



SWORN COMMUNITY ZINE

A fic/art collaboration project ft. 56 writers and artists

Contents

purpose 7

Writer - Elle / @galacticryptid

Artist - susie / @aegisunmerge

shelter 8

Writer - Elle / @galacticryptid

Artist - susie / @aegisunmerge

linger 9

Writer - Elle / @galacticryptid

Artist - susie / @aegisunmerge

5 + 1 (breaks and creates) 11

Writer- Ash / @LumehaAsh

Artist - Ambirdoodles / @ambirdoodles

How to winter your gladiolus: 15

Writer - sumaru / @asterlactuca

Artist - pittoo / @linhardtlovebot

(into the dawn)17

Writer - cheshire / @paraselen_e

Artist - Bhai / @Bhai_kyun

One lifetime (with you) 18

Writer - cheshire / @paraselen_e

Artist - Bhai / @Bhai_kyun

Walk by my side 19

Writer - Vault_Emblem / @vault_emblem

Artist - Bringmemisery / @Bringmemisery

Glass Walls and Dirty Tiles 27

Writer - Shidreamin / @shidreamin

Artist - brotome / @brotome

Together 33

Writer - Rhyse / @NohrianLyric

Artist - V / @Bumblevetr

Trust 37

Writer - HapSky / @HapSkyScribbles

Artist - chickentocino / @chickentocino

Warmth 38

Writer - HapSky / @HapSkyScribbles

Artist - chickentocino / @chickentocino

Missed 39

Writer - sarah / @closureaxioms

Artist - Aeryx / @Ismyria

The Scars Left by Death 43

Writer: KANNA / @spooky_agi

Artist: Bianca / @cryocannon

A piece of you 51

Writer: Leo Darnell / @samariumwriting

Artist: Vic / @dracoryss

Crois En Toi 57

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi

Each day of our lives we make deposits in the 58

memory banks of our children 58

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi

Kintsugi Memories 59

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi

La vie est un sommeil, l'amour en est le rêve 60

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi

Words Carved in Blood 61

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi

To Have Your Hand 63

Writer - TK / @cntrlvaneau

Artist - Takeshi / @foxkunkun

Line of Dance 79

Writer - QuillFeathers / @o3QuillFeathers

Artist - Izumi / @IzumiNoBrowser

andante, andante 87

Writer - Rook / @corviid

Artist - Jano / @jan0h_

Crimson Oath 97

Writer - DimensionSlip / @slip_fe3h

Artist - nu / @jeleefishing

One Year 105

Writer - Kit / @luster candies

Artist - Aki / @yusukelogist

flowers 107

Writer - rime / @letrasette

Artist - eman / @kkkkki_

Black and Golden 117

Writer - Maria / @deformedcities

Artist - Toastie the Know / @KnowToastiez

Silver 123

Writer - Rosa / @UNICORNvoid

Artist - Jerome / @machuba_

Looking glass 125

Writer - Jin / @kkamaguui

Artist - Miyu / @magepaw

Hide & Seek 133

Writer - Emma / @Ingrimasname (Tumblr)

Artist - Mikan / @yadntve

Meet me in the dark 152

Writer - Ostovandi / @Ostovandi

Artist - minophisch / @minophisch

The softening sound of the night 163

Writer - Ash / @LumehaAsh

Artist - juju / @Nyasebe

Entwined 169

Writer - saunatonnttu / @saunatonnttuija

Artist - Dids / @Didscodance

hearts 177

Writer - whisk / @luciel_hm

Artist - sirane / @dreamdropdorks (Tumblr)

shockingly enough 179

Writer - Yao / @aphrodi

Artist - Jaime V / @vermilleons

As they Professed their Grief 189

Writer - Addy / @AddyTepes

Artist - Xiao Xiao / @Xiao_Xiao_Nii

purpose

Writer - Elle / @galacticryptid

Artist - susie / @aegisunmerge



“Felix,” he says, and like a fool, Felix feels a shiver lance down his spine.

“Boar,” Felix replies.

Dimitri smiles, a little sadly. “Why do you do it?” He places a hand to Felix’s chest. “Why do you keep it there?”

Felix resists the urge to flinch away. “Keep what?”

“Your sorrow,” Dimitri replies softly. “Why do you keep it caged there— in your heart? Why keep it silent?”

Felix breathes in, then out.

“For the same reason you do,” he says, covering Dimitri’s hand with his own. “For the sake of what I care about.”

“What do you care about?”

Felix shows him.

shelter

Writer - Elle / @galacticryptid

Artist - susie / @aegisunmerge



Shivering, Felix stamps his feet against the hard earth.

Why they're out here, waiting on a convoy that may never arrive, makes absolutely no sense. Faerghian winters are notorious; though Felix has fought his way through many, he's always done so with spite.

A great gust whips his hair out of its tie and threatens to fell him, but Dimitri's hands grip his arms.

"Steady, Felix. Do not make an enemy of the wind."

"It's the cold I have quarrel with," Felix replies, teeth chattering.

"Then for once," Dimitri says, drawing Felix into his cloak. "I'll be your shield."

linger

Writer - Elle / @galacticryptid

Artist - susie / @aegisunmerge



They're falling apart.

His arms around Felix's back, desperate, clinging to him like a lifeline. Dimitri is shaking, but quiet— so very quiet in his suffering.

On the floor, Felix holds him, and every breath is taken in an effort to stay calm. He has to keep it together. For Dimitri's sake, he has to be unbreakable.

"You're okay," Felix says, because he can't say anything else. "You're okay, we're okay."

Dimitri hiccups a sob and Felix smooths blond strands away from his forehead. He hides Dimitri's face and speaks low, reassuring words into his hair.

They're okay.

5 + 1 (breaks and creates)

I

Felix wasn't in love; what he had, nursed in his chest since he was born, was not what being in love was. It was duty. It was friendship. It was warmth. It was an undefined pressure he could never truly describe. But it was not love.

(He refused for it to be love, but he knew the taste of denial.)

Yet he felt like he was strangled, breaking, broken, his heart torn apart, when an animal took the place of his best friend, of the boy he grew up with. He felt like a part of himself was dying, his body struggling to stand in the blood soaked grass. The slippery, wet mud had a red shine that he saw, too, in Dimitri - Dimitri - *Dimitri* - **the beast**'s eyes, with his back straight and his lance stuck into the skull of a man who died once before, and died once again.

And with it died the warmth.

No, Felix wasn't in love; and yet, in that moment, his heart was broken, stomped on by the animal that stole Dimitri's corpse under his eyes.

II

A few months after his arrival at Garreg Mach and Felix felt as if the world was falling fast and crashing hard all around them. An assassination attempt and a new professor, a kidnapping, and too many threads and lives hanging and burning. Living near the boar did not help; he had been watching all their classmates and friends be taken by the soft smiles and the polite prince that hid the monster beneath. It made something itch under his skin. Something that made Sylvain laugh in that dark, knowing way. Something that made Ingrid look at him with a shadow that was not anger in her eyes.

And yet.

Yet.

Despite it all, more days than he thought he should, Felix met with the boar. He faced the beast he hated so much. The wooden blade was heavy in his hand as he

parried the boar's strikes, large and powerful. His form reminded him of the royal knights trained at Fhirdiad, and his strength...

The training spear broke into Dimitri's hands, and Felix almost saw the boy stolen by the boar. The too large eyes, downcast and focused on the shards shining against the sand, and the echo of guilt and shame from a distant past.

"You should be used to this," he spat, reaching out for the sting of a too fresh anger and pain.

"Ah... I know, I am sorry. I am going to repair it."

"What is the point, boar? You will break all of them again."

III

Felix struggled to breathe. His sword was ready to strike and the smell of ozone and scorched flesh was overpowering his senses. The sounds of the battlefield had melted into an indistinguishable symphony of allies and enemies, blended through steel and magic, and he could not grasp the telltale sentences of the Professor, his friends or the army.

It was him, the lightning and the blood pulsing loud in his ears. Alone.

A loud crash echoed behind him, and nothing else existed in that instant. He spun around, so fast he felt dizzy, and caught the way Dimitri's hand broke a soldier's face, heavy gauntlets meeting without mercy the uncovered flesh.

After looking around, making sure no one else was there, Dimitri turned and smiled at Felix. The tiny splatter of blood on his cheek felt too red, too harsh, and Felix blinked slowly. It was all he could see - the rushed cacophony of the battlefield dimmed, as if under the surface of a river.

"-lix. Felix!"

With a gasp, reality crashed back, touch and taste and vision overwhelmed by sticky blood and nauseating warmth.

"Are you alright?"

"... Yes."

Before Dimitri turned and left, Felix reached out and grasped at his arm.

"... Thank you."



IV

"Why am I here again?"

Dimitri looked up from the letter he was reading, an utterly boring and drab request of vital importance, and he couldn't help but smile at the bored expression Felix was wearing. As much as his partner hated everything that had to do with desk duties...

"Because you are my advisor, and when Dedue told you he could do it in your stead today, you told him to go look for you at Ashe's inn."

"I seriously can't believe some lords are sending you this crap," Felix said with a roll of his eyes, shaking the letter he held. An exasperated scowl darkened his face and he let out an annoyed sigh. "What do they think you are?"

"They are simply concerned."

"Rumors about you preparing to propose to someone is not something that they should concern themselves with!"

There was a tiny, fleeting hint of fear in Dimitri's eyes, seconds before chaos ensued. Felix was almost sure he had imagined it, and forgot about it as soon as shards of porcelain and too hot tea fell onto the ink and paper thrown onto their shared desk.

"... I swear I thought you were past breaking cups, boar."

"I... I thought I was, too," Dimitri said with a shy laugh, his gaze locked on the tea slowly dripping on his lap.

+1

"Felix Hugo Fraldarius, will you marry me and share your life with me?"

A strangled noise escaped Felix's throat, and he felt his cheeks warm up. This... This was not what he was expecting. This was supposed to be a simple, usual morning, with training and meetings. Politics. Administration. And here he was, in their bedroom, with Dimitri looking at him, the light of the morning sun softening his features. And his smile... His smile was blinding. So open. So happy. It made warmth bloom in Felix's chest, threatening to spill into a shivering smile of his own.

In Dimitri's hands laid a sword, a simple blade without any of the fancy decorations one would associate with a proposal. Simple and efficient. Solid. Trustworthy. A blade made for battle, even if it was a time for peace.

"Did you make it yourself?" Felix asked, holding his hands out to receive the weapon. He did not want to let the emotion strangle his voice while he ran his fingers along the blade.

"Yes." Dimitri let out a laugh. "Yes, I guess the time spent learning how to repair weapons was well spent. I wanted to make something special to ask for your hand. It felt... appropriate, as a proposal gift."

"... Come here," he said after putting away the sword in its sheath with gentle movements. "Come here, you big boar," he said again, when Dimitri didn't move. With a tug on Dimitri's collar, he forced the man to lean down to kiss him. "I will."

--

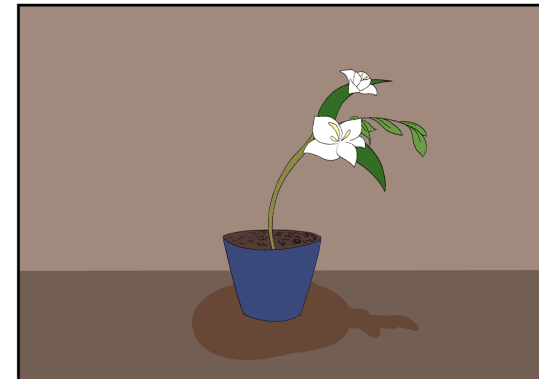
Writer- Ash / @LumehaAsh

Artist - Ambirdoodles / @ambirdoodles

How to winter your gladiolus:

1. Gladiolus do not take well to being crowded. Be sure to keep the ground around them open, and free.

2. Support the stem.



"Perhaps we should ask Dedue for his help."

"No. *No.*"

Dimitri watches as Felix smears dirt across a cheek, hands twitching in frustration. Sunlight spills gold all over his shoulders like Felix is gold himself, and Dimitri feels his chest warm even in this pale thin spring.

"If this nonsense is to be done at all, I'll be the one to see to it. Nobody else."

They're crouched in the greenhouse dirt together; King and Duke, like they're playing at the schoolboys they once were. Felix's wrist dips out from under his sleeve, winter pale, and Dimitri cannot help himself—his fingers find the smooth skin before Felix can even startle.

"What are you doing?" Felix stares at the small flower bulb he has viciously shoved into the dirt; but he doesn't shake Dimitri off.

His hands are so accustomed to bloodshed, he and Felix both; but clean, here, but for the spring dirt—Dimitri wants to believe this befits them, too.

If not him, then at least Felix, his Felix, who was never meant for war.

"I do not think Rodrigue would begrudge my helping you." Dimitri feels Felix's heartbeat thunderous under his thumb, so reassuring and so real, it's as if it has made a home under his own skin, too. "In growing this small thing to honour him."

Felix *hmpfs*; but when he turns his gaze away, he does turn to face the sun.

--

Writer - sumaru / @asterlactuca

Artist - pittoo / @linhardtlovebot

(into the dawn)

Writer - cheshire / @paraselen_e

Artist - Bhai / @Bhai_kyun



Since birth, they had been inseparable. House Vestra served House Hresvelg, and thus Felix was ever at Dimitri's side, his shadow and his closest friend.

Then years passed with them apart, and when Felix saw Dimitri again, his hair had turned silver-white, his eyes pale lavender.

"What happened to you?" Felix asks.

"I--" Dimitri tries to answer. Felix can tell that he *tries*, but his words falter, and he looks haunted, harrowed.

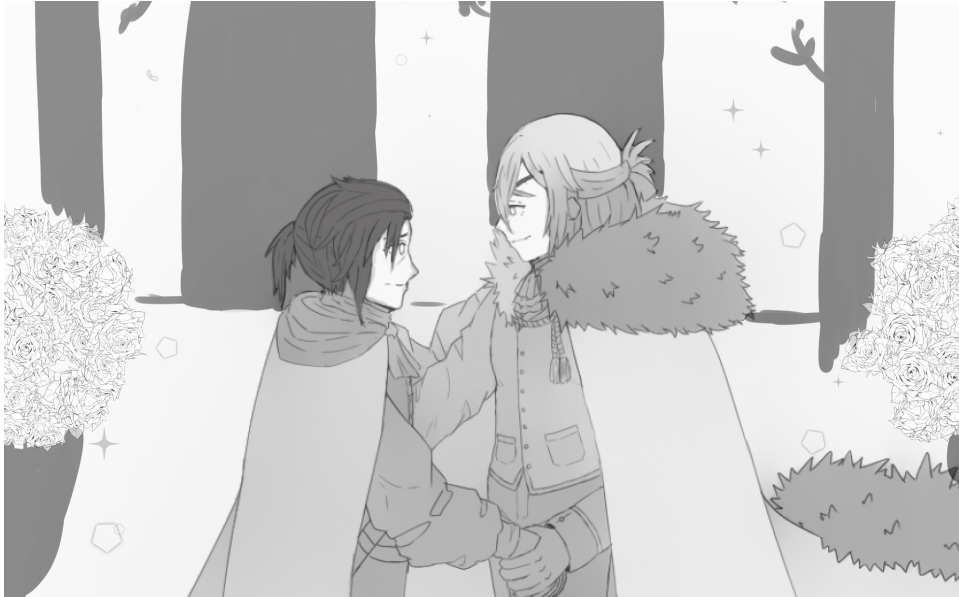
"Nevermind. It can wait for later."

Felix thought later meant never, until one day Dimitri tells him everything. This time, Dimitri speaks calmly, clearly, and then he speaks of revolution.

One lifetime (with you)

Writer - cheshire / @paraselen_e

Artist - Bhai / @Bhai_kyun



There is a private wedding, only a gathering of friends and family atop the Goddess Tower with Archbishop Byleth presiding. The Goddess Tower is beautiful with white roses and streaming sunlight, but it's Felix that Dimitri finds most radiant of all.

Felix's expression doesn't change through Byleth's opening words, lovely though they are, but when Dimitri takes his hand and a ring, Felix flushes pink. He blinks back tears and refrains from cursing in a way that is terribly charming.

Dimitri makes promise after promise, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer—until death do us part.

He slips the ring onto Felix's ring finger, and he says, "I promise this now, and for all the days of my life."

Walk by my side

"C'mon boar, you aren't a child," Felix would say had this been any other occasion, but when Dimitri came to him asking for help with the preparations, he couldn't find it in him to say no.

He's too soft, that's the problem, but Felix is tired of the many walls he's built around him, he's tired of fighting, so he's decided to allow himself these small moments of weakness as a prize for having survived the war. He thinks he deserves this much.

Today it's a very important day: Dimitri will be officially crowned king.

And to think that they all believed him to be dead so long ago, and here he is, alive and ready to take upon the duty that has been thrust upon him since birth.

They all know it won't be easy, not with Dimitri's state of mind, and of course, nobody knows it better than the king himself. That's why he looked so worried when he asked for Felix's help and why, even though he's already dressed for the occasion and was just supposed to check on him, Felix wasn't able to refuse him.

"You can't even prepare your own bath," he comments, seated on the edge of the bathtub, fingers gently scratching Dimitri's scalp to wash his hair.

"You say so, and yet there is no venom in your words," Dimitri replies, and he can't help a smirk, "It's almost as if you enjoy taking care of me."

Of course he does, but Dimitri will be the last person to ever know that. Still, only a huff comes out of Felix, and silence falls between the two.

If someone had told Felix that this is where he and the boar would've ended up eventually, he would've stabbed them, but now... now he cannot help but to be happy about it.

It hasn't been easy watching his friend losing himself to madness, but Dimitri has managed to resurface from it stronger than ever, and Felix can only be proud of him – not that he will ever say it out loud. of course.

When Dimitri takes one of his hands and he draws it closer, kissing its palm, Felix's first instinct is to jerk away, but his lips are warm and soft – if not wet – so he stays put.

“Sap,” he says, because he's still going to say something, but he can't help the gentle tug on his lips, which curve forming a fond smile.

“But you like it”.

“No, no I don't”.

He loves it.

At least Dimitri is auto-sufficient enough to put on his undergarments without help, even though at that point, had he really asked Felix to help him, he would've known that he was just teasing him.

He's gathered his clothes for the day on the bed, waiting before beginning to pass them to him as he gradually puts them on.

It's when he glances at him again that Felix stills. It wouldn't be the first time he sees him bare like this – he even saw him in less – and it wouldn't be the first time he sees his scars, but there's something about them this time... Felix isn't even sure what it is, but he just wants to touch.

His steps are silent and he catches Dimitri off guard – he can tell by the way he shivers – when he brushes his hand over a burn mark where the neck meets the shoulder.

He remembers this wound quite well: they were advancing towards the capital when a mage hit Dimitri with a blast. He'd been so afraid for his life back then, trying his best to carry him outside the battle, to a safer place, at least until Mercedes or any healer could take care of him.

It was then that he realized how much Dimitri really meant to him: if he were to die he definitely couldn't have handled it.

Such a shame that it was only then that things changed, but on the other hand, it was inevitable: to make things work, they both have had some growing up to do.

“Felix...” Dimitri mutters when he feels the other's lips on his skin. Such soft gestures from Felix aren't exactly common after all, and he can't help but to wonder what's the reason behind all this now.

“Hush, you,” is the other's reply, and Dimitri can't help a slight smile. Always so bossy.

“You know, unless you want me to be seen by the general public like this, I need to put this shirt on,” he says then, trying to keep it light, but Felix doesn't reply.

“Felix.”

“Hhm?”

“You're dwelling.”

Despite denying it every time anyone brings it up, Felix does dwell in the past quite often. He may say that the past doesn't affect him, but Dimitri has seen the vacant look he has in his eyes sometimes, when he would spend even hours silently looking in front of him, his mind who knows where.

