

ענין פון יסודות  
והנהגות

דפוס תל אביב

*Dear Traveler:*

*You are likely here because you have connected with Octopath Traveler in some way. Its rich and alive worlds, its mesmerizing music and visuals, its touching tales and the characters that make it so—all this too is why we have gathered to celebrate Octopath's anniversary.*

*This unofficial, non-profit anthology, Eight is for OCTO, has come together and was made possible solely through the efforts of fans and their love for this series.*

*So, whether you started this journey in its beginning years ago, watching the teaser trailer for a "Project Octopath Traveler," or found your way through a subsequent addition, making the title "Octopath Traveler" mean more than just a single video game, let us join in that joy.*

*Thank you for joining us for this special occasion; here is to a happy 8th anniversary to Octopath Traveler. Fair farings to you, and may the road ahead be a merry one.*

*Sincerely signed,  
The Eight is for OCTO Mod Team*



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**An Adult (18+) version of this volume can be downloaded at  
[8isforoctopath.itch.io/vol2nsfw](https://8isforoctopath.itch.io/vol2nsfw)**

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# Eight is for O T T O

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Volume II: Solistia

# Snowdrop Hearts

*by digitaldreams*

**General || Castti/Malaya || 1,959 Words**

Alternate Universe, Fix-it Fic, Reunions, Hurt/Comfort

It truly was a miracle.

In Castti's memories of the day Healeaks fell, she was certain she was the only one who survived. She had seen Randy and Andy sacrifice themselves to put out the fire. She had found Elma's collapsed body in the streets of town. She had watched Malaya send her out to sea knowing she would not live to see the sunrise. Castti had seen more bodies that day than any other time in her career as an apothecary, and she had been sure no one else could have outlasted the poisonous rain.

And yet... She had been wrong. Castti hadn't known it at the time, but she was not the only one to survive the tragedy of Healeaks. Through what could only be described as a miracle, Malaya had been found by a traveler just before she could take her final breaths. The days after the rainfall had been touch and go, but eventually, Malaya opened her eyes once more. Somehow, she had survived, and there was only one goal on her mind: to find Castti again as soon as possible.

It took over a year and a half for the two women to reunite. The world had been intent to keep them apart for as long as possible, not helped by the fact that Castti didn't even know Malaya was alive. She could only assume

Malaya was long gone, but Malaya was searching for her all the while. They had been traveling at the same time, but they always seemed to just miss one another. Malaya knew Castti was still out there because of what she had heard about the coronation in Timberain, but Castti didn't know enough to look for her in return.

It wasn't until after Castti had parted ways with her new traveling company that she finally found Malaya again. Castti had a long journey ahead of herself as a lone apothecary, but first, she wanted to return to Healeaks to honor the memory of the place that had given her so much love before it was destroyed. Castti would not be able to rebuild the entire town on her own, but she hoped the ghosts she had left behind would at least appreciate her efforts to take care of all they had lost in death. It was the least she could offer to them.

Castti wasn't the only one who had that idea though. Malaya had devised the same plan, hoping Castti would one day return to the place they had called home to find her. Malaya had been planting snowdrops in a small garden outside the home she and Castti shared when she heard footsteps behind her. Even after all the time she and Castti had spent apart, Malaya would recognize that gait anywhere, and she turned slowly to find...

Castti.

All the air in Healeaks seemed to vanish in an instant, and Castti and Malaya were left struggling to breathe in more ways than they could ever hope to count. Castti had been guided through her journey by a phantom of Malaya, but it had all been contained within her mind. Malaya had been chasing after Castti's shadow only to fall short of reaching her again and again. Everything about the moment felt impossible, and yet...

Castti surged forward all at once, pulling Malaya into a tight embrace just to make sure she was real. Malaya pressed her body against Castti's with as much force as she could stand, tangling her fingers in Castti's hair. Neither one of them could find the strength to speak, and so, they did not try. The fact that they were together meant more than any words ever could. Even if they had been willing to speak, it hardly would have helped them since nothing felt sufficient other than the beautiful sensation of familiar hands interlocking.

Malaya didn't think she had ever cried as much in her life as she did

that day. She and Castti retreated into their old home, and Castti found it familiar yet different. They wandered their way through explanations of all that had happened since they were forced to split up. Malaya heard all about Castti's adventures with her new friends, and Castti learned of every town Malaya had gone to in her efforts to find her. They had missed out on such vast parts of one another's lives, but they were determined to make up for it however they could. They had belonged together before Healeaks fell, and they would prove they still belonged together after they had lost their home too.

Healeaks was a shell of its former self, though both of them knew that was to be expected after all that had happened. The poison rain had done significant damage to the environment, and the plants were only just starting to recover after a year and a half of time spent breathing. The homes were empty, and the ceilings were caving in thanks to the lack of care against the elements. Malaya had only been able to fix up her and Castti's old home, though even their house was far from the state it had once been in. It would do for the time being, but they had a long way to go if they wanted to fully return Healeaks to its former glory one day.

Castti was planning on continuing to travel when she could, but for now, she chose to stay in Healeaks. She had been intending to linger there for long enough to take care of her old home, and now... Now, she had even more of a reason to stay. She and Malaya could explore the world with time, but until then, Castti wanted to savor the fact that her lover was alive at all. She had spent the last year and a half convinced she was the only one left, and she had no reason to believe otherwise.

But everything was different now. Castti could look up at any moment she wanted and find Malaya standing a short distance away from her. They were different from how they had been all that time ago, covered in darkened scars and burdened by the weight of a trauma they never should have been forced to endure. Even so, Castti loved Malaya just as much as she always had. The time she had spent away from her had not dulled her admiration for her lover at all. If anything, it only made Castti want to know Malaya more than ever before. They had missed out on so much of one another's lives, but they could make up for it all. They could choose each other again and again

just as they had before Healeaks fell.

Malaya admired Castti just as much as always too. Castti had accomplished much since they last saw one another, but her kindness had not waned in the slightest. Malaya doubted she would have been able to hold strong in the face of such terrors if she had been in Castti's position. Castti had kept her hope intact through the end of the world. Malaya, on the other hand, had felt bitter for ages after Trousseau took everything from her. If his intent had been to send her crashing into despair, then he had come dangerously close to succeeding. There was no despair between Castti and Malaya now though. They laid down in the same old bed they had shared as the two leading apothecaries of Healeaks, looking into one another's eyes and feeling the ache of years in the silence. It had only been a year and a half since they were last together, and yet, it felt like it had been so much longer. They had survived so much in that time. Malaya would have believed it if someone had told her a decade had come and gone since she last had the chance to brush Castti's golden tresses away from her cheek.

Regardless of all their lost time, they were together now, and that felt like all that mattered.

Castti cupped her hand around Malaya's fingers to pull the other woman's palm closer to her cheek. Castti had lost quite a bit of the feeling in her hand because of the poison rain, but she could have sworn she still felt Malaya's warmth through the numbness. This was real. Malaya was real. Against all odds, they had both survived, and they had pushed through the darkness long enough to find one another again.

For a time, Castti had wondered if she should travel with another group of apothecaries. Perhaps she would be able to meet up with a party looking to expand their ranks, or maybe she would be able to recruit new healers who were hoping to find a way to apply their skills beyond the limits of their hometowns. She had been conflicted though, wondering if it would taste like betrayal to the spirits of Eir's Apothecaries. Even if her departed friends would want the best for her, Castti didn't know if she would be able to do something like that personally. The travelers had felt different since they were not apothecaries like her, but establishing a new iteration of Eir's Apothecaries... The thought had been too much to bear.

Traveling with Malaya under that name, however, felt like a perfectly fine idea for Castti. They were the only two survivors of the group, but together, they could carry on the legacy of those who they had been forced to leave behind. In holding one another, they could honor the friends who had been buried beneath the dying grasses of Healeaks. Eir's Apothecaries would live on not through Castti alone but through both of them. Castti wished they could have all been together, but so long as it was impossible... She was glad someone else understood. She was glad she was not alone. She was glad someone else was there to hold her through the aftermath of such significant pain.

Castti leaned forward until her forehead was pressed gently against Malaya's skin. There was so much they needed to say to one another, and there was even more they had yet to experience... But Castti was certain they would get to it all one day. Sooner or later, they would do what they had always been meant to. They would savor their time together even more because they had been forced to spend so much of it apart. Nothing would ever be able to tear them from one another again. Castti wouldn't allow it, and she knew Malaya wouldn't tolerate it either.

"I love you," Castti whispered. She was so close to Malaya that she could see the way her breath made the tiny brown hairs next to Malaya's face dance. Everything about Malaya was so beautiful, and Castti was glad she could see it with her own eyes once more instead of having to trust she had properly committed her beloved to her faulty memory. Malaya offered Castti a soft smile in return, and Castti recognized it as the special grin that was reserved only for her. Malaya leaned in and pressed her lips against Castti's, leaving her exhale to brush against Castti's skin. There was no place in the world Castti would have rather been than in Malaya's arms, and she knew Malaya agreed. All of the pain that had led to that moment was tolerable so long as it granted them the peace they could find only in each other. "I love you too."

Their survival could only have been described as a miracle... And out of all of the miracles Castti had seen over the course of her life, she knew this was the one she was most grateful for.



# Unfinished

*by onlybythestars*

**General || Castti/Malaya || 746 Words**

the words come easily  
at first.

I take pen to paper, writing as though we are lovers trapped in distant lands  
separated by miles, not worlds  
and for a moment  
a few sweet, sweet moments  
I can pretend.

it never happened.  
you're still there  
waiting to receive my words  
I've only gone away somewhere, and I swear I'll be back soon  
to see each and every one of you  
and you, Malaya, most of all

I don't know that I'd call Healeaks home  
any more than any other place

where we all rested our weary heads  
while tending to the ill and injured

but I didn't need that  
did I?

all I ever needed  
was to have you all with me  
we moved around from town to town  
coming and going like the wind  
no foundations laid, no roots sunk in  
except within each other.

and now you sleep beyond my reach  
I swore I'd let you do it  
and I did, I did, I promise that I meant it  
you won't awaken anymore

yet still.  
I still.

if it could work like that  
if my grief could be  
a simple thing  
a road that goes from plain to sea  
instead of a labyrinth of trees  
maybe then I could  
maybe then I would  
not  
wonder.

I write this letter to try and free  
all the feelings deep inside of me  
words unsaid, tears unshed  
all that binds my heart

I pretend with every line that you  
are there to hold it  
to unfold it  
to laugh with me, and speak aloud  
that you are fine, thank you, all is well  
to pen a reply  
about all that I cannot see  
to tell me of Andy, Randy, Elma, Jeyah  
everyone in town you tend  
we talk of the weather and the food  
all the little things  
and you  
are not

you aren't

you aren't here.

you aren't anywhere

the truth is that I never left your side  
long enough to justify a letter  
except for once.  
just once.  
and it was.

enough.

my pen stills now, as I have a thought  
I've had so many times  
*what if, I think? what could have been?*  
if we hadn't wandered far that day?  
bad luck, you'd said, when back we came  
shrugging at the tale

we told  
of somewhere old  
and cursed.  
you never dreamed  
of what might come  
a consequence of getting lost  
nor, I regret, did I

hindsight is  
so cruel.

if we hadn't taken the wrong path  
wandered off the road  
where now might we all be?  
would Healeaks stand and ring  
with children's laughter, adults' chatter?

could I have stopped it all?

I'll never know.

I can ask and ask  
till ink and voice run dry  
but from the truth I cannot shy  
and that is

that you are gone.

everyone is gone.

the days I cherished, long and bright  
have fallen now  
like autumn leaves  
like bodies in that rain

and nothing I do can make it right.

I've walked those streets, so bare and quiet  
seen every little thing  
that would not be the same  
if not for that day.  
layers of dust, thick as the snows in Winterbloom  
holes in roofs and walls that no one will repair  
rotten food and fields gone fallow  
the scent  
of decay.

a man I met told me how  
he found them all  
they sleep there now, beneath the earth  
he buried every last one  
a stranger that they never knew  
giving them a final kindness  
I hope it helps them rest.

but you're not there, Malaya, that I know  
I lost you somewhere else  
you brought me to the ocean's edge  
and there  
I left you on the shore

there's so many stories, you know  
of lovers parting at the docks  
one sails off  
and one remains  
to wait forevermore

it's always like that: the one who left does not come back  
their ship swallowed by the depths

leaving one lonely  
upon the land

but  
that wasn't  
us.

you watched me go, and breathed your last  
hoping for my return  
that you knew you'd never see  
because you could not wait for me.

I asked around until I found  
someone who'd seen you that day  
who found you and Jeyah, sleeping still  
beneath that solitary tree  
the clouds had parted, bringing out the sun  
that could no longer warm you.

he led me to  
where he'd buried you  
I planted snowdrops on your grave.





# The Rain After the Dream

*by Ruby Lily*

**General || Throné/Agnea || 1,722 Words**

Even a year after the return of the dawn, Throné still had nights she didn't sleep well. Living with the Blacksnakes, she couldn't remember a night when she had enjoyed a restful sleep, and spending nights simply lying awake had often left her feeling hollow. However, she thought as she touched Agnea's sleeping face, it wasn't so bad now if there was still a night or two she couldn't sleep easily. She smiled; Agnea's warmth so close was comforting.

Faintly she caught the scent of raspberries as she tucked a strand of Agnea's hair behind her ear. Just as Agnea promised, Cropdale loved its raspberries.

Throné's eyes fell to Agnea's lips. Sometimes she was afraid of falling asleep, lest she wake and realize this had all been a dream and that a poisoned collar still bound her. But this was real, she told herself. Agnea's body was so very warm and soft against hers, and when they made love, a pleasure she'd never dared to dream of filled her. Agnea loved her, and she was free now, free to return that love in kind. She was free to forgive herself.

Beside her Agnea stirred, and her face became twisted with fear. Her body trembled, and she moaned softly. "Agnea?" Throné said carefully, drawing back her hand, but still Agnea didn't wake, and the fear upon her

face grew stronger.

