment she would receive. Shock and fear cause her to freeze as Sydero turns to her, burying her face in Amari's chest as the sobs came. Her body trembles with sadness, and Amari was far too stunned to do anything. The most emotion she ever saw from Sydero was when she was tight-lipped and trapped in her own mind. She was the queen of

keeping her feelings bottled up, letting the wind and the feel of going fast while driving her bike calm and deal with anything that lingers.

But the sad truth was, one could only run for so long. Escape was a valid option, but the truth was patient and cunning. It always appeared when you least expected it to, and it was swift. If it didn't catch you at that time, it would see you for the next.

"No ... no, Roe," Sydero cries, clutching onto Amari, "Roe is dead. My Roe is dead," she says. Tears fell down Amari's cheeks. She had accepted her death long ago, but she had never heard Sydero do the same. These words had never left Sydero's lips and though Amari had her time to grieve, all of it came rushing back. It was as if Sydero's screams made everything much more real. There was no more grey, it was all black and white. Roe was dead.

Minutes tick by and Amari was never more pleased about the fact that both she and Sydero ran hot. Their combined heat kept her more than warm, allowing her to sit there and cradle Sydero's trembling figure. Finally, her sobs lessen, and she straightens up. Amari remains patient, her mind wandering when Syd finally speaks.

"It was easier," she begins, scratching at her eye with a grimace, "to be ignorant. And we all know that I like taking the easy route." Her shoulders slump, and her head falls, "it was easy to think that she was just gone. That she had chosen to go on a solo hunt, or she went to visit her uncle. Something that meant she would come back, just not then. Blocking you guys out ... that was easy too. I just ... I kept telling myself that you guys were wrong. Honestly, I went insane. Every time my brain would try to right this wrong, I would lose it. Remember that time I said I crashed my bike?" Amari nods, remembering the wreck of a bike that Sydero had brought back. They all believed it wiser to just salvage parts and get a new one, but Sydero refused. It had taken almost two months for her to finish.

"Yea, that wasn't some stupid ass driver. It was me. I was so angry, and I needed to get it out, and that was the closest thing at the time."

"You left me," Amari comments after a long pause, tears freely rushing down her cheeks, "you cared about nothing but fixing that bike, and you left me. Marion, she ..." Amari chokes, not wanting to say the words. She hadn't talked about it as much as she liked. Or

perhaps that wasn't true, she spoke and rambled, but it was never to Sydero. The one person she wanted to talk to. The one person she needed by her side. With her eyes squeezed shut, she whispers, "she left us. We said always, and that wasn't true. You became sometimes, and she became never."

Sydero wraps her arms around Amari, letting her sob as she runs her fingers through her hair. Her own heart was heavy, and she could feel her own eyes beginning to water once again. "I know. I know. And ..." Her breath escapes as she realizes how long she had been keeping this in. Two years. Two years struggling to understand that Roe had left them. Time was superfluous to an immortal; it flows similar to a river. Seeming to go on forever with no sign of stopping, even when it hit rocks or parts were split up. On some days, it felt like Roe had never left, like Syd would find her standing off to the side deep in thought like she usually did. But then there were the days where it felt like Roe had been gone forever like memories were hard to cling to, and the ones she did grasp easily slipped past her fingers.

"I'm sorry," Sydero growls, annoyed at herself and how she had let this happen. "That means shit, but I'm so sorry, Amari. I wasn't there. I didn't let you grieve and vent. Roe ... just ... she just ..." She grows quiet. There was no need to speak about how Roe passed. Though, it was the worst part due to it being no one's fault. No one could have seen it coming, and no one, even with the many what-ifs, couldn't have stopped it. It was easier when there was someone to blame for everyone. Everyone liked to either point the finger at themselves or at someone else. It was easier to hit a target that you could see and fault. It was harder when there was nothing to throw insults at.

"I've done a shitty job of taking care of you. Haven't I?" Sydero questions, her face buried in Amari's long brown hair.

Amari pulls back and cradles her face with a sad smile, "we both did a bad job. I'm sure if Marion was here, she'd have a lot to say." Amari squeezes her eyes closed and takes a shaky breath in, "but she's not."

"Her reaper ass is nearby, I don't doubt that," Syd jokes, and the both of them chuckle, a sound that lasted for a second but warmed them down to the core.

"Will we ever get over this?" she questions, truly lost.



“No,” Amari answers with confidence, “but we will move on. Slowly. Together, I hope.”

Sydero swiftly brought Amari’s hand to her lips, kissing her fingers and then her wrist where her engagement bracelet rests, “always.”

Their foreheads met, neither of them speaking. They couldn’t have this every day, but for that moment, the three of them were once again together.