Given how many times Felix had snapped him out of his own thoughts, it's only fair that Dimitri repays the favor when he can. After all, he doesn't want Felix to dwell, especially if it's about something negative.

For once, however, Felix doesn't snap at him, doesn't deny anything; he just kisses his shoulder one last time before putting some space between them again.

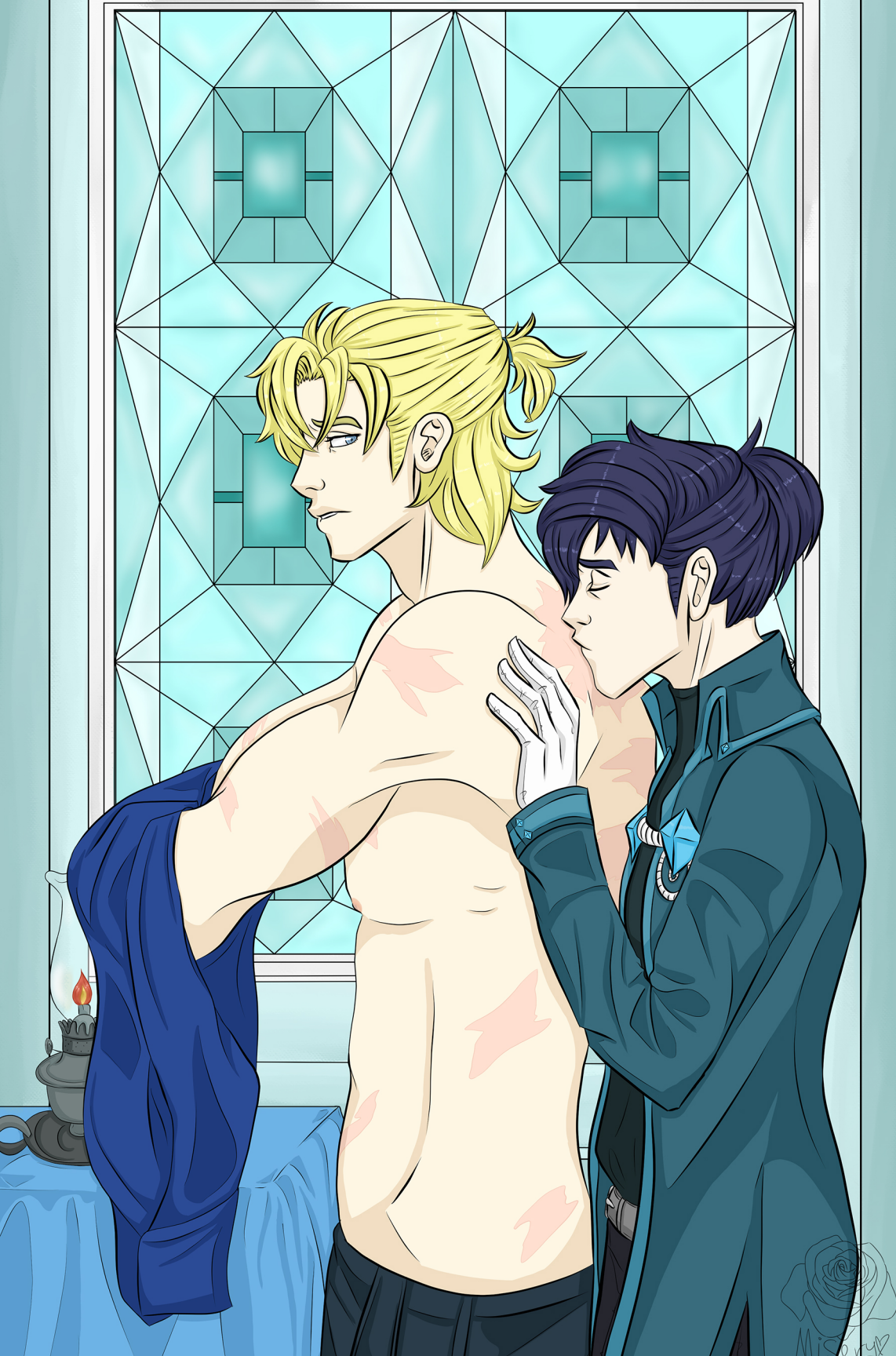
“I think you've got it from here,” he says, “I should wait outside.”

“Will you at least help me with my hair?”

There's a sigh coming from behind Dimitri.

“Ugh, fine.”

Dimitri's hair is soft, definitely softer than it once was, and that's because Felix had to



teach him how to take care of it – “Dimitri, I swear, I won’t touch you not even with a ten foot pole if your hair doesn’t stop reeking of blood.”

Passing the brush through those beautiful blond locks is relaxing to Felix; he never is this delicate with his own hair, but with Dimitri it’s different. Not that he’d break if he tugs a bit stronger, but why should he? There is no reason to do that – unless he begins to tease him for something, but that’s another story.

His movements become soon mechanical, and for some time Felix’s able to forget about everything, focusing only on his task.

At some point Dimitri begins to hum a melody that Felix believes has heard from Annette a few days ago, but of course he has none of the vocal talent she has.

Still, it makes Felix feel good.

“Are you practicing for the coronation?” he jokes, making Dimitri chuckle.

“I’d might raise a few spirits if I do that, thinking about it” he muses, and now it’s Felix’s turn to chuckle.

“Dear Sothis, you’d make everyone run away.”

Despite those words, Dimitri smiles.

“Yes, I suppose I would.”

Once he’s done, Felix puts some distance between him and the other to admire his work.

He cannot deny it: he’s always liked Dimitri, even when he wished he didn’t, and seeing him like this, all clean and proper, stirs something inside him.

He wants to keep him inside that room, he realizes. He wants to hold him and kiss him until he’s too tired to continue, but he knows that he’ll get his chance to do so later, when Dimitri will be too worn out from the celebrations and will cling to him, whispering into his ear that he wants to leave, and after a quick jab directed to him – because a king escaping celebrations in his honor is ridiculous – he’d take him by the hand and guide him to his quarters, where they will finally be able to spend the rest of the night alone and undisturbed.

He doesn’t even hear Dimitri, and actually he comes back to reality only when he feels a gentle brush of knuckles against his cheek.

“Felix, is everything all right?”

Oh, he spaced out.

“Yes, I’m fine,” he says, wondering if he should add something. After all, Dimitri looks nice, more than nice, but Felix has never been the best at making compliments; insults always come easier to him.

“You look... good.”

It really isn’t much of a compliment, and yet Dimitri’s smile is the brightest nonetheless.

“Thank you, Felix. I really appreciate it coming from you.”

Felix sighs; he’s always so cheesy.

And yet, he’s smiling.

Their walk towards the throne room is silent, interrupted only by Dimitri’s acknowledging nods towards the guards that are patrolling the castle – these are times of peace, but one can never be too careful.

And as Felix watches him – or better, his back since Dimitri’s a few steps ahead – he cannot stop thinking about how much he’s grown.

This, right here, is Dimitri. Well, he’s still a bit of a boar, as Felix still calls him that sometimes but without none of the venom he’d use before.

Beast and man, all in one. Dimitri himself told him once that both live within him, but now he keeps himself in check; he doesn’t let the beast roam free, hungry for blood and revenge. This doesn’t mean that things are easy, but they are definitely better – and they’ll keep getting better, they vowed to each other.

Despite his absentmindedness he notices immediately when Dimitri stops in his tracks, right before the huge soon-to-be-open gate, and he stops as well.

Dimitri turns towards him, and Felix can feel the uncertainty in his eyes despite his smile.

“Will you walk beside me, Felix?” he asks, his voice grave, and Felix looks at him, not saying anything for a while.

He smiles then, shaking his head as he takes Dimitri’s hand and steps closer, ready to give him his support during such an important day.

“Forever and always.”

--

Writer - Vault_Emblem / @vault_emblem

Artist - Bringmemisery / @Bringmemisery

Glass Walls and Dirty Tiles

Voices.

They rise and fall in low murmurs, echoing along the floor. Felix pauses, swallowing his pants, wiping at the sweat along his skin. Against the ground, steady, steadying, he draws two short lines with his sword, waiting. Listening.

It's a voice. Just one.

One Felix is awfully familiar with.

It's with a grimace that he sheathes his sword, giving the dismal remains of the training ground a scathing look. Ordinarily, a proper sparring session would clear his head, give him some time to regain peace when night scares take hold. He had just been about to relax when the shuffling of feet and whispers had forced him still.

The words twist along the wind, hollow murmurs and cries, and Felix grumbles as he takes a quickened walk over. It's far too late, and too early, to deal with such non-sense.

From the window, he can see the shape of his so-called leader.

The colors of stained glass distort and pull at the moonlight, streaming pools of tinted pinks and greens along the church floors, over the pews, across the lone figure kneeling at the altar, head bowed. Felix swallows, taking a step onto the wrinkled carpet, noting the sprays of blue and purple that darken against the black of his boot. Another step, another, until Dimitri's voice dies into a shaky silence between them. He stills, watching, as Dimitri's back unfurls, blonde strands lingering against his

hands, until haunted eyes meet his own.

“Felix! What are you doing awake so late?” Easy words, if they weren’t spoken with such a croak. Felix grunts, narrowing his eyes.

“None of your business. Why are you here, boar?” The words lose their scathing edge when Dimitri winces, bags under his eyes becoming increasingly prevalent as the months go by. Time at Garreg Mach has been bad to the Blue Lions, Sylvain and Ashe’s personal laundry aired out, and every passing day seemed to have drained more from Dimitri.

The man standing at Felix’s front is no more than a sullen husk of a person.

“It’s nothing, just a bad night.” An understatement. Dimitri’s lips quirk up in a piss-poor attempt at a smile, ending up more around a grimace. Felix crosses his arms, waiting, though there is nothing more to say.

“Feh. Another excuse, as expected of you.” Dimitri twitches, though whatever words in his mouth never emerge. Instead he crosses his arms, swaying side to side, brows knit together. Felix scoffs, letting his shoes smear dirt along church floors. “Go to bed, you’re disturbing the humans.”

“Felix.”

It’s a remarkably bad idea to stay with beasts for longer than necessary, and yet, Felix finds his feet come to a squeaky stop at the foot of the church. There is nothing but a shallow echo within the church walls, a breath echoing until it has become a haunting reminder of the man behind him. He swallows, his knuckles cracking as his fingers twitch shut, for a moment wishing he had carried with him the sword he had used for practice.

He has a dagger strapped to his uniform. It will have to be enough.

“What is it?” Though he can hear the soft wisps of Dimitri’s breaths, there is no rustle of movement. Good. The reach of a spear would put Felix at a disadvantage this close.

“Felix. Can we—could we speak? About,” wavering, hesitation. Felix bites down a grunt, his eyes pinched. This irritatingly indecisive aspect of Dimitri is new, fresh, borne from just a few years ago. When they were younger, when they were together, Dimitri had been a natural born leader. Energetic, friendly, loud.

That was a long time ago.

“Speak, boar. Quickly. I want to get some sleep tonight.” Unlikely; the dull prickly

annoyance has wrought Felix from sleep time and time again.

“Felix,” another pause, though briefer than the one before, “am I really so awful?”

“At what?” The urge to stare at his demons is too large. Felix relents, allowing himself this half step turn. As expected, Dimitri refuses to fully meet his eyes, and still, under the scatterings of moon light cut through stained glass, Felix can almost picture him with a likeness akin to the old saints, faded into rubble, standing still in this old chapel as the world swings by.

It feels that way sometimes—staring at his unchanging back, even as red rains from the heavens and screams echo in his ears.

“At—at, I’m not sure, Felix. Is that not the problem? We have been friends for so long, and yet... Do I really deserve so little as to be named a beast by my friend?” Uneasy. Unbalanced. Shaky. Such a different back from the one Felix saw marked in red.

“I saw you.”

Relentless. Furious. Still.

“We’re in a military academy. Of course we’re going to have to fight. But you,” the words are more spit than syllables, days turned weeks to months to lingering years of resentment at the forefront of his tongue, “you enjoy it! You enjoy killing, the pleas, the scene of a groveling man before you hack him down.”

Dimitri’s silence is too easily won. In comparison, Felix can feel the unsteady rock of bile, spittle within his mouth as he heaves, scathing words lingering heavy in the air between them. It’s deserved.

“What else do I have to call you if not beast?”

Blue.

They bloom at Dimitri’s beck and call. Daggers and swords raised, axes and spears held steady, the high note of an arrow strung. It’s their job, here, as students of this academy. It isn’t as though servitude isn’t an uncommon feeling to Felix.

But what is the point of his work here, if all he’s aiding is a man who will smile and laugh as he lays waste to families, to people, to those who would cower and sob and plead not unlike those Dimitri had once sought to protect?

“It’s true.” Finally. His words echo in the quiet between them, hollow and useless as any excuses. Felix rolls his eyes, crossing his arms; surely, with no doubt, Dimitri will

be cowering again, defenseless and unstable in light of his monstrosity.

“You’re right, Felix. I did enjoy that. Fighting them, killing them, their, screams, even.” The snort that escapes Felix cuts Dimitri short, an uneasy lingering. Yet when he speaks again, the edge to his words is sharper. “Call me a beast then. You are correct. But, even so, Felix...”

“Even as a boar, can’t I ask you to remain my friend?”

Pathetic. Even in the depths of night, alone with his crimes rung in the air, Dimitri still has some worthless ambition to ask for this. This friendship, as though it’s worth anything. Stupid. Stupid.

Felix gnaws on his inner cheek, forcing himself to meet Dimitri’s eyes. The blank blue in them stares, unflinching, wanting. Cold, in a distantly inhumane way, and yet, the tightness in his shoulders, the nervous habit of flicking his fingers, the slight bent to his waist.

“You are pathetic.” Felix voices. Dimitri flinches, his eyes slipping away just a moment. Human. It makes Felix unreasonably mad.

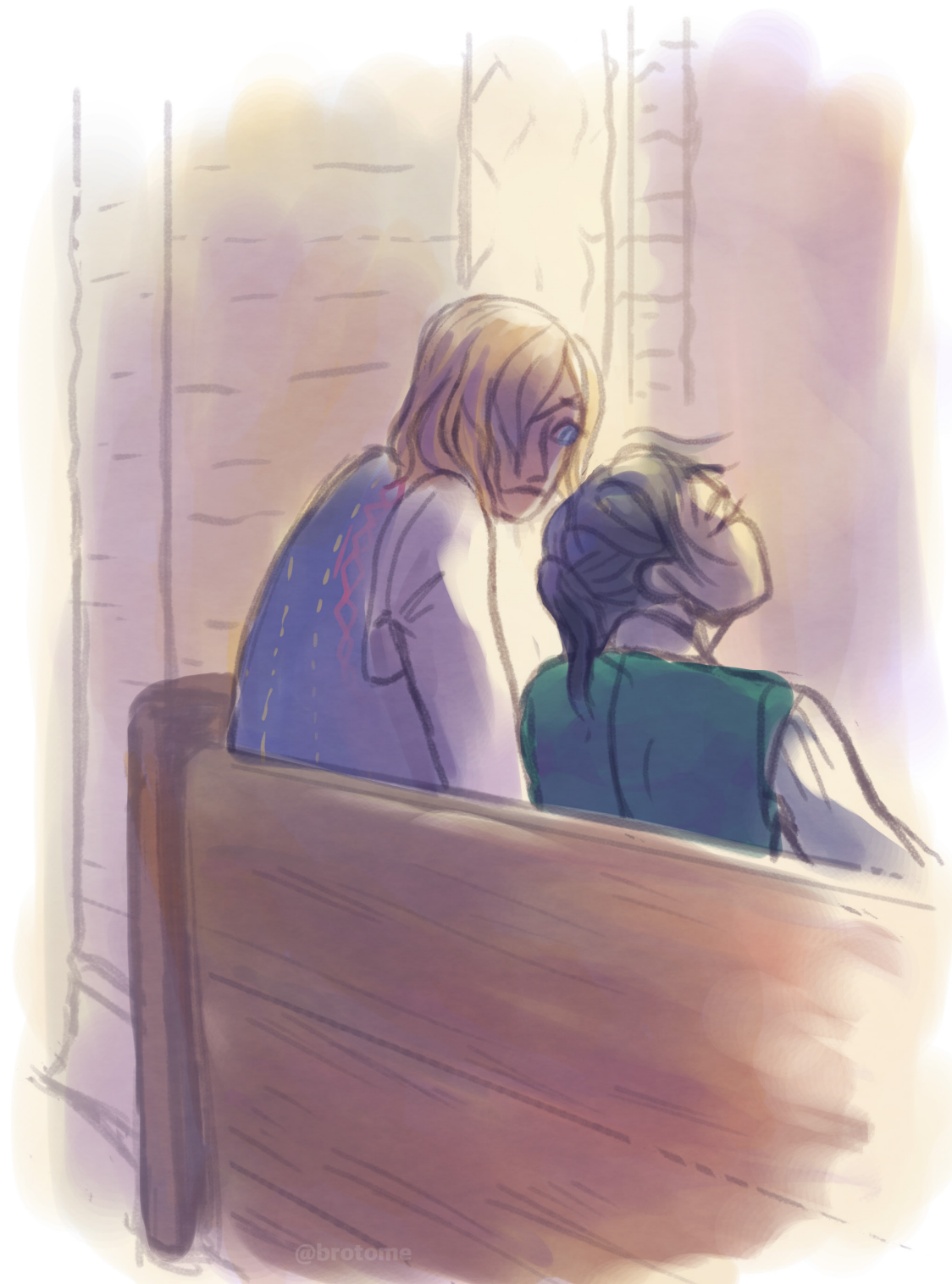
“But. I’m not so amazing myself.” The shock on Dimitri’s face is laughable, and for once this damnable night, Felix can find a twitch at his lips. Dimitri’s hands wrangle in the air, pulling at nothing, until they relent to claw at his tunic, stretching and wringing the fabric. All the while, his eyes stay locked.

“Boar. I’ve stayed here this long, haven’t I?” Felix grimaces, feeling a familiar warmth creep upwards from his neck. Disgusting. His feet kick at the floor, but the damage is done, and then Dimitri is striding forward with a lightness to his eyes.

“Felix!” It’s an urge to dodge the widening arms, and yet, Dimitri is the one who freezes in place, elbows at an awkward angle. A dry cough forces its way into the air between them, Felix grimacing and Dimitri with a shaky smile. “Can, um, would it be alright for me to hug you?” Stupid. Felix rolls his eyes, and with a single step forward, grasps at Dimitri’s arms. They follow him with ease, such ridiculous ease, as though Dimitri were not capable of breaking free of any grip, until they are wrapped at Felix’s back.

“Why,” he murmurs at the base of Dimitri’s neck, acutely aware of how he stiffens at the breath, “are you awake so late, boar?”

Dimitri’s hum travels through their bodies, pressed oddly close, and though Felix has slackened his arms Dimitri remains close, face neatly tucked away from his gaze. Even so, he can imagine the flickering doubts on his face, hidden under blonde locks.



“I was looking,” Dimitri relents, and then he’s loose, taking a half step away. Too close, yet too far to keep that lingering warmth between them.

“For what?” The request to aid is at the tip of his tongue, and though unspoken Dimitri grins, shaking his head. Felix bites down on his lip, an odd flicker at the base of his neck.

“Peace, I think. Just, a moment to reflect.” His eyes meet Felix’s own again, the same dull blue as always. With his stupid noodle hair, and his shallow smile, Dimitri gives Felix one last look before taking another step back. “About being a beast, I suppose.” He’s receding. It’s barely a flicker of a thought in Felix’s mind before his mouth is working again, teeth clicking together in the cold.

“That’s stupid.” Dimitri blinks, an uneasy edge to his mouth again, though Felix charges on regardless. “Tackling your issues alone is a stupid thing to do.”