Throné understood. The eight of them had brought back the dawn, but the nightmares weren't so easily forgotten.

Gently she put her arms around Agnea and threaded her fingers through Agnea's unbound hair, just as Agnea often did for her when she suffered nightmares. To hold another like this, so tenderly and lovingly, was still at times an unfamiliar feeling, and she feared her own touch insufficient. Yet the trembling in Agnea's shoulders eased a little, and her expression softened.

Throné didn't need to wonder what nightmares Agnea suffered. Crick's death in Stormhail, the sorrowful Darkling during the Night of the Scarlet Moon, Lostseed and the monstrous Claude, that vision of Tanzy burning to death - they had all witnessed much sorrow and pain during their travels together. Yet still Agnea saw beauty in this world, still wished to make others smile.

"It's all right, my star," Throné whispered, brushing her lips against Agnea's brow. She fell silent a moment, recalling the lullaby Agnea had sung for her before she confronted Father in Montwise. "Rest, little one, for the day is done," she sang softly; even now she found comfort in the lyrics. "Queens and kings too were once like you. Now it's time to close your eyes, and rest until the sun does rise..."

Slowly Agnea opened her eyes, and stared groggily at Throné. "Ah... Throné...?" she said, her voice small.

Throné chuckled mirthlessly; how ironic that her attempt at a lullaby would wake Agnea. "I didn't intend to wake you."

Agnea shook her head. "No, it's fine. I was having a nightmare, I think, and then I heard your voice..."

"What kind of nightmare was it?"

Even in the darkness of their bedroom Throné saw how deeply Agnea blushed. "You'll think it's silly," she muttered, lowering her face.

"Maybe, maybe not. Tell me, Agnea."

Agnea hesitated, and then let out a deep sigh. "It was my mother's statue in Sai, destroyed." She let out a weak laugh. "I know, of all the things to have nightmares about, right?"

When Dolcinaea and Veronica had threatened to raze the slums of Sai, Throné had never seen Agnea so angry, and that Dolcinaea would so callously disrespect Agnea's mother - well, Throné too had been affronted on Agnea's behalf. "I can't imagine it was very pleasant seeing a statue of your own mother in pieces."

Agnea chewed her lip, and again her shoulders trembled. "Before I woke, you were singing my mother's lullaby, weren't you? I wish you could've met her..."

Carefully Throné laid her hand on Agnea's hair. "I think I understand now - seeing that statue of your mother destroyed made your grief feel fresh, didn't it?"

"But it was just a statue, and that was over a year ago—!"

Throné laid a finger on Agnea's lips. "Grief is a complicated thing. I... know that all too well."

Agnea's eyes went wide for a moment, and tears began to roll down her cheeks. She touched her face, as if in disbelief, and Throné drew her into her arms. She sobbed into Throné's chest, and Throné said nothing, simply holding her close and kissing her hair. It had been a year since the battle for the dawn, and before Throné would never have thought herself capable of offering comfort. But Agnea believed in her, loved her.

Thus Throné began to sing again, that simple lullaby Agnea shared with her a year ago. She wasn't as good a singer as Agnea, and her voice was clumsy and uncertain, but soon enough Agnea's tears dried, and she looked up at Throné, a faint smile on her bright lips.

"You really like that lullaby, huh, Throné?" she said with a quiet giggle. "I'm glad."

"Of course I do. Do you remember when you first sang it for me?"

"Yes." Agnea's smile faded a little; the blood Throné had shed in pursuit of freedom would never be forgotten. "We've been through so much, but we brought back the dawn too. Things can get better! I will never, ever give up!"

Throné touched Agnea's cheek and brushed away a stray tear with her thumb. A house of their own, a bed to share, fresh raspberries every day - it was all more than she ever dared hope for. She hadn't given much thought to

what would come after “freedom,” and even at the end it had smelled of blood. But still Agnea had reached for her hand, and that was only a beginning, like the dawn itself. Never again would she allow someone to steal that treasure.

Agnea smiled, faintly and sweetly, and illuminated by the soft moonlight. She too laid a hand on Throné’s cheek, and Throné leaned into that touch, always wanting more. Once, it had startled her how freely affectionate Agnea was, and as they traveled together, she had begun to long for that affection. From huddling for warmth in the Winterlands to sleeping together beneath the stars in the Wildlands, she hadn’t realized the joy of simple touch. Agnea’s hand slid lower, her fingertips brushing over Throné’s bare throat, and Throné shivered in anticipation.

“You’re beautiful, Throné,” Agnea murmured against Throné’s skin. How many times Agnea had said those words, Throné had lost count a long time ago, but she still loved hearing them all the same. Agnea had never been able to hide her attraction to Throné, and sometimes she still noticed Agnea stealing glances at her breasts, but now Agnea simply smiled when caught instead of turning away in embarrassment. Throné loved that honest desire of Agnea’s.

Agnea kissed the base of Throné’s throat, where that poisoned collar had once lain. Her lips were gentle yet hungry, and drew closer to Throné’s cleavage. Throné had nightmares too, of blood and darkness. A part of her would always be afraid of turning out like Mother or Father. She raised Agnea’s chin and then let her fingers curl around Agnea’s slender, unmarred throat. Agnea’s smile widened, her blue eyes bright, and her pulse quickened against Throné’s palm. When she closed her eyes, she still sometimes saw Pirro’s bloody, dying smile. Her own hands were stained in blood, but these same hands could hold Agnea so gently and grant her pleasure.

Temenos would say that the world wasn’t so black and white, and that people weren’t so simple. Smug bastard as he could be, he had believed in her too. They all had. No matter what that Arcanette woman said, Throné was free now. She was no mere vessel of Vide. A smirk tugged at her lips; she didn’t mind having a god’s blood on her hands.

Agnea laid her hand over Throné’s at her throat, an alluring sparkle in her eyes. Throné bent her head to kiss Agnea, cherishing the warmth of

Agnea's skin against hers. In some ways, she was still a snake, seeking the warmth of another. They kissed, over and over, and wherever Agnea's hands touched felt like fire. At times Agnea's warmth could be overwhelming, but Throné never wanted to let go. Agnea's touch alone made her feel alive in ways she had never felt before. She was free now, free to accept such warmth and intimacy. With a mischievous smirk, Throné released Agnea's throat and then cupped her ample breasts, and she gasped sharply.

"If you keep gettin' me so excited, I won't be able to sleep at all!" she giggled, some of her natural accent slipping free.

"Well, we've still a few days before we have to set out for New Delsta, so we can have a little more nighttime fun before then," Throné replied with a dark chuckle, savoring the weight of Agnea's breasts in her palms.

Agnea giggled again as she drew closer to Throné, pressing herself more into Throné's touch. "Maybe it's because that performance is so soon I'm feelin' restless. It's gonna be my biggest one yet, and we'll see all our friends again too!"

"It's been a year already, huh...?" Throné murmured. For much of that time, she had traveled with Agnea as her bodyguard. Though many of the places they visited were familiar, now that no collar weighted her down, it was like seeing them for the first time again.

"I'm so, so happy we met," Agnea whispered, planting a kiss to the curve of Throné's breast. "I'll keep shining, just like my mother, and I'll always help you smile, I promise!"

"Just remember to take care of yourself too. As your bodyguard, it's my duty to ensure your safety."

"I don't make things easy for you, do I...?" Agnea muttered with a sheepish smile.

"I wouldn't want it any other way." Throné smirked, and again pressed her lips to Agnea's for a kiss.

The two of them would always have nightmares, Throné knew. She couldn't imagine her life without them. But now the night also promised desire, and Throné felt Agnea's heartbeat against her chest as they held each other close.

# Records of Frigit Isle

*by natchalattes*

**Teen || Oswald-Centric || 1,538 Words**

Diary/Journal, Imprisonment,  
Implied/Referenced Abuse, Self-Reflection

Day X, Year XXX3

Frigit Isle lies at the edge of the world, or so the prisoners say. To attempt an escape now would result in a swift death, and I do not intend to die here.

The guards took satisfaction in silencing me. For days, I was deprived of food and sleep. They measured my face at some point – a point that I cannot clearly remember. When they brought out the muzzle, I lacked the strength to resist its cruel hold.

I try not to move my face. The metal pinches. Blood drips. I may be silenced, but I am not defeated.

My “reputation” precedes me. One man called me a murderer and dared to strike me. He learned his lesson the hard way.

So did I. The club is a cruel companion.

Day X, Year XXX3

I understand the lay of this land.

The cold is unrelenting here. Clouds cover the sky on most days. If there is even a beam of sunlight against the snow, the prisoners flock to it. An attempt to take in its warmth, I presume.

We have a daily modicum of free time, which I spend it in the prison's library. Most of the books are yellowed and falling apart, and the information is out of date, but it is better than nothing.

Eating is hard. I cannot open my mouth. I shove pieces of bread through the small hole in the muzzle. I sit in the corner of the mess hall and refine my plan. The prisoners stare. I glean what information I can, for my eyes are the answer to their mockery.

A guard orders us to return to our cells. This will have to wait.

Day X, Year XXX4

Phosphoal sustains this isle. Or rather, we do.

Each day, they bring us to the mines. We labor through the day, the rattle of chains as our company. They sell phosphoal to the mainland and reap their profits. The warden visits on occasions to berate those who fail to meet quota. Untimely deaths are a common occurrence here; the beatings "shake up the routine", in his own words. Some days, I believe it is the only thing that brings him joy. Not all the guards share this sentiment, I have observed.

When he beat me, he laughed. He kept going. I thought of something else.

Bruises heal. The fire within me only burns brighter.

Day X, Year XXX4

My love. How can I honor you on this day, in my pitiful state? I don't want you to see me like this.

Even in your absence, I still wonder what you saw in me. You would not recognize the person I have become.

I couldn't be a better husband to you, nor a better father for her. I live with the consequences.

Day X, Year XXX5

The window of free time feels progressively shorter. Still, I spend it in the library refining my plans.

The librarian is the only kind face I see in my time here. He informs me of new thesis papers relating to my field of study. By the time they arrive, they are likely outdated, for new discoveries are endless. I thank him nonetheless. When he says "Professor", it is not condescending like the others.

Small things keep the fire alive.

Day X, Year XXX5

This muzzle is worn from use. The guards intend to replace it with a new, “better” one. If they were interested in hearing my thoughts on the matter, which I doubt that they are, the fit was more than adequate.

They intend to starve me again. Lock me away, deprive me of sleep.

The plan is far from ready. I would not attempt an escape. But their cruelty is the point.

Day X, Year XXX6

You would have been seven today.

If there is a moment where I yearn to be home with you, your mother, and a pot of goulash simmering over the fire, it would be today.

I’m so sorry.

Day X, Year XXX7

The prisoners are still wary of my presence, but they don’t start a fight. They appear more curious about my predicament than anything else.

Some of their crimes are minor, in comparison. Petty theft alone does not warrant time in a prison like this. My theory is that the warden simply needs more fodder to mine his phosphoal. Yet, they spend little on the laborers who

are responsible for filling their coin purses. That does not surprise me.

As I write these words, the winds howl outside the cell walls. A cold draft passes through the holes in my clothes.

Greed is what makes and destroys this world.

Day X, Year XXX7

I have lost track of the days. Will come back to it. Hungry. Little sleep. More phosphoal, less talking. I cannot talk. The club strikes. Something cracks. A scream. Silence. Back to work.

Day X, Year XXX8

An escape route. Warm clothing. An accomplice. I've been refining the plan over the years, and these elements are key to my escape.

It turns out that he has been watching me for years. He knows I intend to escape and wants to join me. Given his knowledge, he is the most suitable choice. I will make good use of him.

The way he says "Professor" is almost respectful. I don't understand.

Day X, Year XXX8

Things did not go according to plan.

He set fire to the ship. I survived, and because of him, no one is looking for me.

A man dragged me from the shores of Cape Cold. He lets me stay in his home until I am well. I will never be well. Still, it has been over five years since I've eaten stew, and it warms me to the bones.

I look over a worn map he has given me. From Cape Cold, I can travel east to Winterbloom or south to Flamesgrace. I must be quick. I won't fare well in the cold alone.

The fire crackles beside me. The man has given me a tattered coat to wear. It is warm enough, and I know I cannot stay here. The fire within me will not stop until I exact my revenge.

I would ask you to watch over me, but I do not deserve that.

Day X, Year XXX9

I did not think I would be writing here again. A lot has happened.

Emerald knew I didn't do it from the start. He gave his own life to save mine. And his act was utterly selfless.

I said I wouldn't mourn him. I will now. Not only for his mother's sake, but for my own.

Elena lives. Elena remembers me. Remembering was its own journey, but she did. Elena is here, in this new house of ours. With the help of my friends – and friends, I can say with confidence – we rebuilt our home and started our lives anew. Nothing I can do will properly convey my thanks.

To this, they said, “Live. You’re free now.”

Free.

He’s gone. He won’t hurt you anymore. My love, may you rest at ease. I will hold you close in this weary heart of mine.

Day X, Year XX10

This is a new journal. A gift from Elena. The paper feels just right, and the ink glides smoothly. She has an eye for quality.

We enjoy quiet days in the house. I have refurnished the laboratory so that she can conduct her experiments there, if she chooses. She enjoys studying medicinal plants and light magic, the latter of which I can offer much aid. But I will give her time to be Elena, to make up for what she lost. Sometimes, time is the answer.

I’ve received requests to share new research on the One True Magic. The research that wasn’t stolen, at least. To scholars, plagiarism is the highest sin. They now speak his name with disdain. As for mine, I am apparently well-known among practitioners of magic. There are rumors that I am “undead”, having returned from the depths to sate my thirst for knowledge. Perhaps they spread the words of a budding novelist.

Undead or alive, I don’t plan on returning to Montwise for a while. The

city brings back certain memories. When I am ready, I shall document the findings of my research in full, though that brings up a new question: how does one quantify love?

Such is the life of a scholar.

Day X, Year XX10

It will be Elena's birthday soon.

She wants to try a new restaurant in town. She tells me that they make a "mean goulash." *Goulash has never angered me*, was my initial thought, but I understand that was not what she meant. It means that the goulash was delicious. And it was.

I will stop here. Elena calls for me. She wants me to teach her a new magic spell. I promised her that much.

My own research can wait. Spending time with Elena is what matters now. In a way, this, too, is research, for I may see how the light manifests in her hands.

She is the brightest light in this realm. I understand now.

# The Journey for His Daughter

*by yihou*

**General || Oswald & Elena || 2,189 Words**

Post-Canon, Oswald's Story Spoilers, Fluff, Identity Reveal

Lady Clarissa called Oswald a fool for it, but Oswald thought it a logical plan: he would first rebuild his relationship with Elena not as her father, but as Lady Clarissa's friend.

Elena was yet to regain her memories of her real father, after all, and Oswald had accepted the possibility that she never would. He would not treat her any different regardless. But it would frighten any child to be approached by a stranger claiming to be her father, especially one of his stature and stoic nature.

His strategy worked. Elena was always happy to see 'Mister Oswald', who naturally fit into the role of her teacher in magic. He also told her stories of his travels, both his time with the other travelers and his solo journey to eradicate the remaining traces of Harvey's research from the world. He omitted details to make the stories age-appropriate, of course, but she still listened intently with sparkling eyes.

In hindsight, these stories might have given her a wanderlust uncommon in girls her age. Oswald regretted this when Lady Clarissa spoke of again visiting her friend on Toto'haha, and rather than plan to stay home like she had before, Elena begged to go.

“I promise to be good, Lady Clarissa!” she said, her hands clasped together. “I would love to meet Ochette and all the beastlings. Oh, and there is Tropu’hopu on that island, is there not? Seeing the plays and acts they perform would make me a more cultured young lady!”

Lady Clarissa and Osvald exchanged looks. “Perhaps if Osvald would go with us,” deferring the decision to Osvald.

Elena looked at him pleadingly, a stare reminiscent of her younger self begging for another bedtime story. And though Osvald had multiple objections in mind, all of them died on his tongue.

The look was more potent than Agnea’s entreatment and Ochette’s puppy-like eyes combined, he thought wearily, and he was out of practice resisting it.

“Fine,” he said, and if Elena’s beaming face were magic, it would light up the room.

Elena took well to ship travel.

It wasn’t her time on a ship since she had traveled between the continents before. But on a trip of her own choosing, she was more excited than Osvald had ever seen her. On both legs of the voyage, from Conning Creek to Canalbrine to Toto’haha, she absorbed all she could about the ships’ operation on top of her regular lessons, while the one evening they spent in Canalbrine in-between was spent exploring the city.

Already this journey was the greatest stretch of time Osvald had spent with Elena since their reunion and he enjoyed it even more than he had expected. He had missed his daughter, so very much.

Their arrival at Toto’haha was heralded by a certain owl landing on Osvald’s head before the ship had even reached the dock. She hooted in greeting while Elena peered up at the owl in clear delight. “This is Mahina the malamaowl, correct? It’s so nice to meet you, Mahina!” She curtsied to the owl.

“Hey, Pops!” came a much louder greeting. In the distance, a beastling waved at them from shore.

Elena gasped. “Oh, and that’s Miss Ochette!” She hurried to the railing to wave back.

It sent a strange pang through Oswald’s chest to hear Ochette’s familial nickname for him when his own daughter used his name. He pondered the feeling briefly while the ship docked, but gave up on it when Ochette pounced on him for a hug.

“Ochette. Thank you for coming to meet us,” he said. “You remember Lady Clarissa. This is her ward, Elena.” He hoped that his phrasing would remind her not to blurt out the truth.

Neither Lady Clarissa nor Elena were spared from Ochette’s crushing hugs. Elena, after a recent growth spurt, was actually taller than Ochette.

Ochette was wagging her tail. “Welcome to Toto’haha, Elena! We’re going to have so much fun! I’ll show you all over the island, I’ll teach you how to use a bow, and we can go hunting! Oh, I bet you’ll be into those ruins too, the ones that scholars really like.”

“The ruins Lady Clarissa investigated on her first visit? I would love to see them! And... hunting.” Elena’s enthusiasm waned slightly, but she enjoyed trying new things. Oswald believed in her capabilities.

Their time in the Beastling Village then passed peacefully for Lady Clarissa and fruitfully for Elena. The friendliness of a whole village of beastlings had Elena initially timid, but she opened up within a day. Oswald was proud to watch his daughter venture outside her comfort zone, from trying beastling cuisine to putting an arrow to a bow for the first time.

When Oswald and Elena departed to Tropu’hopu, Lady Clarissa stayed behind in Beastling Village, leaving him alone with Elena for the first time since their reunion. Well, not quite alone; Ochette coming along was unexpected, but not unwelcome, as she ensured an uneventful walk to Tropu’hopu.

Oswald had promised to find Lady Clarissa a souvenir, so he was

scrutinizing the wares with Elena's and Ochette's input when he heard a shout.

"You there, Oswald!"

Oswald turned with a scowl. He recognized the speaker, but only because this man had forced him into his play, "*Make Way for Oswald, the Thieving Gentlemage!*" He still cringed at the memory.

"What," Oswald said curtly.

The stage director reached him before he could flee. "You've returned to Tropu'hopu! Does that mean you wish to star in a sequel to our play? I have plenty of ideas!"

"Mister Oswald was in a play?" Unfortunately, Elena overheard their conversation. "What was it about?"

"It was great!" Ochette interrupted. "He blasted mean humans with ice like *swoosh!* And they were like *graaargh!* Then Oswald said something cool and all the kids loved it."

Elena looked up at Oswald with wide eyes. "And there's to be a sequel?" As dearly as he wished to, Oswald again couldn't refuse her. "...Yes," he said.

The stage director clapped his hands in delight. "I promise to make this a masterpiece worthy of your— daughter?"

"Ward."

"Whatever! You'll love it, kid!"

"You'll never stop us, you thieving gentlemage!" the 'corrupt noble' shouted.

"Yes I will, for justice always prevails," Oswald said in monotone.

Ochette and Elena both sat in the front row, with Mahina perched on the beastling's lap. Their presence gave him strength to recite his trite lines. The villains threatened him, he threatened them back, and eventually he would cast a spell to drive them to their knees. This play wasn't any better than the prequel.

"Ah, but can you stop us... if we have a hostage?!"

The lead villain leapt off the stage and approached the front row, where children raised their hands, volunteering for the role. "Come with us, little lady, and no one will get hurt!" he said, taking one volunteer by the arm and bringing her onstage.

It was Elena. He took Elena hostage.

A distant part of Osvald knew this was all an act; he had the script memorized and Elena had a grin on her face while poorly faking distress. But that part of him was drowned out by the roar of blood in his ears, his heartbeat spiking at the sight of Elena in the clutches of a man holding a (fake) dagger to her throat.

"Elena!" he shouted, and the panic in his voice was all too real. His intended ice spell, flashy and carefully formulated to be harmless, fell apart, and a very different one took its place. An aura of colorful light formed around him as he reflexively called on the complicated formulae burned into memory, and when he fed his frantic emotions into it, the magic brightened into a star before him.

The crowd ooh and ahed over the colorful display and the actors pretended to cower. Elena was the only one that sensed the abnormal amount of magic poured into the spell, and the smile slipped from her face.

"Papa, no!" she yelled.

Osvald jerked in surprise, throwing off his aim in the nick of time. An intense beam of light poured out of the star and shot above the actor's heads into the sky.

The audience cheered at the spectacle while the actors dramatically crumpled to the ground, leaving Elena the sole survivor. She stood before Osvald, her hands fisting the front of her skirt as she stared up at him, and her expression echoed his shock.

Osvald abruptly remembered that they were in the middle of a stage. His tongue unstuck itself. "You're safe now," he said, for once earnest in his recitation.

"I know," Elena said.

They stared at each other until the stage director stepped onto the stage. "And the Thieving Gentlemage saves both his daughter and the day! The end! Take a bow, everyone."

The other actors gathered in a line facing the applauding audience and bowed, while Oswald gave a curt nod. Elena hesitated between the two gestures and belatedly decided on a curtsy.

The crowd began to disperse and Ochette bounded up to meet Oswald and Elena. "That was great!" she said cheerfully. "The One True Magic was super bright this time, Pops! But I thought Elena didn't know you're her dad?"

"I thought the same," Oswald said. He looked down at Elena, who didn't meet his eyes. "...Let's talk in private."

The two of them left Ochette and found an empty pier nearby, occupied only by seagulls that were frightened off by Oswald's tall stature. Oswald lowered himself to one knee beside her while Elena continued to avoid his gaze.

He kept his voice gentle as he asked, "How long did you know?"

Elena glanced at him hesitantly. "A couple months ago. But I never knew for certain. I didn't have any facts to back it up, so it was only a conjecture until now."

Not a recent realization, then. "What led you to this conjecture?"

"It's silly, but I started having dreams." Elena stared out across the water. "In them, I'm a child again and Mama is still alive. There's a third person present too. I can't make out his face, but he's big with a deep voice. Not in a scary way, though; I always feel safe with him. He teaches me about math and magic, and I want to be just like him."

Elena turned back and her eyes were bright with unshed tears. "I have no idea if these dreams are memories or fiction, but it occurred to me... The man in my dreams is what I would want my Papa to be like—and the man was exactly like you. Couldn't that mean you were my Papa?"

A hypothesis based not on facts, but on hope. He would typically be against such a thing, but now it forced a hapless smile out of him. "Yes. In this case, your conclusion was correct. I... I am your Papa."

Elena let out a shuddering breath. "Why didn't you tell me?" He was slow to recognize his emotions, but this one, smoldering like an ember of Shadow in his chest, he could identify. "I was afraid," he admitted.

"Afraid? But why?"

"I assure you, it isn't your fault. I'm nothing but delighted to be your

father, but it has been five years since our separation. I didn't know if I would be a good father, nor if you would want me for one," he said bluntly. "But I see now that I was a fool, just like Lady Clarissa always said."

"I wouldn't call you that," Elena mumbled. "But I think you could've said something sooner."

Osvald chuckled. "You're right. I shouldn't have kept the truth from you for so long. I apologize."

"I forgive you. And... I'm sorry for not remembering you." Elena ducked her head.

Osvald took Elena's hand. "Never apologize for that. I will be your father, no matter what you remember," he said, and his heart felt light to say it.

Something dripped into his beard. For a second, Osvald questioned how there was rain from a cloudless sky before he realized it was a tear rolling down his cheek. His next inhale came as an aborted sob.

Elena looked alarmed as she touched his cheek, her small hand trying to wipe away the streaming tears. "Papa, why are you crying?"

That was a good question. He wasn't upset; quite the opposite really. This feeling, ever present since his reunion with Elena but now swelling in his breast to an unfathomable degree... He had refused to acknowledge it in fear of losing it again, but a part of him had always known it for what it was.

He said, his voice choked through the tears, "Because I love you, Elena. I love you so much."

Elena smiled, her mouth matching the quivering curve of his lips, and threw herself at him in a hug. He held her tight as she burrowed into his coat, against his chest. And it was there that her words were directed straight to his heart when she said, "I love you too, Papa."

# The Seventh Source

*by grey\_sw*

**Teen || Osvald/Partitio, Osvald/Rita || 2,087 Words**

Osvald & Elena, Character Study, Missing Scene,  
Video Game Mechanics, Canon-Typical Violence, Humor

*Guess Osvald's still in there.* Partitio leans up against a wall in Conning Creek, watching the townsfolk come and go. Beside him, Ochette shifts from foot to foot, scenting the air. Even so, the rich smell of spit-roasted octopus isn't enough to distract Partitio from running his lucky silver-leaf coin through his fingers, making it appear and disappear between his gloved knuckles.

It's a nervous habit. One that Papp tried to school him out of, since it's the kinda thing that might put customers ill at ease. Truth be told, he's ill at ease, after everything that's happened. It's damn near enough to turn his stomach sour.

"I'm worried about Elena," Agnea says, softly. "Do you think she'll wake soon?"

"It's impossible to tell. The wound Harvey gave her seems to be healing, but given what we've learned so far, this may be more of a... spiritual affliction." Castti turns to Temenos.

"Don't ask me." His nonchalant shrug belies a keen interest in the topic. "From what Osvald said, Harvey's knife bore the influence of the Shadow. But even after Trousseau... and Kaldena... we still don't know enough about its possible effects."

Hikari frowns. “Nothing good, I’m sure. But if we’re lucky...”

“*If* we’re lucky, it’s just a scratch.” Throne’ melts out of the shadows beside Hikari, having gone to check on Lady Clarissa’s house. “I couldn’t see much, but it looked like she’s just sleeping. Osvald’s with her. We should know more when he comes back.”

More waiting, then. Partitio’s not great at that. Action’s more his style, especially when it comes to his partner: the big, quiet man he’s come to admire, despite the differences between them. (Osvald is good at waiting. That notebook of his keeps him entertained, any time, any place – he’d even read it on that horrible gondola. Hell, he’d been taking gondola notes.)

Partitio Yellowil ain’t that kind of guy. Right now, he’s itchin’ for something to do, or someone to fight: some way to protect his partner’s little girl. But if Castti and Temenos can’t help Elena, Partitio sure can’t. He knows, the hard and heartbreakin’ way, that no amount of leaves can buy good health.

Please, let her be ok, he thinks. He was always taught that the Trader ain’t a deal-maker, despite the name... but he’ll ask this once, just the same.

Maybe someone’s listenin’, because just then, Throne’ straightens out of her slouch. Partitio follows her gaze to the edge of town. Osvald’s there, sure enough, talking to Clarissa. Partitio can’t make out any of the words... but from the way Osvald’s gesturin’, Partitio can tell that something’s on his mind.