“But, didn’t you—”

“Well, I’m not a beast!” Dimitri blinks twice more, agape, and when Felix grabs at his wrist he relents, letting the other force him forward again. “If you want to find peace about that, then you should consult an actual human instead of—of this! Just,” his voice wavers in the moment, the echo of his own shout rekindling in his ears, “I’m here.”

“Facing all your problems alone is why you became a beast to begin with.”

At the very least, Dimitri’s gaping face is a pleasant ending to his night. Snorting, Felix pulls away, making sure to take a wide step to the doorway. It’s far too late for this nonsense, and if either of them plan to get any sleep tonight, they had best do it now.

“Go to bed, boar. I’ll be here tomorrow, understood?”

“Understood!” Ah. Felix was wrong. Dimitri’s unsteady smile pulls into a full one, mesmerizingly bright against the dark shadows of the church, the spilling of colors onto the dirty tile floor. That. That is the best ending to his night.

--

Writer - Shidreamin / @shidreamin

Artist - brotome/ @brotome

Together

Felix heard every one of his running footfalls as if they were being pounded into his soul. He couldn’t be too late, he couldn’t fail. So he ran, faster than he ever had, the noise of battle just an anonymous din around him. The urgency was suffocating, and his lungs burned from the exertion. *I can’t be too late. I can’t –*

He comes to a halt as he rounds the corner, the scene before him searing itself into his brain. Byleth, their professor, standing strong, with the Sword of the Creator in his hand, unravelled like a whip, waiting to strike with a singular purpose: Dimitri’s death. Dimitri, his King, the wild boar, his childhood friend, everything and nothing, was on his knees, Areadbhar out of reach, staring up at his opponent, fury written into the snarl on his face.

The dark light of archaic magic fills the air as Hubert steps out from behind the wall. He is composed, indifferent perhaps, a trap door spider merely waiting for its meal. Or the loyal hound set on guard by his master, to make sure that the fight in front of them goes undisturbed.

Without hesitation, Felix moves as if to counter with a spell of his own, waits for Hubert’s focus to shift to preventing the spell from forming, before knocking him to the floor. He gives the sorcerer a kick in the head for good measure and keeps running, knowing that if he can just get to Areadbhar that they had a chance.



Each of his footsteps were in competition with Byleth's movements. Step; his arm begins to rise. Step; he adjusts his wrist slightly. Step; he adjusts his grip. Step; his hand is now level with his shoulder. Step; his arm is extending. Step; downwards, lower, lower, lower... Step; the extended chain of blades surges forward.

He's there finally; Felix is in front of Dimitri; the blades glide closer; Dimitri rolls at the last second, out of the way and Felix follows suit. And time speeds up again. The blades crash against the stone floor, the force of ancient power leaving cracks in the granite, dust rising from the debris. Dimitri is on his feet, Areadbhar in hand. And Felix is at his side, scanning the room, knowing that one vital piece of this battle is still missing; Edelgard.

Byleth has stepped back, re-assessing the situation. Felix steps in front of Dimitri, adjusts his grip on his sword, changes his stance and focuses on breathing. He cannot afford to be riled, to be baited by the professor, the expert swordsman that had taught him so much. And knew his weaknesses. He can feel Dimitri shifting behind him, readying his lance and Felix just hopes that the boar doesn't do anything stupid.

"Even though you should have retreated, it is good to have *my* shield," Dimitri murmurs above Felix's shoulder. The words and tender tone send an inconvenient heat

through Felix. He quickly suppresses it; he is not going to fall here because the *boar* distracted him.

"Focus on the battle," Felix spat in response.

"I am. So long as Vestra doesn't wake up, we have a chance at taking out the professor," Dimitri said firmly. Byleth had begun to approach, weapon still drawn, face placid, impassive, as if this were just a job and not two of his former students standing against him. *Had there ever really been affection in those eyes?* Felix wondered.

"What about Edelgard?" Felix asked aloud.

"She was injured, last I saw. Vestra teleported her away from the battle," Dimitri replied, moving to Felix's side. Dimitri nodded towards the professor, arched an eyebrow and asked, "together?"

"Always," Felix responded quietly and nodded. Weapons drawn, heads held high, they ran to meet their fate.

--

Writer - Rhyse / @NohrianLyric

Artist - V / @Bumblevetr

Trust

Writer - HapSky / @HapSkyScribbles

Artist - chickentocino / @chickentocino



“Your Majesty,” Felix calls.

Spoken, with intent. Echoing through the empty council room. The title of a king.

No crown adorns his head.

It has been long, since he was simply “Dimitri” - long since he was “boar prince” and not so long since he was “beast” though maybe, sometimes, he still is. Most of the time, he just tries to be better, to become what he has to be. Works hard, and harder still.

No crown adorns his head, yet.

Spoken, with acceptance. Echoing through the empty council room. The heart of a king.

“Yes?” Dimitri replies.

Warmth

Writer - HapSky / @HapSkyScribbles

Artist - chickentocino / @chickentocino



Sunset rays in frosty air, winter basked in orange light. It's cold, in every sense of the word, yet Felix feels warm. His lungs fill with crystal clearness, and when his chapped lips ache from talking he simply stops. So does Dimitri.

Blond streaks in black ones, foreheads touching gently. It's warm, this feeling in his chest, yet Dimitri feels cold. His nose sniffles with frozen drops, and when his numb hands shiver from chillness he simply holds them out. And so does Felix.

Missed

Time was a stringent mistress.

It hadn't been three full years since Felix last stepped foot in Garreg Mach, but already its once diligently maintained halls had fallen to disrepair. He supposed it didn't help that a lost battle was the last thing it saw before it was abandoned. There was more rubble than wall where he entered, and weeds grew around and through the cracks in the stone.

Felix came here on a personal whim, even though his attention was being demanded by the search parties sweeping furtively but fervently across Faerghus for the missing prince. For once in a long time, Felix agreed with his father: Dimitri didn't die in Fhirdiad. However, Felix thought they were looking in the wrong places.

Call it a gut feeling, born of and honed by a literal lifetime of being side by side with the boar, but instead of avoiding the Empire patrols, he had followed them. And he had seen... truthfully, he wasn't certain who or what he had nearly encountered, and judging by the corpses it left behind, it may well have been a beast. But Felix wasn't afraid of beasts; he was looking for one.

His instincts led him here. He didn't like it—he didn't like being where the memories of his old friends turned enemies reverberated off the walls. He walked through the ruined courtyard where the tables were overturned, and the chairs were filthy with grime and old rainwater. Ferdinand's obnoxiously bright voice greeted him, inviting him to tea. He ignored the scent of Almyran pine needles lingering nebulously in his imagination as he passed.

Caspar's incessant chattering followed him through the ransacked training halls where broken training weapons lay strewn across the floor. Felix wasn't sure if his feet took him here out of habit or whether he thought it was worth looking; after all, the boar had spent almost as much time as he had here. Before he realized what he was doing, Felix picked up one of the useless sword handles. Dimitri often shattered training swords just like this, he thought.



As much as the boar repulsed him, he couldn't deny that Dimitri had been his best sparring partner after the professor; no one else pushed his own abilities and reflexes quite as hard. With that excuse, the training grounds had been one of the few places where he tolerated the boar. When they were taking swings at each other, it was easy to forget his resentment; if he examined the feeling—and he purposefully did not—he could almost say he was comfortable with it, like things were as they should be. He tossed the piece of junk away.

Dorothea's song echoed melodically in the wide expanse of the main cathedral, the clarity of her pitch unsullied across time and the illusion of reality. There were holes and craters everywhere, and a large heap of rubble loomed despondently at the far end where there was once a magnificent statue backed by splendid stained glass windows. Parts of the ceiling had crumbled, and shafts of golden light filtered through the gaps, illuminating a cascade of falling dust. Felix had the distinct yet ironic impression that the place felt more sacred now than it did in its untarnished glory. Without all the ostentatious glamour and in its low, broken state, the sanctity of the Goddess shone through, unfiltered and sincere.

Felix approached it slowly; he'd never been particularly religious, but neither had Dorothea, and still she always sang with all her heart. She and the others had asked him to join the Eagles back then; perhaps if he had accepted, he'd be in a better place right now, doing something useful instead of wandering around an abandoned ruin. But he didn't, couldn't, because Faerghus and more importantly Dimitri needed him, and now more than ever.

--

Of course Felix thought to look for him all the way at Garreg Mach.

Dimitri crouched deeper in the shadows as quietly as he could; Felix was ever vigilant, and in the silence of the abandoned cathedral, any noise would be sure to draw attention. His own emotions roiled at the thought that Felix came looking for him, a confusing and conflicting swirl of half-coherent thoughts. He wasn't *glad*, but it would be remiss to say he didn't feel his heart move that he and Felix still shared enough of a bond for him to come all the way to Garreg Mach on little more than a *feeling*; Felix couldn't have much more than that, because if he had any sort of tangible proof, there'd be a search party with him.

Some small corner of him wanted to weep. He hadn't been sure that Felix, who so openly expressed disgust at him, still wanted anything to do with him. However, he carefully swallowed this feeling; who knew if Felix was here out of a sense of duty to Faerghus and not actual concern for him?

As eager as he was to rekindle his friendship with Felix, the strongest impulse by far was the desire to hide. He was not the Dimitri Felix was looking for; of this much he was certain. Felix was looking for a prince, perhaps an old friend, a worthy liege; Felix was looking for a man. However, Dimitri knew he was none of these things, not any more, and so it was better to not be found.

Felix always knew him the best, but whatever sixth sense had led him here, it still couldn't penetrate the deep shadows of the ruins where Dimitri had intimate knowledge of the hiding places. He hid in one of these places now, a broken crater in a wall, near enough to the debris of the statue that he could hear Felix approach.

Footsteps clicked near in confident, familiar strides, close enough to touch, and Dimitri

slowed his breath. Felix's proximity offered him some degree of long overdue comfort. He stood there for a long time, as if praying, but knowing Felix he was probably contemplating his grievances. Dimitri didn't mind, content to sit against the low wall between them and bask in the solace Felix unknowingly provided with his presence.

He didn't know how long they stayed there like that in a facetious approximation of quiet companionship; he almost thought Felix had left without him noticing, if it weren't for the Felix-shaped shadow cast across the stone. Vaguely, he wondered if Felix was waiting, so convinced of his instincts that he expected Dimitri to appear eventually if he simply lingered long enough.

That confidence would be well earned since he was correct; it wasn't his fault after all that Dimitri didn't want to be found.

Finally, Dimtri heard the footsteps leading away, slower and reluctant, and he exhaled slowly, carefully emptying his lungs in a deep, silent sigh. He almost hoped Felix would hear and find him.

He let Felix walk away.

--

Writer - sarah / @closureaxioms

Artist - Aeryx / @Ismyria

The Scars Left by Death

“Felix, there was an attack on the king's traveling party.”

It seemed such a simple sentence, but the weight of his father's words told him otherwise. From behind Rodrigue, who was still dressed in his waterlogged cloak and muddied riding boots, stepped Dimitri. His chin-length hair was dripping from the rain, sticking to his pale cheeks and leaving streaks down the dirt on his face. His downcast eyes and grief-stricken face was the only answer Felix needed.

The King is dead.

The idea of such a thing seemed impossible. A far-off nightmare that should not have been realized. But the truth was right there in front of him, written across the taut lines of his friend's sunken face. This was no joke, no test. It was real. And if one nightmare was to come true...

“Glenn was with them,” Felix said slowly, regretting opening his mouth immediately but unable to stop himself. “Where is he?”

Why wouldn't all your nightmares come true?

This time it was Dimitri who spoke. He didn't raise his head and his words barely made it past his lips, but to Felix's ears it sounded as if Dimitri was shouting.

“Dead.”

Dead.

Felix took a step back as if Dimitri had struck him. The blood drained from his face and the room began to spin. It wasn't possible, he told himself in abject denial. Glenn would never die on him. He'd just been knighted a few months before, he couldn't just die. Not his brother. Not Glenn.

Rodrigue's lips were moving but it was what seemed like hours before Felix regained his senses. When the room had finally slowed to a sedated crawl instead of a whirlwind, his father's words finally reached Felix's ears.

"—Duscur," his father was saying.

"What?" Felix was hearing now, but his brain was slower, still reeling from the shock of the news he'd just received. The haggard look on his father's face told Felix that whatever was about to come would serve as another of the nights' all but fatal blows.

"I said," Rodrigue repeated slowly, voice low and calm, as if to soften the words themselves, "we're at war with Duscur, and the council has drafted you both to the reserves."

--

The sun had not yet peaked its head over the horizon when Felix, accompanied by a few dozen of his father's men, rode out to the northernmost border of Faerghus territory. He scanned the field for Dimitri and instead caught sight of the Margrave Gautier and his sons. On any other occasion Felix might have rode over to them to quip about Sylvain's posture or weapon maintenance, but the somber occasion left no room for pleasantries.

Dimitri was nowhere to be seen for what was nearing the better part of half an hour. Just as Felix was beginning to think the prince had decided not to show up or had taken his men to another part of the field, Felix saw the Faerghus banner-men riding up. Between them, on the King's own steed, rode the prince.

The boy Felix had grown up with was gone, one look was enough to confirm that. The young man that lead his men to the field had shorn his hair, the child's bob gone and replaced with a soldier's cut. If Dimitri was anxious or angry, it didn't show, hidden under his formal and chilly demeanor. In place of what had once been the boy prince was a man, the rightful King of Faerghus, leading his men to avenge his murdered father.

At least, that's what Felix assumed was happening. But as Dimitri passed him and didn't spare him a glance, Felix got a shiver down his spine. Something isn't right, he thought to himself, and spurred his horse forward, commanding his men to stay in position and telling them that he would return once he had spoken with the prince.

When Felix finally caught up with Dimitri he realized that they were far past the reserves, and Dimitri was still riding. He's headed to the vanguard, Felix realized in a moment of horror and shock. This is suicide.

"Dimitri!" Felix called once he was in speaking distance. "Where are you going? The reserves

are back there, we weren't drafted to the vanguard. Ride back with me, we don't belong up here, we're not soldiers yet."

Dimitri didn't look his way and when he spoke his tone was as icy as his expression. "I am not headed to the front lines because I wish to die in the carnage," he stated flatly, eyes ahead looking at something Felix couldn't see. "The Duscur people are not responsible for my father and step-mothers deaths. But I know who is and I'm here to find them. This war is nothing but a distraction from what really happened that night."

Felix took a moment to digest this as they slowed to a simple trot. The King was assassinated, but not by the people of Duscur. That means Glenn was killed by a third-party as well and I have no reason to fight in this war. I should take our men home to live another day.

As Felix thought things through, Dimitri began to instruct his men. "You are the most skilled fighters in Fódlan," he began, his voice lower and deeper than Felix was used to. "Having you in the reserves is a senseless attempt to keep me from harm. You will join with Galatea troops in the vanguard. I expect every one of you to come back alive."

He sounds like his father, Felix realized. Always prudent, always in control. He will make a great king someday.

"I have a separate mission to carry out, given to me by the Queen Regent herself. I cannot tell you where, simply that drafting me to the reserves was a cover up for my true purpose here today. I wish you all the luck the Goddess has to give. Farewell."

With that, Dimitri broke off from the company he had been riding with and disappeared into the forest to the east of the battlefield. Felix, realizing once more that Dimitri was about to do something foolhardy, rode after him.

It wasn't long before they began to hear the screams of war. Swords clashing, horses braying, the sound of people making their last stand in the cold Faerghus winter. The sounds were distant now that they rode under the dark cover of the trees but they still made Felix uneasy. There was no guarantee that they weren't going to end up in a Duscur ambush given how far into enemy lines they were riding.

A few minutes later, Dimitri came to an abrupt stop, dismounting and tying his horse to a nearby tree. Felix followed suit, the tension between them frigid and heavy. Felix had tried to bring himself to break the silence a few times during the course of their ride but Dimitri had shushed him with a hand and given him no reply. Now that they were seemingly at their destination Felix attempted once again to gain information from Dimitri.

"Dimitri, what are we doing here? You said the Duscur people weren't behind the attack. We should speak to Cornelia about this and call off this thoughtless war, not be sneaking behind enemy lines with no backup—"

"I have never known you to be one for so much pointless chatter, Felix. If there is even the slightest chance my father's murderer is here tonight, I am going to take it. I will not let

them get away again.”

“And then what?” Felix hissed, attempting to keep his voice quiet despite his exasperation. “You’re not a knight, Dimitri! This is war, not sparring practice. Your death is the one casualty we cannot afford!”

When Dimitri turned to look at him to deliver his response, the look on his face made the blood drain from Felix’s. Never had he seen such bloodlust, such rage, and on Dimitri’s young face it made him look inhuman. “And then,” Dimitri said slowly, his tone freezing Felix to the bone far more than the winter wind ever could, “I will rip them apart. One by one, limb by limb, until there is nothing left. I will have my vengeance, Felix.”

The rest was a blur. Time passed without chronology in Felix’s mind. There was blood. There were screams. Whose, he wouldn’t remember until years later, but they haunted him almost more than his brother’s death ever would. They would stumble back hours later, long after the war had been won, with a young Duscurnan carrying the bloodied prince back to his home. Felix would follow, his sword dripping red with blood, eyes downcast.

After what was to be referred to forevermore as the Tragedy of Duscurnan, Faerghus as a country was changed, but even more so was their prince. Dimitri had returned alive at the very least, and had taken the man who had carried him back into his custody. His name was Dedue, and he wasn’t far from Dimitri in age, but his white hair and large build led many to think he was far older than he was. Dedue refused to leave the prince’s side no matter what, and Dimitri allowed it.

Time passed slowly after Duscurnan. Dimitri had not been able to avenge his father and Felix could tell that it haunted him. After he recovered from his wounds, Dimitri would spend hours and days in his room, not taking food or company, and it was allowed at first because Dimitri was grieving. He’d lost his family and not soon after had been thrown into a meaningless war that he was not yet prepared for. Even Felix let him have his way, checking on him occasionally to make sure he was still doing the bare minimum to keep himself alive.

It was a few months after Duscurnan that Felix first started to be truly concerned. He had let himself into Dimitri’s room, long past the charade of knocking only to get no response, and what he saw shook him to his core. Dimitri was wrapped in one of his father’s cloaks, huddled in the corner of the room, rocking and talking to himself.

“I know...y-yes I understand, Father. I am sorry, so sorry...I will...they will die...all of them... you will be avenged.”

Dimitri was whispering to himself, over and over, holding himself so tightly Felix wondered if he might be bruising himself. He ran to Dimitri’s side, sitting next to him and attempted to lay a hand on his shoulder, but Dimitri swatted it away in his panic.

“I SAID I’LL AVENGE YOU, PLEASE DON’T— O-oh it’s you, Felix.” Dimitri’s breathing was labored, his cheeks colorless. He looked as if he’d seen a ghost.

“Yes, it is. What are you doing? Sitting here in the dark, talking to yourself.” Felix tried again to touch him, and this time Dimitri let Felix squeeze his shoulder. “You should come to dinner, Dimitri. You haven’t eaten today at all.” Felix stood, offering Dimitri his hand. “Let’s go.”

“I...I think I’d best stay here. Enjoy your dinner, Felix.” Dimitri attempted a wan smile but it didn’t last long. As Felix left, he looked back to see Dimitri hunched over, muttering to himself to himself once more. It would be the last Felix would see of him for a long time to come.

Dimitri’s ‘condition,’ as the castle’s inhabitants had taken to calling it, worsened. He kept to himself more often than not and could often be heard screaming at an empty room. If one was to enter the prince’s refuge, though not many did save for bringing him meals that would go untouched, there was only the slightest chance that he would recognize you. The majority of the time he only saw ghosts.