“C’mon! Pops needs us.” Ochette’s tail swishes in the dirt.

“Very well,” Temenos says. He has a way of makin’ himself sound uninterested, but Partitio knows their Hound has caught an intriguing scent.

They find Osvald waiting for them, just outside town. He wears a small, thoughtful frown: not the kind that has Partitio worried for Elena, but the kind that has Partitio worried for him.

“Is she ok?” Agnea asks, wringing her hands under her shawl.

“I believe so. Clarissa thinks she just needs rest. I wanted to leave

before...”

“Before?”

“Before she wakes, and doesn’t remember me.”

A moment of silence follows. Maybe it’s not surprising that Castti is the one to speak up.

“She’ll remember. It may take time, but... she’s young, yet. She has many years to make new memories with you. With her true father.”

“Yeah!” Partitio puts on his best an’ brightest grin. “She’ll be right as rain before y’know it.”

“I hope you’re right. There’s still so much I fail to understand about all this. What drove Harvey to do it? And what possessed Clarissa to...” Oswald shakes his head.

“What’d she do?” Throne’ asks. There’s a hint of it-better-be-something-good to her voice: one that has Partitio thinkin’, all over again, that he’d eat his Papp’s lucky hat before he ever crosses their thief.

“She just said something I don’t understand. You recall how I told you about the One True Magic?”

(Hell, he’d showed them. A bunch of Sea Birdkings had tried to ambush them, not far from Conning Creek... and that’s why there’s a fresh hole blown out of the cliff above the ocean, big enough to drive a steam locomotive through. Oswald had stepped forward, with his unconscious daughter still on his shoulder, and had rearranged the whole damn landscape with a single, searing blast of his new spell.

(He’d told them, once – back when they were crossing the mountains, just before that whole tragic thing with Crick – that only the Archmage D’Arquest had the power to change the land itself with magic. Near as Partitio can tell, that means Oswald got what Harvey wanted: his life-long study, the One True Magic itself.)

“Yeah,” Partitio says. “Y’ found it, didn’t ya? Your equations finally worked?”

“It was less a matter of my formulae, and more a matter of the source,” Oswald says, shaking his head. “I cannot name the source of this magic, even as it flows through me. Lady Clarissa had an idea, but...”

“Oh!” Ochette laughs. “She smelled nice, too, like she thought something

was funny! What'd she say?"

Osvald casts his gaze to the ground. He scratches at his beard with one big, blunt hand. "It's nothing, surely."

"Sounds like something to me," Throne' smirks. "Out with it."

"She, uh." Osvald clears his throat. "She said the source of the One True Magic is love. Have you ever heard such a ridiculous thing?"

Partitio glances at the other travelers – who are, unsurprisingly, also glancing at each other, as if nobody wants to break the news. In fact, it takes him a second to catch that they're all glancin' at him, and not at Osvald.

Damn. The things he'll do for his partner.

"Well, y'see. That is. I, er... aw, t'hell with it." Partitio whips his hat off, scrubbing a hand through his hair. "From what you were sayin', it came to you when Elena was in danger, yeah? All of a sudden?"

Osvald nods. "Yes. At that moment, it was as if time stopped. I wanted nothing more than to protect her, though I had no way to do so. And then... a great power rose within me. A new Source, the likes of which I have never felt. It was a perfect match for my equations."

A small, quiet sound, not unlike a snigger, rose from Temenos' general direction. Half a second later, a grunt – not unlike the sound of Throne's elbow driving into a certain Inquisitor's gut – followed it.

Osvald didn't seem to notice. "Harvey called his Shadow the One True Magic, too. But it was no match for the might that filled me in that moment."

"Well, partner... that sure does sound like it could be love. Since it showed up when you were guardin' Elena, an' all."

Osvald shakes his head again. "I'm not sure I understand. She is my daughter, yes... but ever since childhood, others have told me I have a cold and empty heart."

That's right: Osvald often insists that he doesn't understand love. Partitio thinks this is more an issue of namin' and less of an issue of feelin', because Partitio has never once heard him gripe about his lost station, or his fortune, or his home. Not even his life's work, his precious research. Osvald says *Harvey took everything from me*, and he means *Harvey took Rita and Elena*.

(It's no surprise that the One True Magic chose him. Partitio sees how much he cares for his family and friends, even as he insists that doing so is

only logical. It echoes in the way he gets melancholic when he smells goulash, and flies into a rage whenever anyone harms a child. It rhymes with the way he is, as Ochette puts it, “everybody’s pops”: always lookin’ after all seven of them, from the far corner, over the top of his current book.)

Temenos coughs. “I would be glad to judge whoever called you heartless, Professor.” His voice is as light as always, but there’s a hint of an edge to it. “You spent five years trapped in frozen purgatory, dreaming only of vengeance. Once free, you pursued that goal for another year with us, allowing nothing to stop you – not pain, not the Shadow itself, nor its fell creatures. We all witnessed your resolve. And we all watched as you threw that grim path to the wayside at the first glimpse of your daughter, alive. A lesser person might’ve succumbed to rage and hatred, even then, but you only thought of her.”

“Hmph.”

Temenos smirks. “Hmph if you will, Osvald. I still say that your actions have been those of a wise and big-hearted soul. Verily, the source of your power is none other than the Sacred Flame itself. Which is, assuredly, love... or something like that.”

“He’s right,” Throne’ says. “I’ve seen you around kids. Remember last time we visited the Garden? All those little Snakes, lining up to try and pick your pockets? Don’t think I didn’t notice you filling them with candy that morning, either. Trust me when I tell you: that shit can’t be faked.”

“That was simply logical,” Osvald mutters. “I merely wished to give them a chance to practice their vocation.”

“Ah. Were the piggyback rides also logical?” Hikari asks.

Osvald glances away. “Of course. I had the power to bring them happiness, so I did. ‘S as simple as that.”

“That’s because love is logical,” Ochette says. “Love brings living things together. And if there’s one thing I’ve learned on this journey, it’s that we’re stronger together. Beastlings, humans, animals... even monsters run in packs! It’s our instinct.”

“Quite so,” Temenos says, hiding a smile behind his hand.

“A natural-sciences approach,” Osvald mutters. “Interesting. I always wondered why I was so strongly drawn to Rita. She was warm and kind

to me, despite my nature, and I suppose... that lit the same warmth in my own breast. I found myself wanting to see more of her smile. Her laugh. Her dancing. We made a study of each other, together as one. And then, when Elena was born, and I held her for the first time..."

He sighs: a long, drawn-out sound. "She was our treasure. The brightest part of my life. I wanted to give her the world."

"You just did, Professor. You gave her the Dawn. Another tomorrow. It's the one prize no one can steal... as long as we keep her safe." Throne's arms are crossed; her posture casual, yet ready.

"We will. I swear it. We must find the people behind this – Harvey's *friends* – and put them down." Oswald's voice is a growl.

Ochette leaps up, swiping at the air. "Gauuuu! That's the spirit! There's no prey we can't catch together!"

Later, amidst the dust of the road, Oswald falls into step beside Throne' and Partitio.

"You ok?" Throne' asks. At Oswald's sideways glance, she shrugs. "Not about Elena. About Harvey. You had him marked, but it sounds like he offed himself? Just thought it might be bugging you."

Oswald snorts. "Not at all. He met a fitting end. Alephan has no use for foolish scholars."

"Ha! You guys say that, too?" Her grin could cut glass. "We say 'Aeber hates fuck-ups'".

This wrings a rare snort of laughter out of Oswald. "Indeed."

"Y' said his own damn book blew him up, or somethin' like that?" Partitio asks.

"Yes. Well. Speaking strictly unscientifically..." Oswald pauses. "It looked like it dragged him straight down to Hell."

Partitio gives a low whistle. "Hoo-ee. If that ain't somethin'".

"It's strange, though. Now that I think of it... I'd give anything to hear him try to explain all of this. He was the only friend I ever had, apart from

Rita. My only friend..." Oswald's voice fades. "I suppose I never *had* a friend, did I?"

"Hey, now. That ain't true." Partio claps his partner on the shoulder, pulling him in close. Oswald surprises him by leaning into it. His breath, the warm bulk of his arm, the scratch of his beard against Partio's temple: it's all right there, closer than ever. "You got seven friends."

"So I do." Oswald's voice is low and warm.

"My, aren't you two cozy!"

"Shut up, Temenos," Oswald mutters.

Even so, he gives Partio's shoulder one last squeeze before he pulls away.

# Is Not the Semblance Enough?

*by gascon-en-exil*

**Teen || Osvald/Partitio || 2,000 Words**

Established Relationship, Crossdressing, Genderfluidity,  
References to Period-Typical Homophobia/Classism,  
References to In-Universe Incest, Infidelity, Mild Sexual References

Partitio Yellowil is the most eligible bachelor in the Brightlands.

His estimated net worth speaks for itself, of course. But Partitio is also young and handsome, startlingly so in contrast to most industrialists. Opera dancers visit his company's private box whenever he makes an appearance at the theatre and drape themselves on his arm, socialites rush to find excuses to be in his way if they spot him out and about in town, and businessmen with marriageable daughters are forever sending him letters of introduction in the hopes of arranging a match. Any woman who manages to speak with him however reports the same thing. Partitio is effortlessly charming, assuming one can overlook his yokel mannerisms, yet he seems always unmoved and, indeed, too friendly to care very much at all about wooing anyone. He inflames and frustrates society gossip in equal measure.

Osvald V. Vanstein is rather less eligible, not least because he is not a bachelor.

His story was much circulated in the weeks that followed his appointment to the board of Partitio & Roque — a university professor framed for the deaths of his first wife and daughter and sentenced to life on Frigit Isle, who then staged a harrowing escape and enacted his revenge upon the real culprit.

Through his fortunate acquaintance with Partitio, Oswald had been able to clear his name in court, rejoin the professional world, and make arrangements for his daughter who had unexpectedly survived the ordeal. It's the sort of tale that society gossip adores.

But the man himself has proven to be less of a hit. Oswald rarely makes public appearances in New Delsta, and when he does he is gruff and frowning and half the time walking around with his nose buried in a book. He's a grim sight, towering over everyone around him like a giant descended from some forlorn mountain cave. Fine clothes and a scholarly air can disguise neither his weathered face nor his hulking frame akin to that of a common laborer, and moreover no one knows exactly how old he is beyond the observation that he is unquestionably past his prime. Even more damning is the apparent fact that he and his daughter rely on Partitio as their benefactor; there is little that can render a man so immediately unappealing as a lack of financial independence.

Then there is the matter of his second wife.

Mrs. Vanstein might be the strangest member of this peculiar trio. Months of discreet inquiry have uncovered almost nothing about her, not her family nor her connections nor even her first name. She has never been seen except in Oswald's presence, and has almost never been heard speaking. By all appearances she is quite in love with her husband in a naïve, childish way casual observers liken to something out of an overwrought stage romance. Mrs. Vanstein always displays consideration in her attire, her dresses and hair never on the cutting edge of fashion but not much behind it either although she does have a marked fondness for the color yellow. Regrettably though, the lady is no beauty; rather, Mrs. Vanstein possesses broad mannish shoulders, a small bust, and a sharp, angular face. More than once the attendees of a New Delsta salon have been regaled with the account of someone who nearly dared to laugh at this horse-faced woman when they spied her in the street, only to quail before her husband's wrathful expression. The most notorious rakes in the city agree that she would make for a fine prize to steal away from such a scowling behemoth...but also that they would insist on taking Mrs. Vanstein from behind so they would be spared from the need to look at her.

Their living arrangements excite further curiosity. When Partitio and

the Vansteins come to New Delsta they reside in a rented townhouse along one of the city's most storied avenues. It's a suitable property for the president of Solisita's largest mercantile conglomerate. Or rather, it *would* be suitable if Partitio spent more than a few days there out of every month. The rest of the time the place is shut up and staffed only by a housekeeper. Attempts to bribe additional information out of her have met with failure, as have all efforts at gaining access to the premises. No brothel girl has ever grabbed the attention of either man, and while many ladies have sent their footmen to the townhouse to pass their cards along to Mrs. Vanstein, she has never received any of them. Society was quick to accuse her of snobbery, but soon someone devised the more amusing explanation that the woman is so embarrassed by her husband's unflattering qualities and her own homeliness that she refuses to entertain.

Wild tales of country brides and secret families swirl around Partitio. All the Brightlands conjectures that he must have a girl tucked away somewhere, and that this is the true reason he is forever on the road and, more importantly, why he will neither court a lady nor take a mistress in town. During charity benefits hosted by his company the guests will delight themselves by sketching a portrait of the little simpleton that their host must be "sweet on," to use his own boorish vernacular. Uneducated, unskilled in bed but surely a deft hand at plowing fields or milking cows, and likely with children already at least a few of which actually belong to the farmer next door or to a passing tradesman. Her hardworking paramour would doubtless never notice.

In the midst of all these diverting speculations comes a truly revolutionary one, proposing to solve once and for all the mystery of Mrs. Vanstein. What if she were Partitio's sister? The curious friendship between Partitio and Osvald, two men otherwise wholly unlike, might be excused if they were brothers-in-law, and moreover the physical similarities between the company president and his executive's wife would be accounted for even if no one can attest to ever having seen the two at the same time. Such a pitiable similarity too, for the features so becoming on a man like Partitio are very ill-favored on a woman. Those in the know entertain an even more salacious suspicion: were the Yellowwils' parents siblings? One can never put anything past country rubes. The whispered rumors at the gentlemen's clubs go further

still, venturing that Mrs. Vanstein is so reserved in her demeanor because she shares her affections with her brother behind closed doors. Osvald must tolerate his cuckold's horns for the sake of the comfortable lifestyle it affords him. And as for the lady, what's a trifle like incest in the face of escaping the need to share a bed with a man as cold as her husband?

It would be the scandal of the season if any of it were true. It might even make front page news. Even so, such tales are vastly preferable to what is in all likelihood the reality, that of upstart new money renting in the city and inflicting upon all of New Delsta a curmudgeonly gentleman and his ugly wife. What a bore that would be!

The hansom pulls alongside the sidewalk a few minutes before midnight. Osvald steps out, pays the driver, and helps his wife down from the cab. Arm in arm they vanish into the townhouse.

Once inside the shift is gradual. Coats, hats, shoes, and gloves are cast off, then up the narrow staircase to the two bedrooms. So far as the housekeeper knows, one is for Partitio and the other for Osvald and his wife. She is paid handsomely to forget that she has never laid eyes on Mrs. Vanstein; that, were it not for her clothes and cosmetics, there would be no indication of her presence at all.

Partitio approaches the vanity mirror in the bedroom they share, unscrews his earrings, and carefully removes his wig. With a damp cloth he scrubs away the powder and rouge and the dark paint on his lashes. Osvald steps forward, already down to his shirtsleeves and with his hair untied and hanging free, and wordlessly begins working to undo the buttons on the back of Partitio's dress. In the flickering candlelight reflected behind them, all the incongruities are thrown into sharp relief: the Wildlands laborer's tan, the masculine jawline, the broad shoulders as the silk falls away, and even the whorls of black hair peeking out from the top of the padded corset.

"What d'ya want tonight?" he asks. It's not something they've ever voiced, especially not when what Partitio really means is *Who d'ya want me to*

*be tonight?*

Mrs. Vanstein is an absurdity, a farce staged by a man opposed to deceit of any kind. But she is also a necessity, to avoid laying bare before the uncaring eye of the world the naked truth.

The most eligible bachelor in the Brightlands is a pervert.

But that is also selling Mrs. Vanstein short. It is only through her that Partitio may walk on Oswald's arm down the boulevards or hold his hand in restaurants, and it is only through her that when Elena at last remembers her Papa they may all come together as a family. No child could ever say *I have two fathers* and be thought reasonable. But Elena, every bit as perceptive as her father, could learn to say in public *This is my stepmother, and she loves my Papa and me very much*. Every day it wears on Partitio to play the philanthropist aiding an unfortunate widower; thanks to Mrs. Vanstein, there exists this wonderful new possibility.

And Oswald never pushes, never insists that Partitio be anyone other than himself. When they're traveling, sleeping in country inns or beneath the stars, petticoats and paint would be impractical. And yet Oswald adores him regardless, affirming though every caress and whispered endearment that he is not using Partitio as the men of Oresrush use one another — not as a substitute for women, but rather loving him entirely on his own terms. It's a love that Partitio had once scarcely believed could exist between men.

Their time in town only compounds that love. Sometimes Oswald will look at Partitio and remark, "I like when you wear your hair down," or, "Yellow really suits you." One day Oswald produces a small arrangement of yellow and white flowers and tucks it into the band of Partitio's fedora. Blushing like a schoolboy uncertain of his affections, he stammers, "I thought it might look nice on our next outing when...you know."

Partitio comprehends then that none of this is merely for display, or to counteract the petty cruelties printed about them in the society pages. On a sunny morning a few days later, while they're preparing for a trip to the park, Partitio pulls some of the pins out of his wig so that the loose black curls will spill over the shoulders of his favorite cream-colored summer dress. He places the flower-adorned fedora atop his head where it sits a little differently from usual, but somehow just right all the same. As they amble along under the

trees, Mr. and Mrs. Vanstein speak of everything they want to show Elena in the city someday. Partitio leans against Oswald and kisses him in full view of a dozen idle onlookers.

Mrs. Vanstein, absurd as she is, is freedom.

Slowly Oswald's lips trail along Partitio's shoulder and up his neck along his jaw, lingering on a hint of stubble. "What do I want?" the other man repeats. His arms encircle Partitio's waist, pulling him close. "The same thing I want every night."

Oswald's gaze is warm and unguarded behind his glasses, taking in not Partitio or Mrs. Vanstein but both in unison. Friend, employer, beloved, wife and mother, fascinating inexplicable bachelor-bride outwardly distilled into that singular weighty elision of the Oresrush drawl, partner. And yet, here in the silent space where lies the fire that has always burned between them —

*"You."*







# Separation / Reunion

*by franthescrivener*

**General || Hikari/Partitio || 1,997 Words**

The only reason Partitio knew that they had passed the road to Ku was thanks to Benkei's none too subtle attempt to avoid pointing it out. He wouldn't say "Your Majesty" without reason, and with no visible danger, all Partitio could do was look at the scenery. Yeah, they walked right by that road some ways back, hadn't they? At this distance, they were close enough to Oresrush that Hikari and Benkei might as well come along with him. Partitio was about to voice this suggestion when he noticed Hikari staring behind them with a frown. "Ah, shucks," he said. "Reckon you noticed, eh? Passed it right on by."

"I can't even see the road," said Hikari. "We must have lost track." He looked at Partitio with a wry grin and accusatory eyes. "Why didn't you say anything?"

"Me? I just noticed, myself. Why don't you ask your retainer there why he kept quiet?"

Hikari lifted his eyebrows. "...he didn't! That's what you were trying to say, weren't you, Benkei?"

"Indeed, Your Majesty," Benkei said.

"He was just doin' us a solid," Partitio said.

"So I see," said Hikari. "Though it has lost us a fair bit of time on the

journey back to Ku.”

“You don’t gotta be there right this instant, do ya?” The look Hikari gave him said they did, and that Partitio ought to have known that. Even so, he couldn’t let this opportunity pass without at least trying. “It’s just. Oresrush ain’t too far from here, ‘n’ I was wonderin’ if you ‘n’ Mr. Benkei wouldn’t mind...”

Hikari got this dreamy look in his eyes, like Partitio was offering a wonderful something that would fix all his problems. Made it all the more heartbreaking when reality settled in, and that faint, enamored grin on Hikari’s beautiful face turned into a serious, thin line. Reality hit the new king a lot harder after he had learned about his role in Oboro’s scheme. Now he was questioning it, searching every crevice for danger and deception even when he didn’t have to. But what could Partitio say to that? “Don’t worry, darlin’, I’d never betray you”? Wouldn’t that Oboro fellow have said the same thing (minus the “darlin’”)? “I am sorry, Partitio,” Hikari said, downcast eyes seeming to convey he knew exactly what Partitio thought. “If I had the luxury I would have agreed to it without question.”

“You don’t have anythin’ to apologize for.” But he couldn’t help his sigh as he stared in the direction of where Hikari had to go. “Guess this is where we part ways.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

Partitio continued to stare where he’d soon see Hikari’s back, retreating to the horizon. This wouldn’t be goodbye. They’d write to each other, and would surely see each other again. This relationship was not about to end. And yet... between Partitio’s presidency and Hikari’s kingship, how much time could they spare to maintain the flame, when they were so far apart? If they couldn’t see each other for another year, how would they feel at the end of it? Would they be so far grown into their respective roles that the cloak of the relationship no longer fit?

Stop thinking like that, Partitio. It didn’t have to be that way, especially if he didn’t want it. Not right now, when his heart burned fiercely for Hikari. That sort of far-off thing couldn’t be planned and accounted for like tracks on the ground. It was a relationship. It was love. It was uncontrollable. Maybe a year from now his heart may have cooled, but that wasn’t concrete, and it

wasn't worth worrying over. Love was a journey. The only thing he could do was walk forward with Hikari, for as long as he would allow Partitio to stay by his side.

Hikari slid one of his hands inside one of Partitio's, drawing Partitio away from his thoughts. A tinge of sadness drifted in the sea of gratitude awash over Hikari's face, his gentle hand squeezing Partitio's with a warmth that radiated through Partitio's glove. Partitio had to break eye contact, smirking as he did.

"Am I embarrassing you?" asked Hikari.

Partitio breathed out a laugh through his nose. He didn't think he would ever tire of hearing mirth brighten Hikari's voice. "Naw. Forgot what I was gonna say."

Hikari tugged at his hand. Partitio leaned into the tug, lowering himself enough for Hikari to kiss his cheek. "You can't possibly think I'll be satisfied by that alone," said Hikari, his smile brushing against Partitio's skin.

"You kings have insatiable appetites." But Hikari could only hum in response as Partitio turned his head and kissed him on the lips. Guilt filled Partitio when they finally broke the kiss. It'd gone on for a while, longer than it probably should have. Hikari was late enough as it was! He didn't need Partitio to make it any worse; but all that greeted Partitio when he looked into his partner's face was a bittersweet smile without a trace of resentment. "I'll write," Partitio said hastily. "I'll write lots."

"As will I. Whenever I have a moment to spare."

He grabbed both of Hikari's hands with his own, squeezing and bouncing them in his grip. "And if I got time, I'll swing on by Ku."

"You will always be welcome."

"I'll work on that steam engine A.S.A.P. Even if I gotta nag Mr. Osvald about it. It'll be one of my priorities."

Hikari nodded, flashing a faltering smile. He could not indulge Partitio any further. He had to bring this to an end.

One last kiss; one lingering touch, reluctantly retracted; one last stare, hesitatingly ended. Hikari turned and walked towards Benkei, who looked at Partitio with an unsaid apology. Hikari spared one last glance behind him before he set his gaze ahead towards the road to his duty, and Partitio

watched, until the sun had long since set and his love could no longer be seen.

Hikari couldn't see Partitio when he and Benkei arrived at the port. "He must be on the ship," he muttered to himself. Did everyone else arrive, and that's why Partitio was missing? He was too busy entertaining them to greet anyone else.

But that would mean he had forgotten about Hikari. So be it, should that be the case, but he wasn't happy about that prospect, and he had found, over the course of a year being king, that optimism was a hard to maintain necessity. Nothing in Partitio's letters indicated that he would snub him so coldly. He had to be busy inside.

With who?

Also over the course of a year being king, Hikari had found that paranoia was easier to come by than hope. Ruling had twisted his heart and mind in ways he didn't want them to go—not towards violence and corruption, but doubt and fear. But all sorts of evil followed on the heels of those two things. He had to be vigilant of himself, to make sure he did not stumble under the weight of his burdens.

He wanted a break. He needed a break. He hoped Agnea's performance would provide him with the respite he needed, but that was a sea's distance away, a span he would have to cross with potentially his thoughts as the only thing to keep him company.

Where was Partitio?

The sound of laughter lifted his sagging spirit as he entered the ship. It was Partitio, yes, and Agnea—and Osvald, to his surprise. The laughter came from a clear direction, one that turned his legs to stone when he faced it. What if he walked into the room and...?

Was this how rulers wound up with such bloated cabinets? Delegating everything to this minister and that, so the ruler didn't have to think as much about the unpleasant things? Of the ministers he did have, many fussed that he'd worry himself to an early grave if he kept trying to do so much on his

own. They were most likely correct, but fear and paranoia were potent. What if someone did something wrong when he wasn't looking?

("What if" was the question that plagued him enough—too much—these days.)

"...go see if His Majesty is here," Partitio's voice said from down the hall. Now his entire body was made out of stone, and exposed, because there was no place he could run to fast enough before Partitio walked into the hallway. He'd have to see what Partitio's reaction was before he was ready.

The song Partitio started to whistle died swiftly as he turned to where Hikari stood, frozen. "D... Hikari?"

So he wasn't sure, either. Lies came easily when they were words on paper, but the face and the body were earnest. Neither of them knew what they would see when faced with the other, and both of them feared what would greet them after a year.

But Hikari's body relaxed. Partitio was going to call him darlin'.

In the haze of relief, he didn't know who started running first. Maybe it was Partitio, running so fast his hat and coat fell off, and spurring Hikari's legs into action; or maybe Hikari started to move of his own accord. Nothing felt tangible until he was in Partitio's arms, looking up at him with unrestrained relief.

Partitio smiled that broad, dazzling smile of his and said, "Guessed you missed me, too!"

"I suppose I did," he said with a laugh. "But I think I missed you more."

"What makes ya say that?"

He affected a pout. "You weren't outside to greet me."

Partitio ruffled Hikari's hair. "Sorry 'bout that. Got caught up talkin' to the others."

"Was that really Osvald laughing?"

"Sure was! He's in better spirits these days—though, to tell ya the truth, I'm still mighty surprised, too."

"You two aren't as quiet as you think," a stern, deep voice boomed from down the hall.

Partitio slapped a hand on his own head, then glanced behind him. "Shucks! I don't think ya can say I didn't miss ya just as much..."

Hikari had the mind to go pick up Partitio's things for him, but the comfort of his grasp was too much to break away from. "Look at you, making a mess on your own ship."

Partitio seemed to have the same dilemma. He made an effort to move, but once he realized he'd have to let go of Hikari, he stayed right where he was. "I'll get that later. There's something I gotta do first."

"Being what, exactly?"

A kiss, of course. Before Hikari knew it, he was pulled off the floor up into the air, snug in Partitio's embrace. They only broke away when the driver cleared her throat.

"All ready to depart?" she asked with a coy smirk.

"Er, yeah," said Partitio. He looked up at Hikari, who he still had hoisted in the air, and reluctantly set him down. "Sorry, darlin', but the crew's gonna need me for a sec."

Hikari stood on his toes to peck Partitio on the lips. "I'll see you soon, then," he said, giving Partitio's hand a squeeze before he left to greet the others. The two lovers kept looking back at each other as they went their separate ways, until Hikari vanished behind a door.

The past year had been hard, certainly. The challenges of being king were heavy enough on their own, and they weren't made any better by coming to a cold, empty bed. Letters couldn't replicate the feel of a man by his side. But he and Partitio had endured, their hearts burning just as hot for each other as when they had parted ways.

Nothing about their paths would be easy, but knowing he would still have a heart to share no matter how far apart they were made the burden feel lighter. Hikari greeted his friends with happiness and hope in his heart, confident that he was loved, and would be loved—perhaps forever.