Felix grew increasingly concerned as the months dragged on. What had originally been brushed off as the grief of an orphaned boy had turned into the makings of what looked to Felix to be a complete breakdown that Dimitri showed no signs of breaking free of. His attempts to free the prince from his self-imposed isolation bore no fruit and by the end of what marked their first year after the Tragedy, Felix stopped trying. The two grew apart and what seemed to be an impassable rift was left where their close friendship had once been.

--

Twelve moons passed until Felix once again decided to attempt to wake the beast. He had spent eight of those moons, after getting over his own grief and irritation over Dimitri’s state, researching and seeking a cure for the illness that inflicted Dimitri’s mind. In his anger Felix had nicknamed Dimitri ‘the boar’ in his head and the name stuck, even after all twelve moons had passed Felix could not shake the feeling that it fit Dimitri far better than his royal title.

Felix knocked on the beast’s door. When no response came, he knocked again, this time louder, backed by his constant impatience. “Boar! Open this door at once, I have need of you.” Nothing. “You have been locked away in the goddess-forsaken tower for too long. Your people have gone long enough without seeing hide nor hair of their prince.” The deafening silence continued. If duty would not drag him out, Felix would.

He pushed the door open with force and was met the harsh sound of brittle wood giving way and splintering. Felix started and gave the door a once over. It was completely intact, save for where time had worn away at the carved wood. Then he looked down around himself where the splintered remains of what once had been a chair lay in disarray. He propped the door closed, Felix noted with unease. Was it to keep prying eyes out or to keep himself in? He tread in to the room with more caution than he had had with the door, his eyes having a hard time adjusting to the pitch darkness that engulfed him the farther into Dimitri’s lair he ventured. “Boar!” He called again, unable to find Dimitri in such an ill-lit space. This time he got a response in the way of a startled grunt from the far corner of the room. There, hunkered down amongst a clutter of books and broken furniture, sat the man who was once the revered

crown prince, reduced to nothing more than a grief-stricken beast. An animalistic whine escaped Dimitri's lips when caught sight of Felix. It was a sound of pure anguish, a grief so deep and cold it could drown out all other emotions.

The sound of it broke Felix's heart. He had not laid eyes on his old friend for the better part of a year, and the sight of what he had been diminished to tore Felix's fragile heart into a million pieces. He felt Dimitri's pain, his anger, his uncertainty and his terror all at once, it was written across Dimitri's ashen face, his fragile body. Everything that had once been Dimitri Alexandre Blaiddyd was gone and replaced with the wounded animal that sat before him.

"Boar," Felix said slowly, feeling as if he was stepping on the thin ice of a pond, waiting for it to break. "Do you know who I am?" One question at a time. You don't know how bad it's gotten. A simple word to break him irreparably.

Dimitri nodded slowly after thinking for a moment. "Felix," he answered slowly, his voice breaking. "Felix." The second time he sounded more sure of himself, as if he'd only been testing the name on his tongue at first.

Felix nodded, a relieved smile dancing across his lips. This is a start, he thought to himself. If he knows me I can help him. Felix refused to admit to himself in that moment, but hearing his name on Dimitri's lips for the first time in what felt like life time filled him with indescribable joy. "Good, yes, it's me, Felix. Now," he reached his hand out, offering it to Dimitri, "Will you come with me? Just to clean yourself up a bit."

Dimitri retreated, shaking his head. "Can't. Won't. They're trying to get in." Dimitri shivered, pulling his blankets tighter around himself. Felix's brow furrowed.

"Who is trying to get in? The maids? They only want to bring you your meals, boar. Nothing more than that."

Dimitri retreated further into himself, blatant paranoia in his eyes. "No, no, the voices. The voices want to get in. Hurt me. Mad at me. Father..." He sniffed, bearing his face in his arms, and Felix's heart broke a little more. It was in that moment that Felix saw Dimitri for what he truly, truly was: A young boy of no more than fifteen, orphaned and alone in the world, still reliving the loss of his family and the horrors of the battle that followed. Felix cursed himself for leaving Dimitri alone as long as he did, but now he understood what had to be done. The kingdom could not be without its prince, but the prince could not be the way he was.

"Your Father— the voices cannot hurt you when I am here, boar. See?" Felix motioned to the ever-present sword at his hip. "I am a much stronger fighter now. Nothing can hurt you if I am by your side."

Dimitri's head peeked up above his cocoon, sunken eyes brightening slightly. "Really? You can fight ghosts?" Dimitri's troubled innocence cut Felix to his core and he continued.

"Yes, I can even fight ghosts, that's how strong I've gotten. If you see any, tell me and I'll be rid of them straight away." A seed of guilt planted itself in Felix's heart. I was not going to

play into his delusions, but what must be done...must be done. At least, it was better than trying to rip them from Dimitri by force. Instead he would make Dimitri feel safe and help come to the realization himself.

It was then that Dimitri finally, finally stood, shaking free of his blankets and stepping gingerly over what could only be the aftermath of a violent fit. He walked over and stood in front of Felix, still looking wary.

Felix offered Dimitri his hand as he had many moons ago when Dimitri had first refused his help. This time, however, Dimitri took it. Whether it was on a whim or because Dimitri truly knew he needed help Felix wasn't sure, and he wasn't going to ask.

"I will protect you, I swear on my name and on my brother's grave. Do you trust me?"

Dimitri's sad blue eyes darted from Felix to the door and back, as if gauging the enemy's strength against that of his own forces. He must have come to some sort of conclusion in his mind because he squeezed Felix's hand and nodded, knuckles white and heart beating fast. "I do."

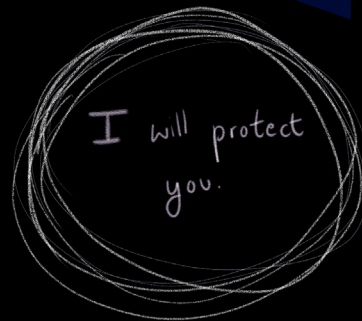
They stepped forward into the candlelit corridor, hand in hand, Felix guiding him carefully as if he were a lost child, and in a way he was. At Felix's side he would learn once again to trust, if not the world, at least those who had proven themselves. Felix would stay by him and help heal the scars left on him by death, help him grow stronger and allow Dimitri to coexist with his demons, no matter how loud or demanding they might sound to him.

For a time, at least.

--

Writer: KANNA / @spooky_agi

Artist: Bianca / @cryocannon



A piece of you

As much as it was unfortunate, both Dimitri and Felix were busy men with a lot of land to govern and people to direct. Sometimes, that just meant they worked separately and came together at the end of a long day, finding a moment to relax, finally, together.

Those were the nights Dimitri preferred. With the candles blown out and all issues pushed away until dawn crept through the curtains, he could burrow himself under his sheets and Felix would hold him close. They'd lie, fingers intertwined, until the rose of dawn started to make streaks in the cloudy morning sky. Dimitri almost always slept well with Felix by his side, and woke up warm with a smile on his face.

But they couldn't always spend their nights together. Sometimes, Felix's work demanded he return home to the Fraldarius lands and help out there. If there was a poor harvest, a bandit problem, anything out of the ordinary, he was off to his lonely castle, leaving Dimitri in his.

Sometimes, the separations were for several moons. Particularly if the winter was rough, sometimes it made more sense for Felix to stay home. To maintain order, to support the people who needed it. Dimitri's affection paled in comparison to the needs of the people of Fraldarius territory, and he understood that. It didn't stop him from missing him.

In those weeks apart, moons apart, they wrote letters to each other. When Dimitri first sent a letter to Felix, when their relationship was barely formed, he worried irrationally that he wouldn't get a response. That Felix would somehow think that he was silly, overly emotional, and ignore the whole thing. That the intensity of the connection they experienced together would fade when they were apart.

He needn't have worried, of course, because he always worried too much (about the strangest things, Felix said, and then he'd smile fondly, nudge Dimitri in the ribs, and press a quick kiss on his cheek). Felix's returning letter was full of sentiments Dimitri knew he struggled to put into words. Things Dimitri knew Felix felt through his actions, through his face and voice, but were still heartening to read.

Dimitri may have shed a tear of joy or two into the first letter. He reread it every evening before bed, and slept with it on his bedside table, every single night until the next letter arrived. The pattern repeated, until Felix announced in his next letter that he would soon return. With that, Dimitri folded every letter into a box and put them there for the next time they were parted.

The pattern was always the same: once Felix left, Dimitri waited in anticipation of the first letter carrier. Felix would send good tidings, inform him of his safe arrival in Fraldarius territory, and talk about anything business related. And then the topic would drift to kinder things, warmer feelings, before Felix wrapped the letter up with wishes for his good health.

Dimitri would write in return, and receive Felix's reply. Writing the letters was Dimitri's second favourite part of any day from Felix's departure until his return; it was a time of week when he could think about anything, write about everything - be it mundane or important - and tell Felix just how much he adored him.

He honestly delighted in throwing everything he had into it. Every word of endearment, every feeling he ever felt towards Felix, the tiny details he didn't even know if Felix was aware of (the length of his eyelashes, the way his smile lifted his cheekbones, the shine of his hair under the evening sunlight, the sound of his unrestrained laughter filling the training ground). Even though he wrote the letters all alone, he felt like Felix was there with him if he just thought hard enough.

His favourite part of his day when Felix was gone was, of course, getting to read Felix's letters to him. They carried him through darker, lonelier hours full of all the tasks he didn't want to do, lifted him through the news he knew in his heart was unavoidable but wished it wasn't (people did not deserve to suffer and starve in winter, but aid could not get everywhere all at once until the roads were repaired properly).

Felix sometimes teased him for the overly poetic content of his letters, asking him if his heart had finally gone soft. Of course, he'd then follow those words up by telling Dimitri how much he valued that kind heart and cherished all the time they could spend together, so he knew it was only teasing.

They went back and forth, back and forth, until Felix returned to him in Fhirdiad, and the letters were never mentioned again. They were only a thing for when he was

away; Felix never thanked him for the correspondence when he was back at his side, and for his part, Dimitri never mentioned it either. It was almost a separate part of their life together, something reserved almost entirely for colder times.

Dimitri honestly didn't scrutinise their habit or anything close to that much at all. It was something he adored doing, enjoyed looking back on, and one day hoped he could look back on the letters with Felix with fondness. Perhaps he could tease Felix for the things he'd said and watch him blush, or point out particular lines that meant the most to him.

The part of all of this he didn't expect was uncovered a few years into their letter swapping - Felix had gone out to Fraldarius territory just as the harvest started to come in due to reports of bandits that couldn't be easily driven out because everyone was needed on hand in the fields. He took a small contingent of soldiers from the army with him, and when his first letter arrived to Dimitri it came in the form of an emergency messenger. Galatea had been hit by blight, and the people were in revolt. More help was needed urgently.

Perhaps it wasn't the smartest idea, but Dimitri went himself. He was most comfortable dealing with lives in conflict when he was the one there, though he would rather not be there lance in hand. He left his other advisors with orders to begin the organisation of a supply train and set out in person.

Though it had barely been days since they last saw each other, Dimitri embraced Felix just as he did when they'd been apart for moons. Felix shoved him off, but he was smiling. "You're just like a dog," he said, frowning slightly. "Come inside. When was the last time you were in Fraldarius territory?"

Dimitri glanced back at the castle gates, where a page was leading his horse in the direction he vaguely recalled the stables being in. "Shouldn't we be getting to the root of the rebellion?" he asked.

Felix waved a hand, looking as collected as always. "I have people working on it," he said. "I said you were coming to talk to them personally and things have, unsurprisingly, calmed down a little."

"...I didn't reply," he said with a frown. Felix only nodded, leading him through the entrance hall he barely remembered and then through several corridors he couldn't recall at all. Finally, they came to a room he did recognise. Rodrigue's office.

"I'll get you up to date on everything, unless you need to rest before all that," Felix said, making his way to where a lamp stood on the desk. He lit it, pulling the curtains closed to cover the dim evening light and keep the little warmth of the room in. "Do you?"

Dimitri was still standing, slightly struck, at the doorway. “My apologies,” he said, chuckling slightly uneasily. “It’s been a long time since I was in this room.” The last time would have been...he travelled through Fraldarius on his way back to the capital when Garreg Mach fell now over ten years ago. He’d been in Fraldarius lands and even the castle since then, but never Rodrigue’s office.

“You’ll want to get used to it,” Felix said, moving to get an armchair from next to the bookcase and move it so there were two chairs at the desk. “There’s quite a lot in the way of papers to get through, if you don’t mind coming over.”

“Of course,” he said, making his way over to take the seat Felix hadn’t taken. As he did so, he caught one of Felix’s hands in his own, making him blush. He chuckled. “Go ahead and begin.”

There was, in fact, lots of explaining to do. This crisis was, seemingly, far more complicated than a blight, and Dimitri found himself marvelling at how well Felix was doing his job. He had everything in front of him ready, or almost to hand. “Hang on,” Felix said halfway through an explanation, pulling open the drawer next to Dimitri’s feet and shutting it almost as quickly.

But before he got it closed, Dimitri saw... familiar handwriting. “Felix,” he said, and Felix’s movements, which had been smooth and effortless as he took Dimitri through the minutiae of overdue land drainage coming at the wrong time, stuttered to a stop. “Are those letters?”

“They’re not important,” Felix said shortly. His hand moved to a different drawer to find new papers, and despite the importance of their endeavour, Dimitri caught his hand to stop him. Felix looked at him, an expression of faint exasperation gracing his face. Faint, fond exasperation. “Fine, they are important.”

“Did you keep them all?” he asked. He... he hadn’t dared hope that Felix would. He knew he was important to Felix, he couldn’t exactly doubt that after all this time together, but somehow Felix still found ways to surprise him with how much he cared.

“They’re nice,” Felix said, a blush starting to form on his cheeks. It never ceased to delight Dimitri just how easily he could fluster Felix with only the weight of his sincerity. “I read them sometimes, when we’re apart.”

Dimitri leaned in to kiss him; there was no other option, really. He couldn’t just sit there and listen to Felix talking about feelings that matched his own. When he withdrew, there was a soft smile (the one that raised his cheekbones just ever so slightly) on Felix’s face. “I do the same,” he said. “I always miss you terribly-”



“And it’s like having you there beside me,” Felix finished, leaning in for a second kiss. When they came up for air, he withdrew slightly and reached for the papers he’d been trying to find from the beginning. The whole time, he kept the fingers of his left hand entwined in Dimitri’s own.

Papers laid out in front of them, Felix rested his head on Dimitri’s shoulder and took him through the rest of the information he needed. He was listening, of course, but mostly Dimitri was thinking of that bundle of paper wrapped in twine. It made his heart feel full, knowing that the love he felt so deeply was returned so alike in kind.

King Dimitri Alexandre Blaiddyd and Duke Felix Hugo Fraldarius were, respectively, the last of their lines, and close for the duration of their lives. For years, the reason as to why neither ever married was a mystery, considering the time of peace the King and his Shield brought about and the long lives they both lived. Years later, however, the Archbishop released documents entrusted to them upon the pair’s death: two boxes of letters, full to the brim, covered with expressions of deepest love unlike those found in any surviving literature before or since.

--

Writer: Leo Darnell / @samariumwriting

Artist: Vic / @dracoryss

Crois En Toi

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi



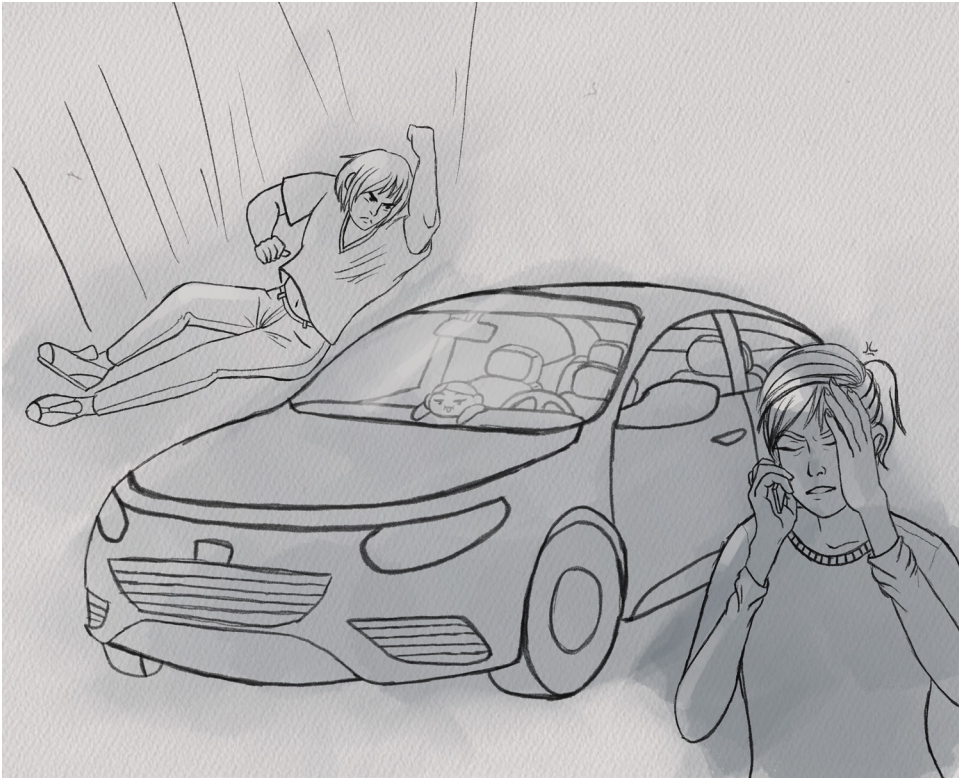
“Dima... I’m scared! Where’s Glenn? I WANNA GO HOOOOME!”

Felix rubbed at his eyes with a clenched fist, trying to will and wipe away the fat drops of tears rolling down his round cheeks. His other hand clutched tightly at his friend’s coat, Dimitri standing tall in front of him like a shield. Somehow they had been separated from Glenn and Dimitri knew it was his responsibility to look after and protect his dearest friend as they searched for a route out of the forest. The blond boy was scared to death but for Felix, he would do anything.

Each day of our lives we make deposits in the memory banks of our children

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi



The dial tone rang once before an exhausted female voice answered the call. Felix pressed the phone closer and jammed his other hand over his exposed ear. Behind him, a frantic Dimitri screamed through the car window at a child strapped to the back seat. The boy blinked tiredly before resuming his interest in his devices.

“FELIX, I’M GOING TO BREAK HIM OUT!”

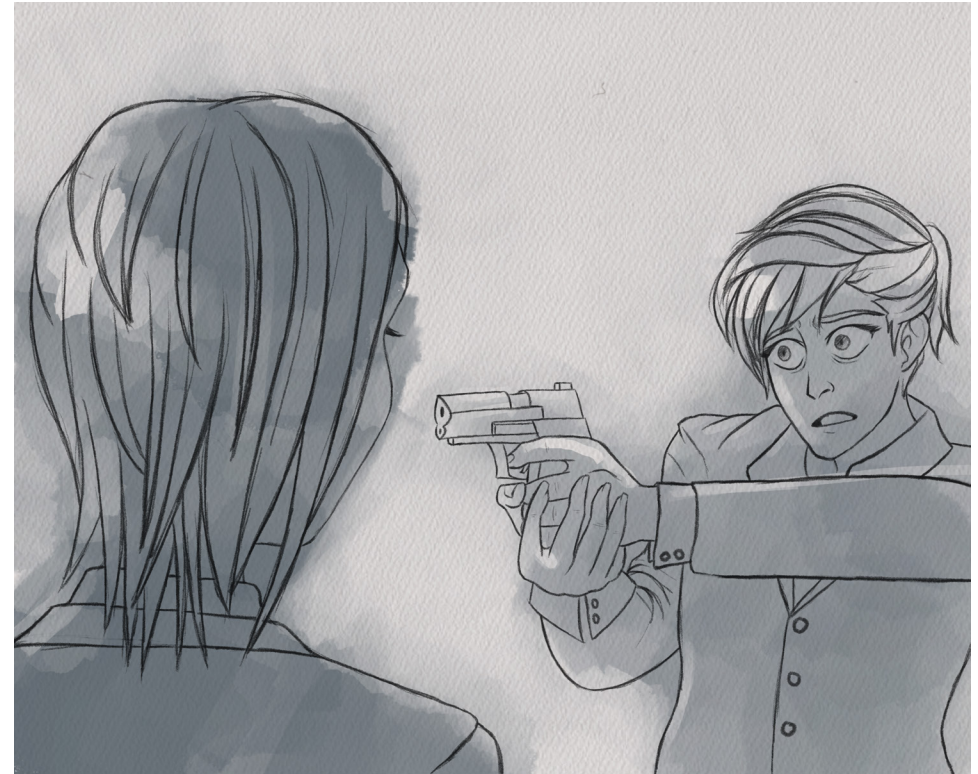
“WHAT NO--”

Dimitri retreated further and further from the car, dropping into a tackle stance from his football days. Before Felix could interject, his husband sprinted towards the car bellowing a loud roar.