# Heavenly Bodies

*by badomens444*

**Teen || Hikari/Partitio || 1,478 Words**

Hikari's Story Chapter 5 Spoilers, Hikari POV, Drunken Half-Confessions

Echoes of song filled the cool night air as they pulled away from the warm mirth that seemed to fill every corner of the city. They ducked back and away toward the inn, where they and their companions were to stay for the night. Crowds filled the streets, ignoring their stumbling steps, their own laughter filling the air as much as the performances going on all around them. No one paid them any mind, and between them their hands were clasped tight. The flowing liquor made their footsteps stumbling, awkward, but Hikari couldn't care, not with Partitio's warm hand holding his own, as they stumbled to find some semblance of privacy.

Perhaps the words hadn't come out of either of them just yet. Perhaps he still found it a touch unbelievable, given everything that had happened so far, given everything that still lie ahead of them. But he couldn't mistake that touch for anything else. His own feelings had bloomed in his chest for so long, a choke of tangled growth, flowers and vines that had threatened to overthrow him, to tear down the walls of his heart any passing second. But with that touch, that crooked and earnest smile on Partitio's face, he knew that, at least in part, his feelings were returned. He had dared to hope. Hope had carried him this far. Perhaps it would carry him the rest of the way, too.

Although Ku was a world away now, the cool, singing heights of the city of Merry Hills, alive with the laughter and song and dance, was a cold contrast to what lie ahead of him in the crumbling ruins of his own home. But for a moment, he needn't worry about that. He needn't worry about what lie at the end of his own road. Perhaps an executioner's axe. One had waited for him before, just north in Stormhail. His body ached for the injuries that he had suffered there, although they had largely healed. The crackling web of lightning touching his skin was now a scar, skin shiny and new, silvery against his flesh. But that didn't matter now.

Bits of Agnea's song littered the air, the song of hope given to the masses, sung bright and proudly, in an arena where she had won the Grand Gala. Bits of them had followed them as they walked. Whether or not their friends would join them at the inn before long was unknown. The night was cool and deep, no longer fresh and young but comfortable, and between liquor and merriment, Hikari felt his eyes were very heavy now. But still, before any sleep, he wanted to talk. Just a little more. He tempered his expectations. Surely there were feelings the two of them shared. He had no doubts about that now, although he had doubted plenty in the past. No, it was more expectations for the future, what it might hold for the two of them, what could be secured and what was still up for fate to decide.

If fate were real, if there was any such predetermination in the world, surely it had brought him here. But Hikari liked to think otherwise. That the future was something he could mold with his own two bare hands, together with Partitio.

Traipsing through the night, over cobblestone streets and tall bridges, they finally found a quiet spot, a turret of stone overlooking the city, the circular dais empty of any presence beyond the wind. Above them, the sky shone, inky blue-black night choked with more stars than he could count, the silvery moon full and bright. With ease, Partitio flopped down on the ground to bask in that light. Hikari followed slowly, lowering himself, feeling the liquor that had settled in his feet tilt with his body.

The cobblestones were cold on his back, the night sky stretching out above him, glittering with thousands of brilliant stars. Giddiness bubbled up in his chest, in his throat, spilling out of his mouth as laughter. The sounds of

the city below them faded away, lost to the night. The world spun, the stars dancing their own merry jig, with just the two of them as witnesses.

"Something real funny I learned 'bout stars," Partitio said, his words slurring a little.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. Regulus was tellin' me. Right after Mr. Osvald and I beat those guys up for his telescope."

"I doubt they'll give him any more trouble. But go on."

"He was telling me that some stars, sometimes it's the real bright ones, they're actually two stars, orbitin' one another, like their dancin'."

"Oh?" That thought resounded distantly against his brain, but filled him with warmth, all the ways to his toes. "Paired stars..."

"Partners, ya could say." Partitio's hand was so warm against his own, and when he dared to look, those silver eyes were focused up at the sky, reflecting the world beyond that neither of their hands could touch. "I've been thinkin' 'bout that an awful lot. Partners like that, moving together, each one makin' the other shine all the brighter."

"It's a lovely thought. That the stars aren't much different than us." He had also been dwelling on their meeting with Regulus and his scholarly pursuits of the heavens, theory and fact orbiting in his mind among all the other thoughts. The world was more vast than he could ever possibly know, further than his own feet could ever carry him.

"I was just thinkin' that."

"He did have many interesting thoughts on the movements of the heavens."

"Oh yeah! Like the moon, for example! It ain't really got a light on its own. But its the sun's light that makes it all pretty and bright."

The ache in his heart was dulled in their proximity, eclipsed by the electric current of merriment alive in his flesh. Stars were nice. But the sun shone the brightest, warm on his face, on his back as he traveled. Warm on his heart, a warmth he carried with him everywhere now, that he cradled close at night, a warmth that had nurtured the garden of his heart from the barrenness that had been there before. By contrast, the moon often felt as cold and heavy as his own heart had once been, swallowed by darkness again and

again. It was no match for the sun, for its warmth, its light.

“But did ya know?”

“Hm?”

“Regulus thinks the sun’s just a regular ol’ star, too. It’s just because it’s up close that we can see it differently.”

“Perspective then. I suppose it matters.”

“I sure think it does. And just because the moon ain’t got a light of his own, don’t mean he ain’t still beautiful.” Finally, Partitio turned to look at him. “Orbitin’ the place we live, lightin’ up the night, keepin’ all them stars company... He’s got a real important job, too.”

“Even when he turns dark?”

“A course! Just because we see his dark side sometimes don’t mean he ain’t doin’ his best. I love him no matter what.”

If those words didn’t pull the breath from his lungs, Hikari wasn’t sure what else in the whole of the world would. His own feelings could never be put so eloquently, so succinctly, a muddled mess that he’d fought time and again to untangle.

Rising to his feet with a wobbling motion, Partitio dusted himself off, reaching on hand down. His eyes were bright, glassy, limed with moonlight, and eclipsed in his shadow, Hikari was moored to the moment.

“We should dance, too. Whole town’s doin’ it.”

“I fear I won’t be able to keep my feet beneath me.” He smiled. It was an earnest one, one that pulled at his cheeks, that cut a crescent curve across his face.

“Then I’ll just have ta catch ya if ya stumble.”

“And what if you stumble?”

“I can only hope ya’ll catch me too.”

With ease, Partitio hoisted him to his feet, and in his unsteady step, they crashed together. Folded into Partitio’s arms, Hikari felt that sunlight warmth spread through him, swift as wildfire, filling his face with more heat than he could bear. He couldn’t pull away. He *didn’t want* to pull away. He wanted to hold onto this moment forever, even after the night ended, even after the moon crumbled to dust, even once the sun burned out. The gods could not rip this momentary happiness away from him. Fleeting, perhaps, but never truly



gone, and never forgotten. No matter what lie ahead for the two of them. The end of the road was still ahead of them, shrouded in darkness, lined with teeth ready to tear him apart. But for this moment, Hikari let himself bask in the light of the sun, knowing that it would strengthen him against the whatever lay at journey's end.

# The Nature of Human Hearts

*by AerialSquid*

**Teen || Temenos & Ochette || 1,287 Words**

Temenos was good with children. They were easy enough to manipulate, if you understood how to think about the world as they did. Partio spoke to them like adults, which gained their respect but did make him struggle to motivate them in the right direction. Throné sympathized with children, likely due to her own troubled past as an orphan, but never quite knew what to do with them. And then you had Osvald, who was reminded of his daughter by any pair of young, shining, bright eyes and was aggressively chopping wood to avoid looking them in the face.

None of them said it out loud, of course. They didn't need to. Temenos could read them.

Temenos read everyone.

Perhaps someone as interfering as Agnea might have tried to distract Osvald from his self-distraction with kind words. Temenos was happy just to enjoy the view of a man built like a mountain engaging in hard physical labor with his shirt off.

He lounged back against a nearby tree and loosened the clasps of his cloak, letting it pool in the sand beside him. Nobody here cared if a priest was properly garbed in his vestments, after all. It meant he could let his hair

down...just a little bit. Not enough to be actually vulnerable, of course, but enough to make others be vulnerable in turn.

When the Beastlings of Toto'haha were discovered - or rediscovered, rather - there had come up the question of proselytization. The pontiff had declared the Beastlings to be in a 'state of grace', more akin to animals than humans, and thus did not require the Light of the First Flame to be brought to them by the church. Temenos deeply suspected this policy was less a spiritual decree and more to prevent ambitious evangelists from trying to make a name for themselves in the dark heathen jungles of Toto'haha and subsequently getting eaten by crocodiles.

Pfeh, 'state of grace', like the beastlings were innocent children. As if he'd not seen Ochette with blood on her teeth

"Hey, Temenos?"

From the way Ochette was following his gaze, Temenos divined she was planning to ask him about his interest in Osvald...

"Yes, my dear?" he said, already preparing an answer about the blessings of hard work upon an unquiet mind.

"Are you gonna make love to Osvald?"

Temenos choked on the warm sea air.

"Ochette, who taught you that phrase?"

"Agnea." Ochette rolled over on her back, lazily stretching out her limbs as if she hadn't just dropped a bomb in Temenos's lap. "She said I wasn't allowed to say the word Castii taught me, and that I had to use that phrase instead. And I can't call it mating, because it's only mating if you can get them pregnant, so—"

"No," Temenos hissed. "And don't you dare mention this to Osvald, or anyone else. And what possibly gave you the impression I wanted such a thing?"

Ochette shrugged. "You smell like it."

Ahhh. Temenos settled back again, leaning against the rough park of the palm tree. "The smell with your nose, or the other kind?"

Ochette yawned. "Other kind."

"I see. I'll need to be more subtle with my emotions, then."

Beastlings apparently had a preternatural ability to discern the feelings

of others. Their limited verbal vocabulary bundled together the term for scent with the concept of this extrasensory perception. It was why their manner of communication sounded so crude and primitive - a human observer was missing half the conversation if they could detect only the spoken words.

Perhaps it was a gift from the gods, after Dar'qest stole their humanity from them. A compensation for what they lost. They seemed happy with it, either way.

Ochette blinked her wide, slitted eyes, ears flicking back as she contemplated her companion, who was trying hard to put a face of neutrality down across his features. "So why not?" she pressed.

Temenos took a deep breath. He beckoned and Ochette came up to lean next to him, already letting her head slip beneath his palm. Beastlings also enjoyed a measure of increased physical intimacy with each other that Flamechurch would never have tolerated. None in their party had been able to avoid the lure of scratching behind her soft ears at least a few times. It was something he appreciated about her presence.

Whenever someone in the party tangled their bedroll up in the throes of nightmares, they'd find themselves soothed by the weight Ochette's tiny body curled up against their side, or in Osvald's case sprawled on top of his broad chest soaking up his warmth. She'd do it even in her sleep, as if it were a reflex to reach out and bring comfort to her friends.

So, how to answer. It would be so easy to say 'because I said so' or 'because humans don't do that' and shut her down. But even in his embarrassment it would have felt wrong. He'd received plenty of that treatment in his youth and it had never satisfied him.

"For one," said Temenos. "Osvald is a man in mourning over his last love, and to take another lover too soon may bundle grief into his passion. For another, I have not seen him take an interest in me, or in anyone."

"Did you ask?" Ochette put in.

"No. And for a third, two members of such a close-knit party as ours having a specifically sexual relationship between just the two of us could disrupt the group dynamics that have led us to success thus far, and I would not sabotage our work for a mere tryst."

Ochette gave a small frown, squinting her eyes at him. "You always

overthink stuff, Temenos.”

“It’s what I do, I’m afraid. Aelfric in his blessing made me an Inquisitor, I think if I’d been born a simple fisherman I’d have gone mad.”

“Hahah, yeah. You’d be out there interrogating the fish about their crimes.”

“That octopus has committed heresies against the church, and I can prove it!” Temenos pronounced, grabbing his staff and gesturing as if menacing his prey. A nearby crab, perhaps seized with a guilty conscience, frantically scuttled away across the sand. Ochette giggled as Temenos recounted the alleged sins of the octopus, including patricide, indecent exposure, and having an ungodly number of arms.

“It must be hard,” Ochette said as she finally came down from her laughter.

“What must?” asked Temenos, hoping she wasn’t speaking about his anatomy.

“Being...you, I guess. Seeing everyone like how you do. You never seem like you’re really relaxing.”

“Is it not for you? You can sense the nature of someone’s heart. Does it not trouble you, to realize how many secrets are hidden behind a kind smile and sweet words?” *How everyone, even the man who raised you, even those who care for you, will lie straight to your face without qualm?*

“I guess it’s a bit confusing.” Ochette shrugged. “I don’t know why humans need to lie so much when it’s so obvious what they’re feeling.”

“Less obvious to us, I think. Often it’s fear more than malice. We protect ourselves, like an animal will hide a wound so a predator will not see it as easy prey.”

“Yeah. Humans are scared a lot about what other humans will think of them. I don’t get it at all.”

Temenos’s hand came back to rest against the crown of her head, as if bestowing a blessing upon her. “Neither do I, sometimes. But it is what it is.”

Ochette closed her eyes for a moment, nose twitching, and then opened them again.

“Hey, but if Osvald does want to make love with you-”

“If he does, *don’t tell me.*”



*It's true that my journey has been fraught with loss.  
Yet hope still burns just as brightly as it always has.  
Does that answer suffice?*



*Doubt is what I do*

# The Light of Your Flame

*by Redheadkitten*

**General || The Travelers & Roi || 2,000 Words**

Temenos Chapter 3 - Crackridge Spoilers,  
During Canon, Comfort, Grief, Friendship

“Um, Temenos?”

They were a day’s travel away from Crackridge when Agnea spoke up. Their business in the strange town had been accomplished, leaving Temenos with more questions than answers but a solid lead on how to handle his upcoming interrogation in Stormhail.

He had been deep in thought on the very subject when Agnea leaned over. Her eyes shone in the firelight.

Temenos replied with a warm, “Yes, my dear?” Surely she had a question regarding the scriptures or other clerical matters.