Kintsugi Memories

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi



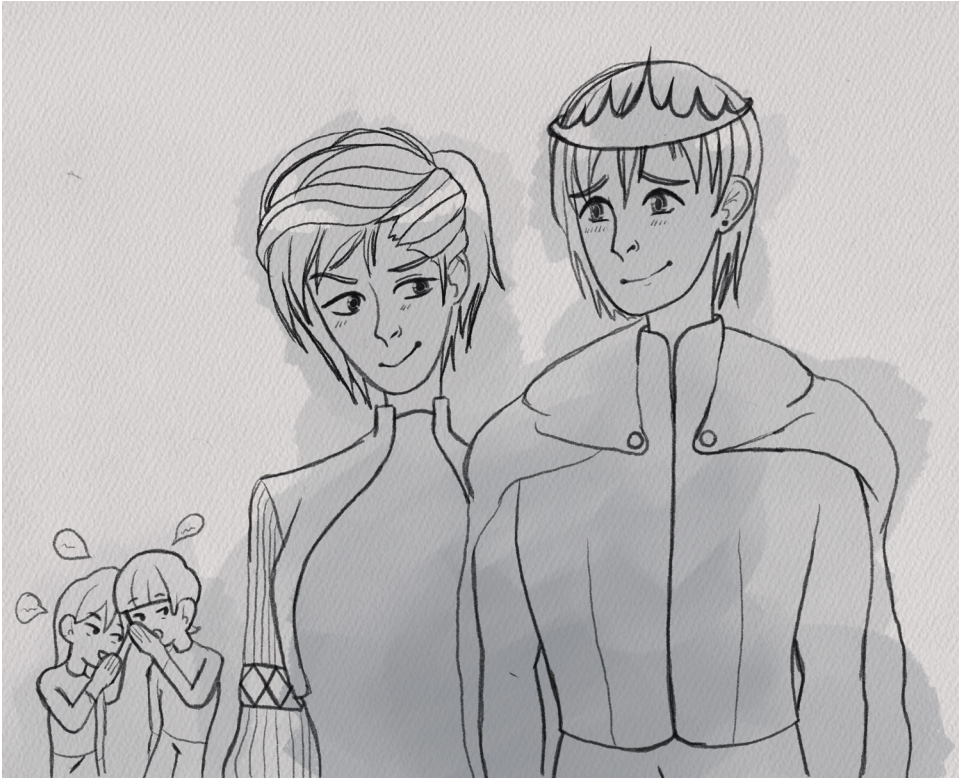
The hat tipped slowly before drifting to the ground with a dull thump, nestling itself into the concrete of the alleyway. The two men were facing each other, their breaths labored and puffing from between their teeth into the winter air like smoke. Felix’s eyes were blown wide, his teeth clenching into a scowl of disbelief as he moves to raise his gun. Cold, blue eyes slowly rose to glance at Felix from under golden blond locks as he brought a leather-clad hand to the bruise forming on his cheek. Felix’s arm was shaking and his vision was starting to blur when he had to steady his gun with his other hand.

“Dimitri...? This must be some cruel joke, right?”

La vie est un sommeil, l'amour en est le rêve

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi



The sun had risen high in the sky when the pair left the castle grounds. Prince Dimitri had requested to visit the busy city to see the lives of his subjects and walked out the doors before anyone could object. Right alongside him, his most loyal Knight matched his steps as they made their way through the markets. As Felix turned to inquire about the prawn skewers, Dimitri's face softened into a gentle smile of a man deeply in love.

("Oh my god, if they don't choose each other... I will go to the castle and slap them myself!")

Words Carved in Blood

Writer - Sica / @shika_coco

Artist - Elayna / @dimitrimochi



His own blade slashed at the armoured man, the metal sinking into a gap between the panels and cutting clean through the front. Dimitri fell with a look of shock and disbelief on his face, Felix barely catching him in his arms as they both dropped to the bruised ground.

Ragged breaths passed through parted lips stained with blood, tears rolled down a dirt-covered cheek marking paths like rivers through a forest. A gauntlet-covered hand rose slightly, catching his cheek on warm soft fabric as the thumb rubbed back and forth gently.

"Felix... I never got to tell you—"

To Have Your Hand

It begins on a Monday, in a ministerial meeting featuring an assortment of former foreign ministers of Adrestia and the Alliance. Felix is seated to his left, and Sylvain to his right. Dimitri is tired, but alert. It is another day of trudging through the unification process, another day of bargaining and bartering and thankless work.

They are in the opening minutes of the meeting, each minister bringing up various concerns and proposals they would like to be addressed, when a page delivers a missive to him. It is a field report from Mercedes, who had travelled to the borderlands between Adrestia and Faerghus to produce an assessment on the humanitarian crisis that had been developing there.

Dimitri tunes out whatever minister is listing his grievances this time - Foreign Minister Becker of Adrestia, and something about marriage proposals that Dimitri did not care to give a moment's consideration. And then, a warm hand covers his beneath the table and Dimitri freezes, his heart in his throat.

It is Felix.

It is not odd to feel the other man's hand in his, they have been courting for almost two years now and they have held hands many a time, in intimate moments between sheets and with growing confidence and comfort among their closest of friends.

Their hands fit together well, and the safety Dimitri finds in the other man's grasp is only comparable to the feeling of Areadbhar in his hand. The weight and grip, the reassuring warmth, gives him the same feeling of being able to conquer any task before him, bring any foe to heel.

But never has Felix sought out his hand in a meeting, never before the court. The gesture is, of course, invisible beneath the grand oak table around which they sit, but the possibility of discovery is undeniable. Dimitri maintains his composure as he sneaks a glance at the man next to him. Felix's face is blank, worrisomely so. There is no blush high on his cheeks to indicate that this is some random simple act of affection, no sense of mischief about him. No, his mouth is a thin pale line, eyes sharp. The sternness of his expression is reflected dutifully in the firm grip he has on Dimitri's hand.

Felix does not let go of his hand for the rest of the meeting, and says nothing of it after. Dimitri does not question him nor the oddness of his action. Dimitri is hardly in the place to question unexpected changes in another's moods or desires.

But Dimitri does not easily move past the touch, past whatever meaning laid behind it.

--

Dimitri does not remember what it was like to be held by his father, to have kisses pressed to his forehead, huge hands rest on his shoulders. He chooses not to think of the woman he once knew as his mother, but he will always remember the softness of her touch, the feeling of her fingers untangling knots from his hair and gentle kisses pressed to scraped knees and knuckles.

There are few things in this world comparable to the physical affection and intimacy of family - the most casual touches convey a sense of protection, love, of being cherished.

There was always a veil between Dimitri and his playmates, for they may have been heirs in their own right, but they were heirs to serve him above all. There was the wall of class distinction between him and the castle staff that raised him while his parents attended to matters of state. And his parents... created barriers of their own, for his protection or his guidance, or whatever it was they told themselves.

Every touch transcended these invisible distinctions, broke down whatever wall the world built between him and everyone else.

However, the ability to touch meant one also had the ability to harm. This was the crux of Dimitri's understanding of the world before and after the Tragedy.

--

The meeting on Monday is not the end of it. Far from it.

On Tuesday, in the steam of the sauna, hours before the rest of the court would even consider rising, Felix stops Dimitri's departure with two hands wrapped around his waist, a warm forehead pressed between his shoulder blades.

"Felix...?"

"Just. Just stay here for a moment. I'm tired."

"Of - of course Felix, whatever you like."

"...Thank you."

"You never have to thank me, Felix. Not for something like this."

Felix says nothing in response, but Dimitri feels the exhale of cool breath against his back. They stay like that for several minutes, unbothered by the oppressive heat being amplified by their closeness. Then Felix lets go without a word, and the day passes unremarkably.

On Wednesday, Dimitri begins to doze in the study in the afternoon.

It is not unusual for him to fall asleep in odd places, to gather his rest whenever and wherever he could. But it was unusual for Felix to position himself upon the chaise which Dimitri's back was propped, and to bury his fingers in the taller man's hair.

Felix must think he's asleep, Dimitri thinks to himself, Felix would never... well, that is not entirely true, not after yesterday's display of affection. Still, Dimitri does his best to keep his breathing even and slow as not to give himself away.

Felix has none of it. He tugs on Dimitri's hair and tells him to get back to reading his report, and sleep in his bed if that's what he wanted to do. Dimitri complies in shock, returning to studying the abysmal financial reports from Galatea. Felix braids and unbraids his hair for nearly an hour, massaging his temples and his neck, playing with the baby hairs at his nape.

It is difficult for Dimitri to find peace. It is even more difficult for Dimitri indulge in pleasure while at peace. Felix somehow manages to enable both with the mere brush of his fingertips.

--

The day of the Tragedy, Dimitri learned what pain felt like, what pain *truly* felt like. What fists and steel toed boots felt like against his ribs, blades against his skin. The physical pain was certainly secondary to the emotional impact, but they were inextricably

cably linked. The fire burned his hands and Glenn's blood stained them scarlet. After the Tragedy, every touch to his scarred flesh felt raw and unwanted.

Before the Suppression of the Western Rebellion, Dimitri donned combat gauntlets for battle. Following the Suppression, he never took them off.

Touch could comfort, could bring joy, but it also could cause endless pain. Dimitri could cause endless pain. He would never take physical contact for granted or so lightly again.

The Academy is a haze. It is rare for others to touch him due to his status, though Mercedes and Sylvain have no such qualms. He finds himself leaning into those touches, to a firm hand on his shoulder or the brush of knuckles across his cheek. But each fills him with panic as much as pleasure - with each touch, he leaves himself open. With each touch, they put themselves within range of harm. He does not trust himself to not overstay his welcome under their touch, nor to not abuse their closeness.

It would be a lie to say that Dimitri did not know the warmth of another's touch during the five years of his madness. The people of the world are not so terrible or so cruel - and it is for this reason alone, these moments of solace he was gifted, that he managed to survive so long as more beast than man. If he had been in possession of more awareness during this time, he likely would have feared the touches as much as he did at the Academy. Instead, through the haze of his madness, the harsh grip of the hands of the dead around his fate - each touch soothed.

The brush of cool fingers through his hair, the gentle press of the back of a hand to his forehead to check to see if he'd developed a fever from infection - even in the guts of Fhirdiad's dungeons, there was a guard among Cornelia's stooges that had enough pity to treat him with that much humanity.

In the slums, there were few that either had the bravery or stupidity to approach the Phantom of House Blaiddyd. A madame that scowled at his bloodied form on the stoop of her brothel, scrubbed him clean with no gentle touch, and fed him with a fierce hand - all the while saying that he'd scare off good paying customers. Never mind that dragging a half-dead beast into the brothel would be a deterrent to any sane man. Children on the streets who knew the pain of this world yet retained enough naivete - or perhaps, kindness - to take him by the hand and lead him out of the rain when starvation drove his vision into darkness. A bold young woman who pressed a kiss to his cheek, stepping over her attacker lying in the dirt now a good twenty centimeters shorter, to give her savior the gift of warmth in the early morning hours.

Each brush of skin against his own or pressure of touch through his gauntlet centered

him, a relief from damnation he would never seek out for himself.

--

On Thursday, it is sitting on a library desk with a lap full of mouthy Felix, that it occurs to Dimitri that this ought to be considered as a pattern.

Felix makes a soft noise of inquiry at the sudden tension under the press of his mouth and Dimitri subconsciously leans backward, baring his neck for better access. For such an erotic act, the mix of pain and pleasure, having Felix tend to him like this was relaxing. Felix seemed intent on leaving his mark today - usually they refrained from leaving any visible proof of their relationship but... Dimitri had no desire to request he stop.

Dimitri does not get a moment to assess the meaning of this all, as it is then that two poor monks stumble upon their King and his paramour having a not-so-illicit rendez-vous in their library.

Felix is a gentle pink to what Dimitri can only assume is his tomato red flush and stuttering apologies, which is absurdly unfair, but terribly lovely. Felix is not irritated per se as Dimitri would've expected, or even embarrassed, but... regretful? forlorn? as he untangles himself from Dimitri to escape with some dignity intact.

Felix keeps one hand tucked around the curve of Dimitri's hip, hot fingers tense against the sensitive skin there as they make their escape. Felix's brow is furrowed, lips draw taunt, and he says nothing of the interruption.

Dimitri began to pull away when Felix brings him in close for a quick parting kiss. Dimitri barely represses his pleased shiver when Felix slides his hand, which had remained on his hip for the duration, under his shirt and up the wide expanse of Dimitri's back. The heat of Felix's fingertips on his bare skin feels like the first touch of spring sun on frost, rippling warmth that eased everything it touched. Before they part at last, Felix applies gentle pressure to Dimitri's back, at the vulnerable curve between his shoulder blades. Dimitri gives a pleased hum into the kiss at the feeling, mourning the loss of as nails trailed gently down his spine and vanished. And then, they parted.

But that warmth lingers with Dimitri for the rest of the day, and the look on Felix's face when they parted moreso.

--

Even two years after his return to the realm of the living, Dimitri is hyper aware of every touch he is blessed with. Whether sexual, sensual, romantic, or platonic - all are

catalogued and cherished as the gifts they are.

When the darkness rises in him once again, as it does and always will, he uses those memories or make new ones to keep tether him to this reality and not any other. Fear and shame still cling to him at the thought of seeking assistance, but they fail to suffocate his will as they once did. When he hears the whispers or sees figures in the corner of his vision, he will seek out a friend, the peace of a strong embrace, a hand in his own, the vulnerable curve of a neck to bury his face into.

Dedue and Sylvain are perfect for hugs that make even Dimitri feel small and loved. Mercedes is best suited for chaste kisses and soft embraces while Annette will never turn the opportunity to braid his hair or have her hand dwarfed in his own. Ashe and Ingrid are the perfect height to wrap and arm around their shoulders, to huddle for warmth during long night's watches. Each of them in their own way bring him where he belongs, staving off the dark thoughts and ghostly hands that reach for him.

Being touched by Felix is incomparable to any other. His touch is the memory of his parents and kind strangers, safety and security in a moment of contact, the grounding and strength of his friends, of his new family. It can be lightning - like energy in its purest form, tugging at his heart and desire as if tethered by puppeteer strings to every movement of Felix's fingertips.

As children, Felix touched him constantly. He was undoubtedly what one would describe as clingy, a hand always in Dimitri's own, a hug for each goodbye and hello, shared beds during thunderstorms and before long time periods apart - more than anyone else, including his own parents, it was Felix who taught him the importance of physicality.

After the Tragedy, Felix's touch burned. After the Suppression, it was Felix who acted as if he was the one who had been burned.

Dimitri ached for Felix's touch in those years of Felix's self-imposed separation. Dimitri ached for the sense memory of the sunlight of his childhood spent in meadows playing make believe with Sylvain and Ingrid, of safety and comfort and sweetness.

But now, after shaking the weight of the dead from his shoulders, after acknowledging the harm his madness had wrought upon his oldest friend - that separation has ended. And the wall built upon between them taken down brick by brick, touch by touch.

It is not an exaggeration to say that each touch from Felix at the beginning of their reconciliation would bring Dimitri to tears. Eventually, that shocking relief at his touch shifted to simple happiness and pleasure.

Felix's touch became every cherished memory, every desire for the future. And so, Dimitri weighs their importance accordingly.

--

On Friday afternoon, Dimitri goes to see Sylvain.

"Sylvain. Do you have a moment? I... I would like to request your assistance."

"What can I do for you, Your Majesty?"

"It's about..."

"Felix."

"Yes, yes it is. How did you - ?"

"You never look hesitant about politics anymore, but neither of us needs to pretend you're confident in love. Is this about Monday's ministerial?"

"Yes, yes I believe so."

"You believe so?"

"It is since that time that Felix has begun to act... strangely. Something is weighing on him but I am not sure what - I am afraid I must have failed to pick up on something during the meeting, some slight he was dealt..."

"Yeah, I figured you must have missed it. Otherwise you probably would've had me take Becker aside and threaten him with like. Increased wheat taxes or something."

"You are not my enforcer, Sylvain. What did Becker say?"

"You should set me loose sometime, I'd be really good at it. He said that it was about time you started considering the marriage proposals we've been receiving."

"But. But I did hear that - he was talking about the proposals from the Alliance and Adrestia, correct? I did not even... I did not dignify it with a response because... I would never even consider spending my life with someone who is not Felix."

"Why are you telling me that? I'm not the one who turned green at the gills in the meeting."

“Of course. Of course you are correct, I need to - I need to go - “

“Yes, do quit wasting my very valuable time, Your Majesty, I have... tax reform legislation to review.”

“Thank you, Sylvain, truly.”

“Just don’t make me plan the wedding.”

--

On Friday evening, Dimitri finds Felix the training yard, drenched in the light of the setting sun. Felix is going through his forms, but there is a stilted manner to them, so very unlike the man known for his grace. It makes a pit form in Dimitri’s stomach; this has gone on too long.

“Felix.”

Felix does not start or give any indication of surprise at Dimitri’s presence, which is a distinct relief. Such lack of awareness would have been incredibly concerning. Instead, Felix just calmly returns his sword to its sheath and lets out a shaky sigh - in sharp contrast with the firm line of his back.

“I know something has been weighing on you, if there’s anything I can do to alleviate the burden, you must... please do tell me.”

Felix was quiet for a long moment and Dimitri found himself subconsciously holding his breath.

“Can you... will you hold me?”

Dimitri blinks in surprise, letting out that breath and feeling such overwhelming affection for the man before him, who was trying so hard, so damn hard to be strong in the face of whatever war he was waging alone. And he wanted to be held, be held by *Dimitri*. It made the past few days feel like less of a dream or an accident than Dimitri had been assuming and more of... of something tied to Felix’s disquiet. That there was meaning behind each desperate touch, a message that Dimitri was unable to decode...

“Of course, I would love to. I always... there’s nothing I...” Dimitri shut himself up and gently tugs Felix towards him. He tucks Felix’s head under his chin, wrapping one arm around his waist and bringing the other to play with the damp strands at the nape of his neck. The embrace is firm, and Dimitri feels Felix relax slightly in his hold, adjusting the angle of his head so he nestled in the curve of Dimitri’s neck.

Dimitri could feel the remaining tension and waited to see if Felix would breach the silence first.

When Felix remains quiet, simply breathing warm and slow against the sensitive skin, Dimitri swallows and grits his teeth.

“Felix... am I right to assume this has to do with what the Foreign Minister suggested last week?”

“Just say it.”

“Is this about the marriage requests, because Felix-”

“Just - just don’t, okay? I don’t know what to say, I still... I-I have no right to you, Dimitri. We have no right to each other, and you know that. What I am supposed to say, neglect one of your most fundamental responsibilities to the Kingdom to what, fuck around with your advisor?”

“I am not even going to deign to respond to you calling our relationship ‘fucking around’ because I know you are just trying to bait me,” Dimitri grumbles, “and since when have you cared about ‘fundamental responsibilities’?”

“Since I started sleeping with my King!” Felix wrenches away from Dimitri, stepping backwards unsteadily and jerking his head to look upwards at the night sky above them. Dimitri’s hands lingered in the place where Felix left them, eye wide with shock.

Felix should look angry, his cheeks should have that sharp high flush, eyes narrowed and teeth bared in a snarl. Instead, he looks scared. Scared and weary, as if haunted but having long accepted the presence of those things he’d rather not think of. His eyes have a distinctive sheen to them and he’s digging his teeth into his bottom lip. Suddenly Dimitri is terribly aware of how tired Felix looks, the shadows under his eyes and the way his hands hang limply at his side. Not defensive or ready for a fight, almost resigned.

How long had this...? How long had Felix been dwelling on this without speaking a word to Dimitri about it? They had not discussed their relationship since Dimitri’s coronation, since his rule became less about unification and more about governing. Since peace had finally swept across Fodlan - since the hazy future of the past has become imminent. Dimitri had been so wrapped up in making sure he didn’t fuck up the crown he never asked for and the relationship he’d longed for - he never monitored the intersection of the two. The guilt is hot and heavy and he feels tears prick at the corner of his eye that he quickly blinks away. Felix still won’t look at him, eyes

locked on the map of the heavens above them.

Dimitri swallows hard, “These past few days... what were you...?”

“I was taking everything I could get... it felt like, it feels like... like I’m going to lose you *again*, but this time I see it coming. I’ve stopped caring about holding back or - or, preserving any sort of dignity,” Felix laughs bitterly, rubbing a hand over his sal-low face, “I just wanted to be as close to you as I possibly could, for as long as I could,” his voice cracked on those words, and Dimitri’s heart along with it.

Dimitri takes a deep shuddering breath and, oddly, calm descends over him. This is, without a doubt, one of the easiest obstacles in their relationship to solve. The relief is almost embarrassing, and he tries not to let it show, to not confuse Felix any further. On one hand, Dimitri is completely overwrought by Felix’s confession, by the return of this Felix who had no inhibitions about keeping what he loved close and making his love known to this world. His throat grows tight and his eyes hot at the thought alone. But - oh, could his love be more foolish? Years of separation through madness and war had failed to wrench Dimitri from Felix’s side for good - and now they had the opportunity to be together, to truly be happy together, Dimitri would not let anything, much less something as petty as politics, separate them.

Felix might be a fool for underestimating the depths of Dimitri’s dedication to him, but Dimitri is more the fool to have ever let his anxiety still his hand in showing his love. Felix needed his touch just as much Dimitri needed his. Needed proof of Dimitri’s love, of his devotion, as much as Dimitri needed Felix’s. What a pair they make.

Dimitri had been so wrapped up in savoring each touch, cherishing every time Felix took initiative to seek out Dimitri’s warmth, the feeling of his skin, that he never considered that... Felix needed reassurance and adoration as well. Dimitri had spent so long holding back, not wanting to ruin what they had, not wanting to scare Felix away from him once again. Oh, as if Dimitri would want anything more in this world than to wrap his arms around Felix and never let him go. He could, Dimitri realized. Felix wanted to - Felix wanted him, wanted everything Dimitri could give him. Oh goddess, this was --

Felix sighs, finally finding the words for his despair in Dimitri’s distracted silence: “I can’t... I can’t. I can’t make you choose between me and the Kingdom. Between what you want and what you need.”

Dimitri smiles.

“That is where you made your first mistake, Felix. Assuming they are mutually exclusive.”

Felix blinks, tears spilling over, and Dimitri approaches him slowly, allowing Felix the opportunity to move away from his lover’s touch if he saw fit. But Felix merely stands there, eyes wide and uncertain, and leans into the caress of Dimitri’s hand against his face. Dimitri quietly thumbs at the wetness across his cheeks and then strokes them with the back of his knuckles. Dimitri was never letting him go, not again, he could never again...

“I cannot lead this Kingdom, this patchwork disaster, without you. I simply cannot. Not without your love, or guidance, or support. And not simply with you as an advisor,” Dimitri adds the last line gently, and saw the moment hope crept into Felix’s expression - his lips parting softly, lashes fluttering and breath slowing.

Dimitri brings Felix closer to him, till they’re chest to chest, sharing breath and eyes locked, “Fuck tradition, fuck how everything was done before. We’re doing it with the rest of the Kingdom - why in the name of the Goddess would we bother abiding by something designed to keep us apart?”

Felix gives a weak laugh at that, turning more surely into the press of Dimitri’s palm at his cheek, and bringing his own hand to rest atop of it.

“I have lost too many years where I could have been by your side, Felix. I will never lose another as long as I am still breathing.”

“I would ask you to be a King alongside me in your own right, but I won’t pretend for a moment you would say yes,” Dimitri lets out a huff of laughter as the flicker of disagreement that appears and then quickly fades from Felix’s face. Dimitri pauses, hesitating even now, before whispering the words that he had kept trapped on his lips since the day Felix first confessed: “So rather - please, and I am begging you, be my Consort. Be with me.”

“You really want me to be...?”

“My consort? Undoubtedly. There are very few things in my life time I have been as sure of as this, Felix. There is no one I would rather have at my side, in all things.”

“But - but an heir, for the stability of the kingdom -”

“Do not quote their lines at me, Felix,” Dimitri says gently, eyes softening. “Our Houses will merge when we marry. House Fraldarius will become part of the Royal Line.”

“That’s not... you can’t just...”

Dimitri snorted.

"I am King of this entire thrice damned continent, I can make a few things up as I go. Your cousin falls next in line, followed by her children if she so agrees. Either her eldest inherits, who I hear is certainly quite capable of ruling this Kingdom just as well as I despite being not yet 10 years old - or we figure out something before then. Adopt one a war orphan, or five. One of us has a night of terribly embarrassing intercourse with a surrogate we pay an obscene amount of money. Goddess' sake, we have magic, we'll figure something out. Honestly, Felix, between the state of interregional infrastructure and national security, an heir is the least of our problems."

"You've thought about this," Felix says faintly, eyes wide, hand trembling beneath Dimitri's own. Dimitri threads their fingers together.

"Extensively. Hours of research, drafting up some proclamations and legislation for the parliament just in case. I am in love with you, Felix, and I have no intention of giving myself over to anyone else."

"Is this... a proposal?"

"It can be, if you want it to. Or it can just be a promise."

"They will come after you. After both of us."

Dimitri bares his teeth, "If they have not already realized it, I am much more difficult to kill than my father. If they need a refresher course, I am more than willing to oblige. And I have little concern about your own ability. Not to mention I have the personal loyalty of more than a dozen houses across each region of the continent. If they want to host a coup, they'll be cut down quicker than you can draw your blade."

Felix lets out a weak laugh, half hysterical. He drags Dimitri's hand down to his lips, pressing a warm kiss to his palm before moving their hands to remain clasped between them.

"I never thought I would say this Dimitri, never in a thousand years, but I do love that you are quite mad."

Dimitri nearly chokes on his own tongue in shock.

"I thought about it when we were children, used to daydream about you proclaiming your love for me, consequences be damned. I thought myself such a fool after the Tragedy," Felix is crying steadily now, but smiling through his tears, "and even just hours ago. I thought maybe, maybe I could have you in some way, in anyway. I'd tell myself I would never sink to be some secret affair, some dirty secret in the shadows for you to indulge in at the end of the day before you return to your Queen... And

yet... I probably would have, if you asked. But I was a damn idiot thinking you'd ever do anything by halves, that you would ever... would ever treat me like that. You - you already have a ring don't you?"

Dimitri's thoughts are a whirlwind, trying to understand that Felix had thought about this - but had thought that Dimitri would... would cast him aside, as if Dimitri could ever... would ever - but there's one action that can wipe that all away.

"Of course I do, I wear it around my neck in battle. It's, I have it here," he murmurs, pressing his right hand to his breast pocket.



"Just... just do it then," Felix chokes out, "I don't want a promise, I want - I want you. I want to be with you."

"Okay. Okay."

"Is this...?"

"It's, um, well. It's made of Umbral Steel."

"I hate it - no wait, I mean," Felix stutters, beet red and grabbing the ring out of Dimitri's fingers, "I hate that you - it's unbelievable that you - it's embarrassing. This

is...”

“Too much?” Dimitri laughs, the whole situation feels absurd, feels out of this world. He’s floating, he’s sinking and swimming at the same time, the world moving too slowly and too quickly all at once. He takes the ring from Felix’s trembling fingers, observing how his eyes remain fixated on the warm metal.

“No. Maybe, I don’t know. Everything about you is too much, everything about this is too much. I can’t even - we’re in the fucking training yard for Goddess’ sake.”

Perhaps Dimitri should wait to tell him he choose the metal half for its significance and half for how it reflects the color of Felix’s eyes. He’ll keep that to himself for now.

“If it’s any consolation, this is where I had planned on proposing anyways.” Dimitri says gently, carefully taking the ring from Felix’s grasp. They’re both trembling, cheeks tear streaked and smiles bright and wide. Felix can’t seem to decide where to look - at the slow glide of the ring down his finger, fitting snug and cool against his skin, or at the softness of Dimitri’s expression. His eyes are wide, and there’s a fragility to his eagerness, to how he --

“This had better not be a dream.”

Felix flicked his eyes away from Dimitri for a moment, idly rubbing his thumb across the new weight on his finger and running his tongue over his bottom lip. Dimitri was torn between laughing and crying. He wakes up every day asking himself that same question since Felix confessed, he wonders if this is just the latest stage of his madness - delusions of joy instead of torture - but, but --

“If it’s a dream, then it is one we are sharing. And while it is not a usual comfort, this is not the kind of dream I ever have the pleasure of experiencing.”

Felix let out a sharp laugh and returned his gaze to Dimitri, a smile tugging at his lips. Dimitri cannot help but return it. He is helpless when confronted with Felix’s pleasure, helpless and addicted and he cares not. Felix brings his hand up to Dimitri’s cheek, and oh is that not a sensation Dimitri will now never grow used to - warm calloused flesh and smooth heated steel.

“We can work on that.”

“Will that be a part of your official duties as my Consort?”

“You’re asking me? Like fuck I know anything about being a Consort.”

“Don’t worry, the only official duties I’ve included in the drafted legislation are ‘ensuring the King does not get himself killed’ and ‘challenging errant knights to duels’.”

“You don’t need to woo me any more Dimitri, I’ve already got your ring on my finger.”

“That’s right. You won’t be ‘a’ Consort, Felix. You will be... you will be mine.”

“I suppose I could used to the sound of that... my liege.”

Dimitri makes an aborted noise in the back of his throat and Felix laughs beautifully at his shock, tossing his head back and shoulders shaking.

“I was saying it to be romantic - and you just gave me the most horrified expression. Don’t tell me the words sound that terrible coming past my lips?”

“It is quite... discomfiting to hear those words from you. There is a certain thrill to... the possessive nature of it, but hearing you use such an honorific. Well. It feels...”

“Incredibly strange? I regretted it as soon as I said it. How about... my love, instead? My heart? My sweet --”

“Yes, anything, whatever you like, as long as I’m yours.”

Felix hummed contentedly, “Now and forever.”

--

Some day in the future, Dimitri finds himself on a battlefield.

If they are to ever write ballads about Dimitri Alexandre Blaiddyd, it should not be for the Tragedy of his life, his madness, or his victory in the War of Unification - but rather for his restraint on the battlefield that day. Standing on a field of battle, one hand pressed low at the base of his lover’s spine, the other tangled in his sweaty gorgeous hair - it took more restraint in that moment to not take his lover on the field right there than it did to not host a one-man siege on Enbarr in the depths of his madness. Felix, the love of his life who Dimitri once thought forever lost to him, cradled Dimitri’s head in his hands as if he were more precious than life itself, kissing him as if this were the last time he ever would.

A cheer went up among the soldiers milling around them, startling them both into pulling away. Shouts of the more proper ‘To The King and his Shield!’ and the less so “get him, Felix!” - that was certainly Sylvain - rang out around them. Dimitri

beamed, pride swelling in his chest as it had only a few times in his life before. Felix looked to be in shock, eyes wide and lips parted, whether at his own boldness or the response of their people, Dimitri was unsure. Felix dropped his hands from Dimitri's waist but did not part from him, moving his hands to rest at his breastplate, casting his wide-eyed gaze around at their people in awe.

“Do you understand now, Felix?”

Felix blinks slow, breath unsteady and heart racing under Dimitri's finger tips. He's beautiful. Mud smeared across his cheek, bangs plastered to his forehead with sweat, eyes bright and cheeks tinted rose. Felix stares at the crowd, and Dimitri stares at him.

Ah, no. Felix is stunning, Dimitri corrects himself as a grin worked its way onto Felix's lips, wild and gorgeous, as he turns to face his lover. Absolutely stunning.

“Kiss me, Dimitri.”

--

Writer - TK / @cntrlvaneau

Artist - Takeshi / @foxkunkun

Line of Dance

When it comes time for her to select the Blue Lions representative for the White Heron Cup Byleth does have an idea of who would be the most successful, but that doesn't stop her from approaching her students about it for further insight. She spends an entire afternoon asking each and every one of them how they feel about participating, looking for any flat-out yeses or noes. When that is done, she is even more confident in her gut choice (it would be his own fault if he hated the idea, for not blatantly refusing), so she retraces her steps to Dimitri again, finding him and Ingrid outside the classroom.

“I think it should be Felix,” she greets, noting the immediate drop of Dimitri's shoulders in relief. She's quite confident in them all, really, but Dimitri deals with being in the spotlight enough and she does not want to put any additional pressure on him. He'd been looking exhausted enough lately.

“He was certainly the best out of the four of us when we were younger,” Ingrid nods in approval, “and he'll put his all into it.”

Dimitri also nods, a smile tugging at his lips. “I clearly remember him telling me how he was much better than myself, at least.”

Byleth stays silent, expecting an elaboration on this newest snippet from their past. She was always willing to listen to their childhood stories; they were pieces of what made them their current selves, after all, and had helped her understand her students on more than one occasion.

For example, Ingrid's current smile is much less contaminated than Dimitri's. “I remember you stepping on his feet multiple times during one song on Sylvain's birthday.”

The prince's hand raises to the back of his head, suspiciously sheepish. “I think I helped him form an excuse for the rest of that night, sore feet and all.”

A few minutes later when Dimitri spots Dedue and excuses himself Ingrid lets out the long sigh that Byleth has come to recognize as her worrying over the rest of the quartet, her own smile faded and eyes sad.

“That was one of the last times I remember them smiling at each other.”

--

A few weeks later Byleth is sitting on the steps of the training grounds beside Dimitri, each of them cleaning their weapons, when Felix arrives early for his final practice before the competition the next day.

His signature scowl appears as soon as he sees who is beside her, “Go away boar,” snapped out as he walks past, leaning his sword against a pillar and crossing his arms. “I don’t need your approval on my dancing.”

This is how many of their encounters pan out, at least in her presence. Dimitri doesn’t even always have to reach out for conversation prior to Felix igniting into fight mode, shoving him away in every form of the word while the prince gently backs away as if from a wild animal (there’s irony there, considering what Felix calls Dimitri, and perhaps she should point that out).

Beside her Dimitri chuckles, the noise ringing hollow, but he merely turns so that he’s facing away from the center of the ring, refusing to completely excuse himself. This is decidedly un-Dimitri-ish, but Remire Village has clearly had a negative impact on him.

Felix meanwhile ignores her level look of disapproval in favor of stretching.

Byleth figures that she is pretty observant. As a mercenary her father taught her how to read between the lines. How to sniff out a lie within a job description or a falsified offering of teamwork. She’s heard stories of how close Dimitri and Felix were as children—of adoration and hints of childhood crushes—and in the present Felix tells her of the prince’s concealed darkness and of the disgust he feels at looking at the ‘current’ him, yet the tone of voice he uses when not speaking directly to but *about* him is never exactly purely angry.

No, the hostility Felix bleeds is not fake at all, but neither is it true hatred.

Byleth struggles to put a word to it (to *them*), because there are moments like this:

While Felix goes through his routine Dimitri slowly spins to face him anyway, leaning forward to rest an elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand, ever so careful to not lift his gaze. There is no way Felix doesn’t notice this, but he does not stop his

work nor comment.

And so Byleth watches Dimitri, who watches Felix’s feet.

One step. Two.

“He will surely win without any issue,” Dimitri comments, tapping out the rhythm Felix dances to against his own pulse point.

--

Five years later Felix watches Dimitri.

There’s even less words between them (although Dimitri has less words for everyone), but the hostility Felix bears is now tinged with desperation. Byleth sees this in the way he exhausts himself with staying in the cathedral late into the night and with the tone of the choice words he does exchange with their lost leader.

Felix and Byleth are similar in that they seem to fear their companions’ deaths more than their own.

Gronder Field is mayhem.

Byleth feels stretched thin in four different directions, having to rely on her former students’ abilities as she forges ahead with their front line in order to keep pace with Dimitri’s battle lust. She has no idea if the distant yellow banners they had seen earlier—before the field and center hill had been razed to smoke and flame—had closed in on their flank, or if any of the old Golden Deer students were among the dead. She can’t let herself think about them while she leaves Dedue’s battalion to finish off a demonic beast, while Felix breaks off from her side to handle a company of archers stationed behind one of the few Empire barricades still standing, while she loses sight of Dimitri for yet another critical minute as he charges further ahead.

Pulling her sword from a crumpled body Byleth turns at an increase in activity up ahead, catching sight of a hazy warp of black magic (Hubert?) erupting near the ground just as a female voice splits the air; “*Dimitri!*” (Ingrid?) screamed somewhere over her head, the gust of pegasus wings so dangerously low that it practically knocks her off balance, two more blasts (fire this time) erupting in almost the same spot a heartbeat later.

Dimitri is not particularly skilled against magic, he *knows* this, but he’s making too many mistakes that he never would have five years ago.

Byleth cuts a bloody path forward while Ingrid’s battalion pushes back the enemy

line, her chest tightening every step. She gets close enough to make out the shadow of Ingrid's stationary mount within the smoke, its wings held unfurled in agitation and Ingrid kneeling at its other side, but is forced to throw herself sideways when a pair of riderless horses bearing Empire colors come barreling past.

When she straightens Felix is frozen a few paces away, having caught up level with her progress—and maybe it is because she has gotten better at defining emotions, or maybe because her father had died five and a half years ago but for her it has been barely the blink of an eye—but the look on his face is all she needs to see. She does not need to turn back around.
Felix stumbles. Walks.

One step. Two.

Byleth closes her eyes, fearing (perhaps irrationally) that she cannot stop this just as she could not stop her father's death.

Time warps. Snaps back.

Byleth goes after the archers herself. Yells at Felix to find Dimitri because he is faster and has his dancer skill. Takes an arrow to the shoulder because she is distracted. But that does not matter.

This time, she saves a loved one.

--

Things get better.

Moral naturally flares to new heights when Dimitri's state of mind improves, aided by more victories and then more supplies as well as troops from the Alliance, and suddenly things look (she dares to think) promising.

Byleth notices some other changes, too. Like how Sylvain doesn't look at other women at all when Ingrid is around, and how Dedue is twice as expressive when speaking with Ashe. Dimitri and Felix spend more time together, too, but they also really only *look* at each other when the other is walking away or preoccupied with something else.

Habits generally go unnoticed by the person who forms them until someone else points them out.

"I think," Byleth comments nonchalantly one day as she and Felix circle each other in the training grounds, "that you do not just train hard to be the strongest and the

best."

"Oh?" voice dripping of disinterest, he steps into her space to parry her next slash.