“The friend you told me about in Crackridge, the one that you grew up with in Flamechurch, was that Inquisitor Roi?”

The chill of the night air suddenly felt much colder. Despite the chatter of pleasant conversations around him, the mention of Roi’s name brought back the hushed whispers of darker days. Temenos could have sworn he hadn’t said it when they spoke after his nightmare. He tried not to let the heartache show in his smile as he returned her question with yet another. “The very same. Why do you ask?”

Their dancer, words always ready on the tip of her tongue, hesitated.

Partitio, sitting on the same log next to her, leaned over in concern. "Somethin' wrong, Agnea?"

"No, no." She shook her head quickly. "I was just thinking about it and I realized that I, um..." She spoke her last words carefully. "I think I met him before he..."

She trailed off and her missing words confirmed that she knew. Roi's disappearance had made the papers across Solistia. Agnea would have barely been a teenager at the time in a small town, but that just showed how far the news reached.

"I just thought... I've liked hearing stories about Mama from other people, so I thought maybe you might want to hear about Inquisitor Roi too?"

Temenos had heard, in the months that followed Roi's disappearance, all sorts of stories from the villagers of Flamechurch. Of his kindness, his piety. Over time they wore on his already fragile nerves but now, so many years later around the campfire of a group of strangers-to-friends, Temenos decided he could hear another. "I'd love to," he said.

Agnea smiled in relief, smoothing out her skirts as she started to tell her story. "Well, it was a long time ago. I was still a little girl when he came to Cropdale. Let me think..." She counted off the years on her fingers. "Eight years ago? Papa said there was a special guest coming to town, but I didn't know what an inquisitor was. I saw him dressed in all his fancy clothes, with gold embroidery and a gold staff. And he was so handsome! I thought an inquisitor must be something like a prince."

A smile rose, unbidden, to tug at Temenos' lips. Roi would blush hearing her words.

"But he didn't have a crown!" Agnea continued. Even her hands danced instinctively alongside her words as she became engrossed in her story. "I made him one out of flowers that he let me put on him, and he wore it for his whole visit! Even when he met with our clerics."

"My parents explained everything afterwards but..." She looked up at Temenos, her brown eyes big and thoughtful. "I... thought you might want to know. He was a nice man to indulge a silly little girl he barely even knew."

Temenos still wore his smile, letting it gracefully fall to something smaller. "He was rather good with children, I'm not surprised to hear he

humored you so. And I'm glad to hear your kindness has always been with you, even in childhood."

Agnea waved him away. "Aw, no, it's nothin' like that."

"He's right! You sure are a sweetheart, Agnea," Partitio chimed in. "And hearin' your story reminds me; I've met Inquisitor Roi too!"

Temenos blinked, surprised.

"I was just a young chickadee m'self," Partitio continued, "but I remember being in town with my pops and he spotted the inquisitor comin' towards us. Hoo-ee he was sweating like a pig in summer to see someone so high rankin' in our little town."

"Your father thought the inquisitor was there for him?" Hikari asked from Partitio's other side.

"Not exactly. More nervous around authority-types, ya see. But anyway, he came up to us—by that point we're both shakin' in our boots—and polite as can be he asks us where he can find the inn. But the best part was..."

Partitio leaned forward conspiratorially and Temenos found himself leaning towards him along with Agnea and Hikari. After a deep breath for dramatic effect, Partitio exclaimed, "He was standing right in front of it!"

Agnea reacted first, breaking into a fit of giggles. "He didn't see the sign?" she managed to say before dissolving into laughter again after remembering how recognizable the inn was in Oresrush.

Partitio joined her.

"Guess he didn't!"

Temenos could only smile knowingly. Both of them were absentminded in their own ways, but it was Roi who more often wandered into the wrong neighborhoods, or towns, altogether. His poor sense of direction didn't help.

The laughter died down, and Temenos considered speaking in the lull of conversation. A warmth had washed over him hearing about Roi that chased away the desert chill.

But Hikari spoke up first. "I saw the inquisitor once, when he came to Ku on a diplomatic visit," Hikari said softly. "We didn't speak, but he smiled at me from across the room. He had a warm smile much like yours, Temenos."

Temenos didn't know what to say to that. He was hardly considered a tender person in the way Roi freely shared his kindness, but Hikari's words

were so certain, as was the look in his eyes. Temenos looked away, feelings caught in his throat.

The campfire became quiet. Just the crackling of the flames, the wind in the canyons, and the rustling pages of Castti's journal.

"Aha!" she said suddenly and Agnea jumped. "Here it is." She smoothed down the page and with a quick glance at Temenos over the fire began to read aloud. "*Month of Draefendi*—hm, the exact day is smudged—*Inquisitor Roi came to the village today. He purchased noxroot and plum leaves. We discussed clerical healing versus apothecary tonic methods. For a cleric, he was quite knowledgeable in both.*"

She shut her journal and looked up. "I remember seeing his name, but I'm sorry I do not recall the encounter. It sounds as though he was a well studied individual."

"You have nothing to be sorry for. It's a miracle you noted his visit at all," Temenos said. He paused, then added, "He often bemoaned the limitations of healing magic in treating afflictions." Roi often helped others in his travels, despite aid not being the purpose for his visits.

He had always been like that, quick to extend a helping hand to those in need. Temenos looked around at the others, and found Throné frowning. "Don't tell me you've also met my predecessor, my dear assistant?"

"I have," she said.

"Oh?" Though Temenos wasn't completely surprised, given the trend occurring amongst their group, Throné's unique circumstances still made him pause.

"When I was out once," she said with a shrug, "with Father. That gold staff stood out along with his bulging purse."

"Throné!" Agnea gasped. "You didn't..."

"I didn't have much choice," she said with tightly folded arms. Her annoyance recalling the encounter plain as she continued. "I saw him slip his purse into his pocket, I took it out and disappeared into the crowd a moment later." She huffed. "I checked it once I was far enough way but there was only a single leaf inside."

Ochette tilted her head. "You grabbed the wrong purse?"

Throné's anger dissipated looking at those fluffy ears. Shrugging, she agreed. "Maybe. But that was a pretty skillful switch. I have to hand it to

him, until I met Temenos I didn't think a cleric capable of that."

"I beg your pardon?" Though Temenos' mind was on other matters. Foolish, sweet, gullible Roi. He wouldn't have the heart nor the ability to pull off a trick like that. At least, as far as Temenos knew. Perhaps she was mistaken. After all, it was unlikely that Roi could have met most of the same people he traveled with.

A case of mistaken identity, he concluded.

"Hey, Temmy!" Ochette said. "Your friend, he has hair like Parti right? But he smells like you?"

"I..." It was true Partitio had startled Temenos several times with his hat off. With his dark slicked back hair along with his tanned skin and perpetual smile; he looked startlingly like Roi. Their smell was harder to pin down, but all inquisitor's robes were made in the same place and of the same materials. "I suppose," he conceded. "But I'm sure you, nor Osvald," he added, glancing at the man, "have met him. Roi never went to the islands."

"He read me my last rites before I was shipped off to prison," Osvald interrupted.

"Last rites?" Castti asked. "Aren't those for prisoners awaiting execution?"

Osvald's expression was grim as he explained. "It's a matter of course for Frigit Isle. No matter the sentence, inmates rarely leave alive." He looked at Temenos, the flames of the campfire reflected in his glasses. "The inquisitor had words about my case, mentioning discrepancies he was looking into."

Five years ago Osvald had been sent to Frigit Isle and Roi disappeared shortly after. The idea of a connection burned in Temenos' mind. The evil bow Roi sought to destroy. A man who framed Osvald for the murder of his wife and child a continent away. It should all be unrelated, but now Temenos wondered...

In the weeks after Roi's disappearance Temenos searched his belongings for any clue to where he might have gone, but only found notes about his inquisitorial duties and play ideas for Temenos. A pile of official court documents had been somewhere in the mess, but Temenos dismissed them at the time.

A sudden pang of guilt stung at his heart. Had he looked closer, could

he have continued Roi's work and freed Oswald from his unjust fate?

"I apologize," was all Temenos could say. "I didn't realize—"

"I did not bring this up to blame you, Temenos." Oswald's expression softened. "I only meant to add to what everyone has said; you had a good friend."

"I suppose I did. Thank you all... for sharing your stories of him."

Ochette was the only one who hadn't. She piped up, "I met him too!"

"You're... sure?"

"Yep," she said with a confident nod. "He said my jerky was so good it must have been blessed by the Huntress herself. I'd never forget a compliment like that!"

High praise indeed.

"And he patted my head before he left. He had a big warm hand. Can we visit him when we go to your hometown, Temmy?" Somehow, despite living on opposite corners of the country, or being imprisoned, nearly everyone knew of Roi's fate. It made sense that Ochette wouldn't, but dredging up all those headlines of his disappearance, the eventual conclusion of his death, it weighed down the heart that had buoyed by warm memories.

"Temmy...?" Ochette asked again. Her ears drooped. Her sense of smell revealed what Temenos could scarcely find the words to say.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I... wish you could meet him again too." He looked around the campfire at all the faces of people only knew as strangers not so long ago, but now considered allies. They weren't *friends* as such, but...

Temenos had little else to say. "I wish you could all meet him again. I know he would have loved to better know you all. Just as... Just as I do."

His companions smiled back. And with his back to the cold, he felt the warmth of a familiar flame in the smiles of all the people who knew Roi too.

How his light had touched them all.

# Oboro's Journal

*by Binary*

**Teen || Kazan/Original Character || 2,030 Words**

Hikari's Story Spoilers, Journey for the Dawn Spoilers

*Finally. All the pieces are set. Now, it was time for them to game to play out. We will usher in the darkness thanks to the eight.*

*MONTWISE YEAR 3, DAY ???:*

*So, finally the prince has come. Driven out of his own home, banished by his own people. He now is coming for the help for my mind. Of course I still have to play as the old mentor he loves. Strange... He has a new traveler I never seen before on his party. A scholar woman who always wears her hood up. When I pushed Hikari into the ring, she grabbed me and glared at me, thankfully, Hikari stopped her before she could use any of her spells on me. I'll have to keep a eye on her. She is not one of the eight and might ruin our plans. Hikari later told me that her name is Fe.*

*MONTWISE YEAR 3, DAY ???:*

*Well, Hikari kept his promise and beat Bandelam, in turn helping me get the parlor. He invited me on his marry band. I accepted of course, to keep a close eye on the*

woman, as well as the other travelers. One of them realized they wouldn't have enough space for two people to sleep so we would have to get another room just for two to sleep comfortably. Fe volunteered stating that she was a bit cramped in the room with the other women. I, naturally, volunteered as well. This way I could keep my eye on her at all times. The cleric was suspicious with me volunteering but Fe reassured him by saying she was used to her guardian sleeping next to her. We all celebrated Hikari's victory in the ring and ate food, our next stop was in the western continent: Wellgrove. Fe told me about herself and her journey to free elf-kind from the endless slaughter from a deranged king. Fe had just found out that her parents were the leaders of her village before they were mercilessly killed.

She didn't want this to be the end result, to kill a person, but as she said negotiations were not a option. Her and Prince Hikari have a lot in common, with doing the right thing... was it worth it?

### WELLGROVE YEAR 3, DAY ???

We finally arrived at Wellgrove late into the night; finally we can get some decent rest in a inn instead of having to worry about monsters. I got to know Fe a lot better throughout that time, honestly I keep to myself but for some reason I always want to seek her out and sit next to her... I can't. The world will always be like this, this constant struggle of "good" and "evil".

I can't let myself get attached to her. My mind tells me to stop but my heart is starting to waver for her. It's hard to sneak off from the group, especially with that ever watchful hound of a cleric.

No wonder Arcanette wants him dead. Ori is getting impatient and I had to send a letter. I cannot tell if he thought I lied about my reason for separating from the group or not. I have to be more careful in the future, though its hard to separate yourself from a woman that's cuddling you in her sleep.

Hikari finally got the weapons that I told him about, they will be useful in the final battle against Mugen, which will unlock the final key to the puzzle: The Darkblood Blade. I broke it to the group that I would have to separate from them, to plan the best strategy to win against Mugen.