"You, Felix," she pushes his sword back and down until he drops it away completely to counter with a swing at her side, slicing air as she sidesteps to catch it, "are a protector. I think in a way you always have been."

Felix pushes her back in turn with a block that he puts his whole weight behind. "It's not my fault that the soon-to-be king is so terrible at covering his blind side."

"Who says I was referring to Dimitri?" Byleth wonders behind a vicious uppercut.

(of course she was referring to Dimitri)

The swing is halted only by Felix smacking his off-hand to the flat of his own blade, which Byleth mimics so that they are left standing in a gridlock.

"I—" the swordsman starts, but he grits his teeth instead of finishing the sentence, eyes flickering up at something over her shoulder.

Byleth sweeps a leg out and trips him as she steps forward, sword-point at his chest.

"Apologies for interrupting," Dimitri says from behind her. "Professor, Seteth said you were to meet him after I had?"

"I did not think you'd be done so soon." Turning to the side she brushes hair from her face to buy a moment and distract from the maybe-cunning smile that threatens her features. "Do you want to take my place here?"

It's impossible to tell if the flush on Felix's face is from anything but exertion, but he is doing a very good job at attempting murder with his eyes from his spot on the ground. "Still fighting like a mercenary I see."

Byleth does her best not to smirk guiltily. Their king looks between them a bit uncertainly, blue eye lingering on Felix, and the latter doesn't clarify outright, but he does extend a hand upwards as Byleth steps away.

Dimitri takes it.

--

She does not know a lot about dancing, but Byleth had seen many styles involving various levels of complexity during her travels with Jeralt's Mercenaries. As she

watches Felix stomp away down the hall she recalls something an elderly woman once told her in regards to what made two people adequate dance partners: familiarity (long established in Felix and Dimitri's case), the agreement to work together (mostly solidified when they'd won the war and Felix had accepted the Duke title), and practice.

They were still working on the last item.

She's in Fhirdiad for work as well as for Dimitri's coronation in three days' time, the rest of the former Blue Lions were arriving the next day, and one did not have to be observant at all to know that Dimitri and his adviser were quarreling over something. Byleth is about done with the delay in paperwork because the rest of her week was supposed to be enjoyable, thank you, so she has just invited Felix to tea, which he had only accepted after she had agreed to spar with him the next two consecutive afternoons.

Byleth had not specified that he would *not* be taking tea with *her*.

Not ten minutes later she is nodding to Dedue, who is stationed outside the receiving room of her guest suite. Dimitri is waiting for her inside, and judging by the perplexed look on his face from where he stood regarding the setting for four that had been placed on the table he had just arrived.

"Professor?"

"Byleth. And please sit," corrected as she comes over, lifting the top off the pot to check the status of the brew. "What happened between you and Felix?"

Dimitri's brow shoots up possibly farther than she has ever seen it, and if he was not suspicious already he must be now because he immediately leans back in the chair upon sitting, crossing his legs as well as his arms. "Nothing to bother you with. Not policy. We will negotiate as we always do. He has been very... argumentative."

Byleth pauses mid-tipping of the pot, giving him a pointed look. "When is Felix not argumentative?" tossed out before she spares him eye contact while she starts to pour. "I am sure he is just worried about you. As he always is."

Clothes rustle as the blond shifts under the overtone of the words. She would almost certainly find color on his cheeks if she looked up, but right on cue an impatient set of knocks rattles the door, which causes Dimitri's hands to clench onto each other where they sit resting in his lap.

Goddess, Sylvain was going to have a field day at their expense when he arrived.

"Come in!" Byleth calls, pouring a second cup.

It must be due to his attention immediately narrowing to Dimitri that has Felix striding (less stomping at least) almost to the table without a word before he notices that Byleth is topping off the fourth cup, and while the other politely did not question her motives he of course does not hesitate.

"You cannot be serious."
"

"Afraid so," and Byleth supposes that maybe she is actually acting as the most impatient one in the room, which is rather amusing. "I was just about to leave."

"As am I," gritted back, though he's still looking at Dimitri when he spins away on his heel.

Inevitably there is the sound of wood scraping against the floor followed by a hand reaching out to grab at a retreating sleeve. "Please, Felix. We need to talk."

This is inevitably answered with an overly-dramatic sigh tipped up towards the ceiling accompanied by zero effort to pull away.

Byleth takes two of the four cups and gives them both her best "well done" smile, kicking the door shut behind her with a satisfying thud.

Dedue tries not to smile as she offers him tea.

--

Everyone knew that Felix kept a fairly strict schedule when it came to his training, and after the White Heron Cup he had worked dancing into it as well. Byleth was surely not the only one to have somewhat memorized what time of day or evening he was likely to be swinging a sword around, but she is surprised to find Sylvain lingering outside the main archway of the castle's immense courtyard that served for training and drills.

"Are we all still so hopeless on sleeping?" Byleth asks, because it is rather late for anyone else to be training. The Blue Lions had all been up much too, well, early into the morning upon their reunion, and with the coronation and feast the next evening everyone should have been trying to catch up on sleep.

Sylvain gestures behind himself with a tilt of his head, grinning and throwing up both hands in innocence, "I swear I just got here," uncharacteristically whispered. "But, Professor, if you want to take bets on whether or not His Majesty asks Felix to dance tomorrow..."



She foregoes answering to step forward and peer around him, Sylvain gladly giving her space. It takes a moment for her eyes to adjust to the dark with the courtyard open to the sky, but sure enough starlight and the moon illuminates a pair of dancers.

As she watches Dimitri turns his partner out into a spin, the music of his laughter breaking off when Felix returns to step in much too close for a proper hold; resting his head against his chest, entangled hands dropping relaxed at their side. Their feet don't stop despite the change, moving together across the expanse of grass.

One step. Two.

Byleth can't help but match Sylvain's grin, recalling something else the elderly woman had said about pair dancing:
You could always pick out the ones that were in love.

--

Writer - QuillFeathers / @o3QuillFeathers

Artist - Izumi / @IzumiNoBowser

andante, andante

Fhirdiad is never warm; the height of the Verdant Rain Moon, when the snow melts, is the closest it ever comes. It's warm now—Felix is warm, at least, or a facsimile of it, from the ebb and flow of too many strangers in close proximity and the wine that's gone to his blood. Only two goblets of it before he cut himself off. He wants to be present tonight, doesn't want to give Sylvain any more reasons to point and laugh when his face starts to glow again.

The chatter is bright and the laughter boisterous, and with good reason, but to Felix the celebration is hollow. The war is over but not yet a creature of the distant past. It feels cold to celebrate the deaths of once-comrades when their bodies are still warm. To the citizens, the fall of the Empire signals an era of new peace; to the soldiers a new and unfamiliar silence, settling eerie like a muffling blanket over the rage of war, and too much time and space to face themselves. The King is not present, Felix realises quickly. He's slipped away from the revelry, which means Felix can, too.

On occasion it is a curse to know him as well as Felix does but tonight, it serves him well. The war is won but troubles never cease. The fool King, ever a dweller, will never spend too long celebrating a success before he begins to mull over his next trial. Doubtless tonight, the eve of a newly united Fódlan, he is in the throne room, feeling the weight of his most recent burden. The crown, or the promise of it in the near future, weighs heavy, and the throne sits tall, and somehow it is always Felix's job to draw Dimitri out of the spiral he is certainly sliding into—questioning worth, questioning capability, questioning everything.

(Felix finds him standing before the throne, of course.)

“Are you just going to stand?” he says in lieu of announcing his arrival. Dimitri starts and turns, watching on high from the top of the stairs, to follow Felix’s approach. His footfalls echo on the stone where he refuses to walk the long carpet. The light of the doorway is at his back; the throne room is cavernous and empty and dim, soft candle-light from the walls warring with cool moonlight filtering the dust through the tall windows. “It’s yours.”

Dimitri glances back down at the throne. “Not yet,” he says.

“You’ll continue to put off your duty?”

Dimitri’s smile when Felix reaches him is fond, if slightly teasing. “I never thought it would be you to lecture me about duty, Felix.”

“Even you’re not fool enough to deny it,” Felix replies. “The continent bows at your feet. You don’t have time to get lost in your head. You’ve lost that luxury.”

“Ah, but if you had your way, I should never have had it.” Dimitri turns back to contemplate the throne. “And you were right, of course, as I’ve learned you so often are.”

“Hm. No one realises that fast enough.”

Dimitri’s laugh is hearty and it does something to expand the warmth in Felix’s chest—perhaps the relief of knowing he can still laugh, or the life that’s returned to it, grown rich and aged to finery from the bright, delighted peal it was when they were children.

“Your absence has been noted,” Felix tells him. “What sort of an end-of-war celebration is it without the man of the hour?”

“And yet,” says Dimitri, gaze fond and warm on him again, “forgive me if I am mistaken—”

“As you often are—”

“—but you do not seem in a rush to drag me back there,” Dimitri finishes. “Ought I to point out that you are absent, too? Duke Fraldarius?”

“Don’t call me that yet,” Felix mutters.

Dimitri chuckles. “You never did much like big celebrations, did you, Felix.”

“Not for me,” says Felix. “But I’m not the king.”

“Nor am I, just yet,” says Dimitri. “Let us not waste further time pretending you are here to return me to the party, Felix—you know as well as I the value of a quiet moment alone together, to reflect.”

“Together,” Felix repeats. “I don’t recall saying I’d stay.”

“Won’t you?” Dimitri asks him, and Felix doesn’t respond—it doesn’t bear considering.

They look back at the throne. The moonlight creeps tentative on its arm, like it’s frightened to touch. It’s not alone. Dimitri seems afraid to approach it.

“You should sit,” says Felix. Dimitri glances back at him. “See how it fits.”

“How it fits?” Dimitri chuckles. “All right, if you are the one asking. I can’t say I’m not curious.”

He rests his goblet down on one arm, then eases himself gingerly onto the seat of the throne. He looks anxiously up at Felix, as though for approval.

“It’s too big for me,” he says, to answer Felix’s silent question.

Felix snorts. “Too big? You’re stuffed into it, boar.”

Dimitri laughs again, loud and surprised. “I suppose...” he says slowly, “it must feel bigger than it is. Perhaps I must grow into it.”

“You’ve grown plenty,” Felix says, a little snippy like he’s still bitter about the further eight centimetres Dimitri had gained on him since they’d left the academy, but his gaze softens almost immediately. “Plenty,” he repeats, more softly.

“Felix...”

Felix isn’t aware of reaching out, only notices he’s done it when the backs of his fingers brush against Dimitri’s cheek, against the corner of his lips. He feels magnetic. Dimitri is gazing up at him like he might be the sun and Felix hopes his expression is more inscrutable than it feels. Sylvain has told him he tends to darken into a scowl when he’s with Dimitri and right now he’s not sure if he’d prefer that or not; the way Dimitri looks at him now makes him feel like he’s being laid bare.

“I swear it, Felix,” Dimitri says quietly, raising a hand to Felix’s, “one day, I will make of myself a man worthy of your loyalty.”

His fingers are soft against Felix's wrist. Felix drops his gaze to Dimitri's hand; it's the first time in a long, long while that Dimitri's foregone his gauntlets. Back at the party, he'd flinched from the dignitaries who'd tried to shake his hand, withdrawn into a nod and kept his hands to himself. But he doesn't flinch from Felix when Felix twists in his hold to take his hand properly. Dimitri's bare hands are as warm as his eye on Felix's face.

Slowly, Felix sinks to kneel before Dimitri, keeping Dimitri's hand in his and his eyes low.

Dimitri starts to lean forward. "Felix, what are—"

"I," Felix says, quietly, "Felix Hugo, of Fraldarius."

"Felix," Dimitri says, awed into near-silence.

"Son of Rodrigue Achille of Fraldarius," Felix continues, drawing Dimitri's hand nearer to him, turning it carefully over in his own, "do swear to you, Dimitri Alexandre Blaiddyd..."

"Wait," Dimitri says softly, "Felix, wait."

"My king," says Felix, still more quietly, "my liege, that from this hour I will be faithful"—he bows his head, brushing his lips against Dimitri's knuckles—"to you, in body and soul; to House Blaiddyd, in—"

"Felix," Dimitri interrupts in a stronger voice. He tightens his grip on Felix's hand. Felix pauses, but doesn't look up.

Dimitri relaxes his hold, turns it to something gentler, less formal, so that he is simply holding Felix's hand in his own. Slowly, with that same magnetic force Felix had felt before, he draws Felix back up to his feet, standing closer now to Dimitri than he had been.

Dimitri's gaze has never left Felix's face in all this while, and Felix feels it, roiling with easy warmth and comfort that burns worse than burning.

Felix lifts his eyes, ever slowly, slowly as he dares, and meets Dimitri's.

"I would much prefer," Dimitri says, more gently than he has yet, "if it suits you, that you stand by my side, and not kneel at my feet."

He runs a thumb over Felix's hand, impossibly tender.

"I do believe I would be lost without you, Felix," Dimitri murmurs. "And your counsel—so clear-headed you are, where my own vision is clouded—as my equal—would you stay?"

Felix doesn't answer. Standing over Dimitri on the throne, he gazes down, never looking away, meeting Dimitri's warm eye with his own unfailing gaze, until Dimitri breaks into an unbearably fond smile.

Dimitri says, softly, "Felix..." He draws Felix a little closer to him and Felix goes, unthinking, letting Dimitri trace warmth up his arm.

"You smell like wine," Felix tells him in a voice gone rough from quiet.

Dimitri laughs again and Felix feels his breath on his face. "Perhaps I got a little carried away at the festivities." As though to make his point, he tugs a little more firmly on Felix's arm, pulling him off balance in surprise and dragging him onto the un-gobleted arm of the throne.

"Wait," Felix says, struggling against Dimitri's strength to scramble to his feet again. "I'm not supposed to—"

"Come now, everyone is celebrating. Who will know?"

"You're going to be a bad king," Felix grumbles. Dimitri starts laughing again, clear and delighted. "You're disrespecting tradition."

"Perhaps," Dimitri teases. "Perhaps that will become my new tradition."

Felix, as irritably as he can muster, snaps, "Honestly," but Dimitri laughs still harder. "The people of Fódlan expect certain things from you, you know."

"Is that so," Dimitri smiles up at him. Felix looks away, unable to stand the way Dimitri looks at him like he contains a world's worth of answers. "Like what?"

"Like maintaining proper decorum."

"Again, I never thought you of all people would be lecturing me on decorum, Felix. I seem to recall you being told off on many an occasion, as children, for running to hug me before you could be announced—"

"All right," Felix grumbles, making Dimitri chuckle again.

"I'm sorry to tease," he says. "Again, I may have had a spot too much wine."

“Not being a drunkard,” Felix says. “That’s another thing they’ll expect.”

“Oh?” Dimitri adjusts his seat on the throne so Felix can lean more comfortably against him. “What else?”

Felix folds his arms. “They’ll expect you to take a queen at some point,” he says, a little more quietly. “So you ought to conduct yourself with a little more dignity, wild beast. How do you expect to court a lady with such boorish behaviour?”

“To take a queen,” Dimitri muses. “Are such things necessary?”

“You will need to marry at some point,” Felix tells him.

Dimitri’s smile is a bit dry. “Will I, now? And whom do you know of, who might be willing to wed the bear prince?” His voice has gone teasing again; Felix privately vows to stand between Dimitri and further alcohol in the future.

“Don’t be foolish.” Felix pointedly does not answer his question, instead raising Dimitri’s hand to observe his fingers, still intertwined with Felix’s own. “This space”—he nudges lightly at Dimitri’s ring finger—“ought not be empty for too long. Not as a king, if you wish your people to be settled. You will need an heir.”

“Is that so?”

“If you intend to have me as your advisor, you would do well not to shirk my advice,” Felix says, nettled by the lilt to Dimitri’s smile.

But Dimitri just tilts his head, acquiescent. “I would do well to heed it in any case—though I would not have you as my advisor alone, given my way,” he says, face gone a little redder, though Felix is keen to attribute this to the wine.

“And?” Felix can feel his own face going warm and hopes the candlelight won’t give him away. “Will you listen, then?”

Dimitri clucks his tongue. “Why the rush? Perhaps I wish to marry for love.”

The gaze is back—the terribly fond one that makes Felix’s face burn and eyes slide away. His voice is lower when he says, “Will that take longer?”

In the resulting pause, Felix runs his fingertips lightly over Dimitri’s empty ring finger. His eyes flick up for a moment to meet Dimitri’s and then furiously away again, when the piercing blue of Dimitri’s single iris shocks him back to himself. He snatches his hand away.



His other hand is still folded under Dimitri’s and Dimitri makes it known, stroking his thumb over Felix’s wrist. Felix won’t look at him, perched at his arm, but feels Dimitri’s tender gaze back on him again and makes a point of not glancing back. It would make him go red, and then again with mortified anger.

“Felix,” Dimitri murmurs.

“What.”

Dimitri reclaims his hand, so that he’s taken one in each. He moves his thumb to run it lightly over Felix’s ring finger in turn.

“What,” says Felix, in a slightly more cracked voice.

“And what of you,” Dimitri asks gently. “Will your hand remain unadorned much longer?”

“Why do—” Felix clears his throat. Dimitri is so warm. So warm against him. “Why do you care?”

“Perhaps,” says Dimitri, “I would hate to miss you. That’s all.”

Felix raises his eyes. Dimitri’s own eye is warm as the base of candlelight.

Hesitantly, Dimitri says, “I am selfish. You see... I don’t want to have to share your time and attention with anyone else.” He smiles, suddenly teasing. “Not when I already have your sword to compete with.”

Felix feels his face crumple instantly into a scowl again, which only makes Dimitri laugh and tilt his head; Felix feels Dimitri’s warm gaze roving over his face like Dimitri had really touched him, smoothing his features the way a light hand would.

“Felix...” Dimitri’s voice is too tender. He raises Felix’s hand to touch his lips lightly against Felix’s knuckles. In a flash, Felix feels an unspoken oath. He swallows, close bursting with something ineffable.

“Stupid boar,” he mutters instead, lowering his head and looking away. His face is warm again. “Who would you be competing with?”

Dimitri beams, radiant and blinding, and does his utmost to tug Felix closer. Felix, already perched precariously on the arm of the throne, topples inelegantly sideways into the seat and lands half on his lap with an irritated squawk. Dimitri’s laughter is raucous and too affectionate and he squeezes Felix around the waist, murmuring, “I cannot imagine who else I would ever want by my side...” and he kisses Felix’s head, or at least presses his mouth to the crown clumsily. “Felix...”

Felix sees him go to take his goblet from the other throne arm and swats it aside before he can. Dregs of deep red wine spill across the stone as it clatters to the floor; Dimitri gives him an affronted look and mumbles, “Hey.”

“I think you’ve had enough,” Felix says, firmly.

Dimitri laughs again, this time simmering to a low chuckle right by his ear. “Perhaps you are right. I am warm and festive enough on your presence alone, I think.”

“You are ridiculous.”

“I am,” Dimitri laughs again. “But I cannot help it, Felix.” He is too close, much too close—Felix feels his warm wine-tinged breath fanning across his face when their eyes meet. “Will you stay with me? At my side, so I can know this forever?”

The celebrations, muffled as they were already by the castle walls, feel more far-off still with the distance Dimitri’s words carry them, manifesting seclusion, as though they are not surrounded by the vast and cavernous walls of the Fódlan throne room; as though the hand cradling his side is not that of the Saviour King, as though the face spilling inexorable warmth over him with its flickering eye and glowing smile were his alone.

Dimitri’s thumb has not left Felix’s fingers. “This had better not be a proposal,” Felix manages. “If it is, it’s a shitty one. I knelt for you, so you—” But Dimitri is laughing again, pressing their foreheads together.