*Hikari and Fe seemed understanding yet still wanted me to stay, especially Fe. This plan will not derail because of attachment.*

*RYU, YEAR 3, DAY ????*

*I finally arrived at Ryu with the weapons that Hikari won with ex-champion fighters that promised to help take back Ku. Hikari's final stop is at Stormhail to recruit Rai Mei to help. I do not doubt that he would not be able to recruit her on his ragtag army. Since being away from the travelers I have more freedom to send letters to Ori. She speaks of one of the travelers,*

*Partitio, despite all odds has melted the billionaire Roque Brilliante's heart.*

*I think she is now faltering, I can read it in her writing. I would visit her but I have to stay here. Is she right? It does not matter though, I must see this through or it will be all for naught.*

*KU, YEAR 3, DAY ???*

*Finally, the travelers have come back from their journey from Stormhail with Rai Mei and her right-hand-man Kunzo. Fe immedietly came up to me and gave me a big hug. "I missed you, Kazan." She whispered in my ear. I swear, it felt like all my doubts melted away. I decided it's best that all of them had a rest after traveling half the continent to get here. They started to set up camp and caught me up on what happened when I was seperated from them.*

*Hikari had a hard time convincing Rai Mei but he eventually swayed her to helping him reclaim his homeland. It seems that things are going according to plan. Fe decided to sleep in my tent. I won't lie, I missed sleeping next her...*

### *KU, YEAR 3, DAY ??*

*The day of the final battle between brothers has come. Everyone had a feast thanks to the hunter and apothecary. I spoke to everyone about my strategy of using the winds against Ku's front doors.*

*After the strong winds caved in the doors, the fight started as Hikari cut through Ku's soldiers to get to his brother to stop the bloodbath once and for all. The other travelers held back the soldiers from trying to ambush him as he swiftly went towards the castle.*

*After everyone defending against the Ku soldier's for a few hours, Hikari stepped out of the castle with the crown in his hands.*

*"Everyone stop! This war is over. Mugen is dead." Everyone stopped fighting, everyone cheering as the war was finally over.*

*While Hikari was getting his coronation as the new king, I sneaked in the castle, taking the Darkblood blade. It was easier than I thought since everyone's attention was on Hikari-*

*"Kazan, what are you doing in here?" Fe's voice questioned as I turned towards her with my signature grin. "I simply had to get the finest sake to celebrate. I know that the Ku family kept only the best of alcohol in here." Fe raised her eyebrow, definitely not buying my excuse. "Kazan... are you hiding something from us?" She slowly stepped towards me, her dark brown eyes scrutinizing my every move. "Now, my dear sunlight, why would I hide anything from any of you?" I deflected her accusation.*

*"There is a reason you came in here and it wasn't for the sake. If it was you would've asked Hikari about it. So, stop pretending and tell me what you came in here for." Fe stepped towards me again, our faces close, close enough to kiss, but I could tell how serious she was, but... I had to continue with this.*

*She saw the covered sword I put close to my chest, she didn't waste time and tried to grab it with me stepping back and raising my eyebrow. "At least buy me a drink first, love." I chuckled lightly but then I was knocked on the ground, Fe right on top of me and pulling out the sword from my arms.*

*"Fuck-" I absentmindedly choked out as I was knocked down by Fe.*

*"A sword?" She narrowed her eyes at me, scanning my face for any weakness.*

*"Why did you steal a sword?" She held it close to her, looking down at me with her intense gaze, one that could make me spill out everything to her-*

*"..." I looked away from her, unable to face her, relaxing my voice to normal as I couldn't escape her questioning. "For the night shall fall." I simply said. "You... are*

one of Vide's followers?" She pulled me closer to her face, tears threatening stream down her face. "Did... did you lie about everything? Was everything a lie between us? Between you and Hikari?"

Somehow, seeing her so upset made my heart hurt. This woman, somehow, made me feel again. It was unnerving, for this world is too cruel.

"Not everything, love. I... You made me question if I should help the Moonshade Order anymore... I thought this world was too unforgiving. Our short time made me want to live together, but.. I am far too gone. We're so close to bringing the night. I can't falter now."

"We... We can help. The travelers. We're strong. We can help you in whatever you need... You seem afraid of someone... Is someone else the leader?" She let go of me, wiping her tears away and got off me, still holding the Darkblood blade.

"Yes... Though I am worried about what they will do to my sister if I ratted them out. She's... coming to the same conclusion as I am about the world becoming better ..." I stood up, looking at her with my dark eyes. "I tire of lying to you and Lord Hikari. If anyone can make the world better its you nine. I'm... worried about how the others may react."

"I'm sure they will be willing to listen and hear you out. I mean, Osvald was in prison, all be it falsely..." She patted my shoulder and gave me a small smile. "I have no doubt that they will help, especially Hikari. He considers you a friend." I sighed and steeled myself to go outside the castle, the crowd already dissipated and went home while the other travelers stayed with Hikari. Fe and I came up to them. "Kazan has something to confess, everyone."

They gave their undivided attention to me as I started to explain everything to them, how I lied to them and how Ori was there everytime for Partitio, how my name was actually Oboro, and of course, the others in the Moonshade Order.

"My friend... I'm sorry you felt like you needed to keep this all to yourself." Hikari put his hand on my shoulder, patting it.

"If you do really see the light of your mistakes, I know that Fe and I will help. I cannot speak for the others." Hikari looked at the others, they all wanted to stop the Moonshade Order and make sure that Ori was safe.

"If this sword is evil I shall cast it into fire." Hikari took the Darkblood Blade from Fe, putting it on the ground as Osvald lit it on fire, making sure the fire was hot enough to burn the metal. "No longer will my family be burdened by 'evil'."

"We should take care of the Moonshade Order, before they put out the flames."

*Temenos warned, the others agreed as Fe put out the smoldering fire that was the sword.  
“Lets get our rest and get them.” Castti reminded them.*

*Never have I felt safe and like a weight has been lifted off of me.*

*New Delsta, Year 4, Day ???*

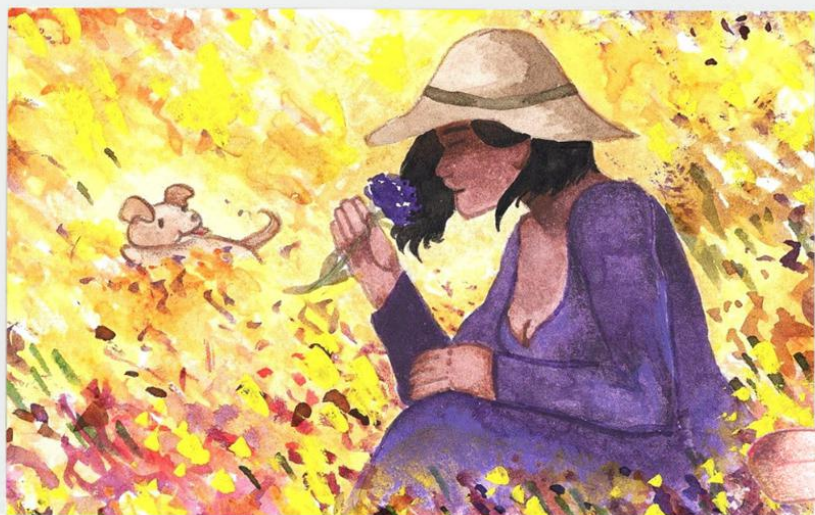
*It's been a year since we taken care of the rest of the Moonshade Order members. The ones who are left is just Ori and I, though we are never going back. Seeing how happy everyone is and just how much the world has changed thanks to the travelers, It makes us think that everything will be okay. Fe and I gotten much closer ever since then, she has been helping elfkind and humans heal their relationship with each other as well as helping elves reconstruct their homes. As for me, I am King Hikari's tactician, trying to help Lord Hikari rebuild Ku.*

*It will be nice seeing her again for Agnea's performance and hopefully I can get the chance to propose to her soon, I have made the perfect plan.*

*Surely she will accept, right?*

# OCTOPATH TRAVELER 8TH ANNIVERSARY





Happy



Eighth



Anniversary!



# The World at Dawn

*by Manah*

**General || The Travelers || 763 Words**

Post-Game Spoilers

“So here we are again.”

Temenos’ remark breaks the awkward silence that had been hanging around the campsite for a while now, ever since the excitement at their reunion had faded and even Partio ran out of topics for idle small talk long after the rest of them. It wasn’t quite discomfort—the setting sun was still shining brightly enough to hold any unease at bay, but night was approaching, and someone had to say something to alleviate the tension. This was supposed to be a happy occasion.

“It’s really been eight years, huh.” Partio’s tone was casual enough, but by now everyone knew how much he left unsaid. Eight years since...

Osvald kindly put it into words for everyone. “Eight years since we defeated Vide.”

“Way to put a damper on our joyful reunion, Professor,” Throné remarked dryly. Out of the eight of them, she she had been the most silent regarding the aftermath of that fateful battle, but even she couldn’t deny the chilling effect simply mentioning Vide’s name still had on them after all this time.

Temenos wasn’t having any of it today though. They had barely been

here for an hour, and this was no time to be dealing shadows of the past.

And Hikari was starting to fidget again.

“If any shadow monsters show up this time, we are prepared,” Temenos said before the mood could drop further. “I trust you all still know how to fight?”

Throné wordlessly produced a dagger seemingly out of nowhere; Osvald raised his book, no doubt a weapon just as deadly as his magic, and the rest of the group whose weapons were safely tucked away near their other belongings just nodded along.

Hikari relaxed a little. “I hope that won’t be necessary. I’ve fought enough shadows for a lifetime.” Temenos didn’t miss the hint of sadness in his voice.

Agnea didn’t either. “Nobody blames you for feeling this way, Hikari,” she said softly. “It was... a lot.”

“Still,” Hikari said, staring into the fire. “In the end, I couldn’t save anyone.”

“Neither could I.” Castti spoke up, to everyone’s surprise. In her efforts to rebuild her life, she rarely brought up what had happened in the past any more than necessary. “Sometimes I wonder, if I had seen the signs earlier—

“You lost your memory,” Partitio interrupted her, “and then he was too far gone to listen.”

“And it was the same for Oboro.” To everyone’s surprise, it was Osvald who spoke up. “It’s not your fault he refused to see another way.”

“But that doesn’t mean we should stop trying,” Ochette chimed in. “Even if all we can do is make it a little better in the end, it’s worth it.”

“As long as we keep trying, there will always be hope,” Agnea agreed.

Throné just shook her head.

“Spoken like true chosen ones,” she teased them, but without her usual sting behind it. “I’m still not sure why we’re in this, but I guess it’s our job to keep the world out of trouble for now.”

“Who knows what the gods are thinking. But it seems Aeber in particular has a certain sense of humor.” Temenos dodged the handful of mud Throné threw at him with practiced ease, then looked at the others. “None of us

wanted this, but here we are.”

“What’s the difference?” Partitio spoke up. “Gods or no gods, I’m still gonna make the world a better place.”

“Right.” There was a rare smile from Castti. “That’s all we can do for the people we lost.”

“To make sure no one ever feels like they have no other choice.” Hikari looked up for the first time.

Osvald snorted. “I suppose we are the only ones who know what needs to be done. If anything, teaching is one thing I’m good at.”

“And so it falls on us to guide the world to a better future.” Temenos sighed and dramatically dropped on the ground between Ochette and Throné. “Goodness. I thought my days of herding wayward lambs were over.”

“Yeah, right. As if *you* ever stay out of trouble, detective.”

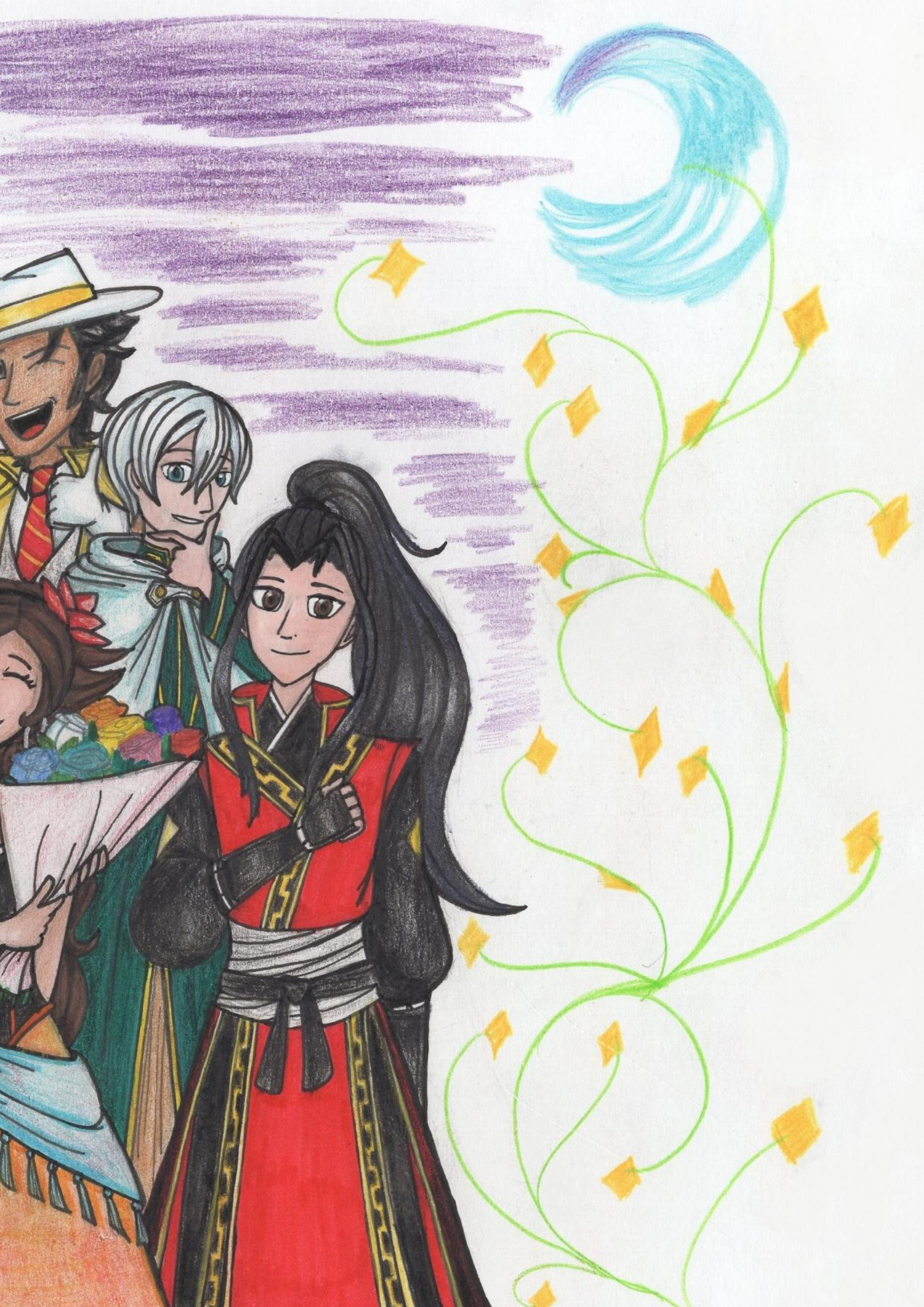
There would be no trouble this night. Vide was defeated. For how long, they didn’t know—perhaps the darkness wouldn’t return in their lifetime, but in a time far from their own, or maybe in a different place altogether.

But the gods and their chosen ones would be ready to cut a path towards a brighter morning.

There were others before them, there would be others in the future, for as long as the world was worth saving.









Eight is for OCTO

An Octopath Traveler 8th Anniversary Anthology