“Don’t worry,” he murmurs. “No, rest assured... Felix, there will be time for that later.” Close together like this, Felix feels beginnings of things that have entirely nothing to do with the close of the war. He closes his eyes and lets Dimitri press him still closer. “This is not something I intend to rush.”

--

Writer - Rook / @corviid

Artist - Jano / @jan0h_

Crimson Oath

Lone Moon, Imperial Year 1185.

It's been a little over five years since the Church and the Kingdom started waging the war against the Empire. A war that they're losing, no matter how Felix looks at it. Yet he continues to lift his blade day after day, slaying as their supreme commander dictates.

The said supreme commander stands with him this particular evening, having called him out to the roof of the tallest castle tower, taking him up a point that overlooks the whole of Fhirdiad.

Smiling, Dimitri lifts his eyes to the night sky. "The moon is beautiful tonight."

"Yeah, I can die happy," Felix says, dour as he gives it an unimpressed glance before settling across the dim expanse before them.

He can feel Dimitri's gaze on him, likely with furrowed brows. "You do not sound like it."

"Should I?" Felix asks, shooting Dimitri a glare, "I'll be setting out for Arianrhod tomorrow, where they're sure to strike next."

Tearing his eyes away from Felix, Dimitri hangs his head. "I know."

Oh no. "Chin up, and don't you dare apologize for it."

Felix can feel it coming. And sure, things as they stand right now are on the bleak side, with the frontlines being pushed further and further back as the Empire marches on, but it's not something that is Dimitri's fault, no matter how much he might blame himself for it.

The Empire simply is too strong as it is right now, especially with *that* formidable professor on their side. It's a fact that Felix embraces, both awaits and dreads. Once he stations himself at Arianrhod, facing them and their sword is nigh inevitable, as with the fact that only one of them is going to walk out of that battle alive.

It's a grim thought, but as a swordsman that values finding opponents of equal or greater strength, Felix cannot help but look forward to it all the same.

Dimitri shakes his head. "Even so, there is much I ask of you."

Felix huffs and folds his arms. "I wouldn't do it if I didn't want to."

"Is... that so...?"

Dimitri sounds strangely shy when he says that, and it has Felix throwing him a funny look, wondering what's gotten into him.

"Is there a problem?" Felix asks, his tone challenging as his narrowed gaze.

Dimitri hesitates for a moment, then sighs. "You once said you do not care about chivalry and the motions that come with it."

"Yes," Felix says, raising a brow. And it still holds true, for the record. "What about it?"

"Then what are you fighting for now?" Dimitri asks, brows knit.

The intensity of Dimitri's stare causes Felix to break eye contact, preferring the sight of the lonely landscape across.

"...Who knows."

But Felix does know, and it's the only reason why he hesitates at all, and is remotely unhappy about the prospect of leaving tomorrow.

Silence falls over them as Felix refuses to elaborate, mulling on that thought and the uncertain future before them. In the midst of it, he steals a glance at Dimitri, who looks like he's deep in thought about something as well. He follows Dimitri's gaze, falling upon the moon that hung over the night sky, stark against the darkness it illuminates alongside the stars that dot the sky.

"Say, Felix."

Dimitri exhales, the first to break the silence that hung over them.

"Remember how we used to climb up here all the time as children?"

"Yes," Felix says, brows knitted as he wonders where Dimitri is going with this line of thought. "Why?"

Dimitri casts his gaze downwards, towards his lightly balled fist. "There was one time you pretended this was the Goddess Tower, and pledged to stay by my side."

Flummoxed as he is, Felix colors at the reminder. "That was a long time ago."

A time when things were easier for everyone, and a period when Felix can indulge in such fantastical thoughts without worrying about how feasible or not they were.

Dimitri seems to be fumbling with something, not seeming like he picked up on Felix's embarrassment. "I was wondering... if that still holds true."

Felix gapes at Dimitri for a moment, unsure of where this line of questioning is leading. "Does it matter now?"

He can't help the irritation that slips into his tone, still unable to make heads or tails of this interaction. *Of course it does matter.* It's the reason why he still fights this bloody, goddess-forsaken war. The sword is an excuse, the shield is his intent. The latter hangs heavy on his back, but he will carry it until the end of his days, if it means that the strength he has been building will protect everyone he cares about.

"It does."

Again, Dimitri seems to be fidgeting with something, unusually the one unable to keep eye contact.

"Then spit it out. Or did you bring me all the way up here just to make fun of me?"

Felix does not really think that is the case, but with Dimitri sometimes, he needed a push to admit to certain things.

"That is not it at all!" Dimitri says, aghast as he whirls on him, "Felix, I—"

While Felix expected the denial, he did not foresee the way Dimitri grabs hold of his hands. Or the way heat builds in Dimitri's gaze as he beholds Felix's undoubtedly dumbfounded expression. Felix feels something round and decidedly metal press against his palm—the object that Dimitri had been fiddling with this whole time.

Dimitri squeezes his hands, steadily looking on as color reddens his cheeks. “Will you—”

Felix’s answer is to close the distance between them, sealing Dimitri’s lips with a kiss. Dimitri gasps, still against Felix’s lips—perhaps just as surprised as Felix is with regard to this bold action he took. Not that it matters, considering Felix doesn’t give Dimitri enough time to get used to the idea, pulling away not even ten seconds later.

“Save that question for when I return.”

Felix keeps his frown when he meets Dimitri’s stunned gaze, but he doesn’t extract his hands from Dimitri’s hold. And for once, he holds Dimitri’s gaze instead of averting his eyes, never mind that his calm is sure to be lined with a level of tenderness and uncertainty that he is averse to displaying.

Dimitri swallows, his shock fading into worry as he reaffirms his hold on Felix’s hands. “...Don’t go.”

Felix sighs as he lowers his gaze, falling upon the larger hands clasping his. “You know that isn’t an option.”

If Arianrhod falls, the Kingdom is sure to follow—and so is Dimitri. The lattermost is something Felix cannot and will not allow to happen as long as he draws breath.

“I know,” Dimitri says, sighing, “however...”

He pauses, and after a moment’s consideration, drops Felix’s hands, presenting the object that had been digging into Felix’s glove this whole time—a simple silver band.

“Could you... at least take this ring? As a... reminder.”

The look Dimitri throws Felix makes refusal a difficult concept, knowing that two hearts are going to be broken in the process if he did so.

“...Fine,” Felix says in mild exasperation, but the stupidly dopey smile that Dimitri wears is enough to wear down the edges of his frown, which melts away into a blush as Dimitri takes his hand once more, tugging off his glove and sliding the band into his ring finger.

“It looks perfect on you.”

A compliment which results into Felix pursing his lips as he feels his face redden some more.

“Stop exaggerating.”

“I am only stating the truth,” Dimitri says plainly, as if surprised Felix would say such a thing.

Felix bristles, but doesn’t jerk away from Dimitri’s touch, enchanted by the silver band around his finger. Tempting as it was to simply have let Dimitri finish his statement, there are a few reasons why Felix doesn’t want to give an answer to that half-asked question. The war is far from over, and there are too many uncertainties in the horizon for that kind of commitment. The distraction it entails makes him uneasy as well—an unbecoming and frivolous use of time for their king and his right-hand.

Though truth be told, none of them compare to his fear of what may happen to his resolve should he say that inevitable “yes”.

“...Stay still.”

The melancholy in Dimitri’s eyes transforms into curiosity as Felix speaks and meets his eyes, but otherwise, nods and complies. Closing the distance between them before he loses his nerve, Felix tugs Dimitri’s collar down, glad that he is wearing a variant of his father’s armor for the day. Otherwise, it’d be hell trying to do what he had in mind.

He bears down on that exposed skin, pressing his lips against them before sucking hard. Dimitri gasps as Felix puts more force into it, intent on leaving a mark that will last.

Pressing a kiss to the swelling bruise, Felix draws back, panting slightly as he observes his handiwork. *Good*. Looking at the size of that mark, he should be good for two weeks.

“I’ll be back by the time that fades. So quit moping.”

It’s Dimitri’s turn to stare at him for a good few moments before his expression of shock fades into a smile. To Felix’s shock, Dimitri wraps an arm around his shoulders, pulling him flush against his chest.

“I will count on it,” Dimitri says, his other hand pressing against the small of his back as he holds him close.

Felix *hmpfs*. “...I just couldn’t stand the miserable look on your face, so don’t get cocky.”

Dimitri laughs. “I will not. I am just... *glad*, Felix.”



“...You’re weird.”

Another huff escapes him, but Felix leans into the embrace anyway, sighing softly as he rests his cheek against Dimitri’s chest. In response, Dimitri buries his nose into Felix’s hair, smiling against the crown of his head. Wrapped in this warmth, it is easy to entertain the uncharacteristic notion to simply stay here, far removed from the stress and worries of the frontlines. After all, it’s always been Dimitri—the person he chased after the most, the person he’s hated the most, and naturally, loves the most.

That is why he must resist that temptation. And instead, answer the call of his sword, and prepare to be the shield that this side of the war needs.

He can’t let the Empire past Arianrhod. He simply can’t.

With no shortage of regret, Felix breaks away from that embrace, his eyes wandering towards the entrance to the rooftop.

Felix exhales. “...We should go.”

“I suppose,” Dimitri says, mirroring that sigh. Turning his head back to Dimitri, Felix allows him to fit the glove back into his hand, tucking away the ring from sight as he lets his hand fall to the side. Without a further word, Dimitri begins to lead the way out of the tower. Felix follows closely behind, lifting his hand once more as he contemplates the ring beneath that glove.

Perhaps, having that promise to hold on to would be a good luck charm in the days to come, and would enable him to surpass the obstacles sure to stand in his way as he fights to defend what’s most important to him. After all, Felix never made a habit of breaking his promises, and he certainly is not about to start doing that *now*.

--

Writer - DimensionSlip / @slip_fe3h

Artist - nu / @jelecfishing

One Year



SUMMER • GUIDING STARS

01. summer / guiding stars

The moon gets closer every night, until it hangs so low and heavy in the sky that it almost touches the horizon. Dimitri gazes out his bedroom window and remembers when they were children, he'd confessed to Felix that he wondered if it might drop into the sea.

"Do you still worry about the moon falling?" Felix asks as he watches Dimitri watch the skyline.

Dimitri laughs and replies, "To be honest? Occasionally, I do." There's a pause before he adds, "You're the only one I've ever told that."

Felix smiles, slightly but fondly – Dimitri's heart feels as full as the moon.

02. autumn / still in bloom

They travel to Galatea because the apple trees that Ingrid had planted a decade ago are

ready for their first harvest. As they walk together, Felix plucks a golden apple right off of a branch and tastes it.

“How is it?” Dimitri asks.

“Tart,” Felix answers, “but not bad. You’d like it.”

Felix holds the apple up for Dimitri; he sees a flicker of trepidation in Dimitri’s expression, but he stands firm. Finally, Dimitri takes a careful bite – then he smiles brightly and says, “It *is* tart... but still sweet. Thank you, Felix.”

He won’t say it, but Dimitri’s smile is gratitude enough.

03. winter / the melting

Dimitri’s heavy traveling cloak disappears the same day that Felix goes to Fraldarius to help his uncle take care of the usual banditry problems that inevitably happen during winters in Faerghus – so he isn’t surprised when Felix returns wearing it. Felix tries to return the cloak, but Dimitri says, “You should keep it. You travel more than me, and I like to know you’re staying warm.”

“It has the Crest of Blaiddyd on it,” Felix replies.

“Keep it,” Dimitri says again, “it’s yours.”

Felix curls his fingers into the cloth and scowls even as his cheeks flush a subtle pink.

04. spring / with you, once again

Felix finds Dimitri in the castle garden, sitting on a grassy patch with his back against a tree – nearby, early-spring irises are in bloom. Dimitri’s eye is closed, but Felix can tell from his posture that he’s not asleep. He checks to make sure they’re out of view from the main path before he sits down next to Dimitri and quietly takes Dimitri’s hand – Dimitri interlaces their fingers and Felix understands it to be a silent affirmation that Dimitri knows it’s Felix there.

He closes his eyes and breathes. Being together is enough: everything else is but momentary.

--

Writer - Kit / @luster candies

Artist - Aki / @yusukelogist

flowers

He finds Dimitri standing along the parapet.

It is not dawn -- yet. Merchants have just begun to wind through town; the sounds of their feet and wagons fill the air. Stars like tiny blossoms spray the sky. Felix breathes out, just once, and watches his breath condense before him.

“You came,” murmurs Dimitri, as Felix steps up to the railing. “I was not certain you would. It is early, after all.”

“I was awake,” says Felix. At this Dimitri smiles.

“Well, boar? What are your summons?”

Three days since the coronation; a week since they defeated Edelgard; nearly three since the recapture of Fhirdiad. Everything is finished. They’ve won.

In the aftermath there’s much to be done. Dimitri must prepare for the task of ruling not only Faerghus but all of Fodlan, must appoint advisors and decide policy. He’s occupied with matters of state. Busy. Felix knows this well.

In the midst of all that, why spend time on him?

Dimitri still hasn't spoken. Only recently that same silence would have rattled Felix. It would have meant the boar was elsewhere, with his delusions and his ghosts. Elsewhere and unseeing. The memory of that mad, roving eye still makes him shudder.

But this silence cannot be mistaken for that terrible one. It's peaceful, and Dimitri is smiling.

Something weighs on the king. Something big. Felix hasn't seen him for these past three days and doesn't need to know. It's obvious from the hesitation in his tone. The reluctance to meet his eyes. It irritated him when they were children and it irritates him now. That painfully earnest Dimitri can't even *look* at him?

Whatever.

The silence stretches long as Felix watches him grapple, then longer still. The day is turning, sky filling with diffuse golden light. Felix breathes out, and in, and out again, and wonders which of them is going to break it.

It's him.

"Boar. I assume you called me here for a reason."

Dimitri laughs. Startled and earnest.

"Forgive me, Felix," he says, and when he says it like that, how can he not? "I am... in my head often, as of late. There is so much to be done, I am afraid I cannot always keep track of it all. Perhaps that is why I brought you here," he says, looking out over the roofs of Fhirdiad. "To remind me of what is important."

Felix looks too. All the city and its people can be seen from these ramparts: linens hanging to dry, carriages trickling through streets. The coronation may have been three days ago, but festivities haven't ceased. They've lasted until this very morning, and even from this great height little streamers can be seen filling the streets, remnants of revelry for a new era.

"For now it is no matter," says Dimitri, like he's said nothing at all. He turns to Felix, his eye bright. "We have much to discuss. Tell me, Felix: what do you plan to do now?"

Felix starts from the shock of it. What he plans to do now, huh?

He doesn't answer. Dimitri is still talking -- for once a relief.

"You know that Sylvain is returning to Gautier; Ingrid to Galatea. I had thought you

might return to Fraldarius," -- here Dimitri's expression falters, which he makes no attempt to hide -- "to govern in Rodrigue's stead. But your uncle..."

"Is more than capable of that task," says Felix, curtly.

"Indeed he is," Dimitri says. "But where does that leave you? I have heard rumor you are leaving Fhirdiad."

He's heard that rumor?

Well, it's true.

It's about the only thing that's true. What he's doing next -- Sylvain's asked him. Many times. Each time Felix dodges and mutters and each time Sylvain isn't fooled. He's not administering Fraldarius. He's not rejoining Garreg Mach. He doesn't want any of those things. What *does* he want? He isn't sure.

But he'll leave Fhirdiad. He has to.

Staying's not an option. Dimitri's got better choices for advisors than a human sword. He can stay for a while, enough to assist as necessary with building and rebuilding. Do the old man proud. And then he'll leave. Cut a new path. Start over. Felix decides this now, impetuous, even as his heart gutters at the thought.

Dimitri interrupts.

"I have a proposal for you. Ah -- well -- I have several."

What is *that* supposed to mean?

"Follow me," says Dimitri.

--

Felix does. He always does. It's not far -- Dimitri stops only forty or fifty paces away -- but it's enough for their settings to change completely, and they now stand in a courtyard so well-maintained as to merit the label of *garden*.

It is vast. It is landscaped immaculately. Rows of flowerbeds dazzle as far as the eye can see. Felix recognizes them: forget-me-not, dandelion, anemone. Others.

So many flowerbeds it's practically a field.

"Do you like it?" says Dimitri.

Felix doesn't *dislike* it.

"Did Dedue do this?" he says instead.

Dimitri takes it. "He did indeed. Starting with this very courtyard. Soon all the gardens of Fhirdiad Castle will be in bloom, thanks to him." Felix opens his mouth to say something, a retort along the lines of *flowers, really?* and *now, of all times?* and *don't the two of you have more important things to do*, but he doesn't get the chance: Dimitri keeps talking, and his next words stop Felix cold. "It was at my behest. It was something I hoped for... for you."

For him. The buzzing in Felix's head starts on the *you* and doesn't stop. It must be evident on his face, too, because Dimitri stops and looks at him in amused fashion. "Ah -- I am sorry. As a child I recall you liked flowers. Perhaps they are no longer to your taste."

"*What?*" says Felix, and Dimitri laughs now, openly. "You liked them, Felix, did you not? I don't suppose you think I would have forgotten."

Felix swallows. A long-forgotten memory stirs.

"You used to come to Fhirdiad with Rodrigue as a child." Dimitri's voice is low and soft; he does not look at Felix as he lifts a sprig of baby's breath in a gloved hand. He, too, is reminiscing. "We were young and could hardly amuse ourselves. You were always drawn to the gardens, even then." Now he has broken it off the bush and is eyeing it as one does a daring idea.

"I was *seven*," Felix says.

"As was I," says Dimitri. "But I remember it well." He's doing something to the flowers, now. Removing his gloves. Felix isn't curious. "You knew the names of all the flowers in the gardens of Fhirdiad."

"I had a book," Felix says, looking anywhere but *him*. "It had... names. Of things."

"And their meanings, too. You knew them all: rose, lavender, anemone, countless others I cannot begin to recall. It left quite the impression."

"How do you *remember* all of this?" Felix says, brusquer than he intends.

Dimitri looks at him. His gaze is not *reproachful* -- Dimitri would never -- but there is something in it that makes Felix sorry.

"How could I forget?" Dimitri says, very quietly. The sprigs of baby's breath twist in his fingers. He exhales once, deeply. "I was alone. Alone in that dreary castle of my youth. All I had to console me was your visits. I have forgotten none of them," he says, quieter still, and Felix, entranced, cannot look away, "not one. Even at my lowest, when I thought of naught but Edelgard -- even then part of me clutched them deeply, fearing to cast them away, lest I no longer be myself."

The air is suddenly too still for Felix.

"I remember standing here, with you," Dimitri says. "We would stroll the gardens together. Ah, and I remember holding your hand. You were so very insistent --"

"*Dimitri.*"

The worst part about this is not even how much Dimitri remembers. It's not that. It's that he is *not*, in fact, going out of his way to humiliate him. It would be better if he were. Then he could say something scathing just to shut him up. But when Dimitri is speaking so freely and earnestly, baring his emotions just like *that*? That's when Felix is really at a loss for words.

But if this Dimitri can humiliate him so -- that at least proves he's human, doesn't it?

"Or had you forgotten?" Dimitri wonders now, and though his tone is light, there's something behind it, rough, almost like a wound --

"*No*," says Felix quickly. Too quickly. "No. I --"

I never forgot, he wants to scream. *I just stopped remembering.*

"Then you remember," said Dimitri. "How we would stand in the gardens, admiring. How you would take turns naming them for me... I think of it often, Felix. I suppose I wished to live those moments again, even now." Dimitri's laugh is rueful. "And there you have it: why I had Dedue embark upon such a project. But it is too late: you do not enjoy them anymore..."

"Boar," Felix manages. "It's not that."

Of course Felix hadn't forgotten. He doesn't forget anything. But after the rebellion, how Dimitri had looked, the beast he had seen, awful, ruthless, wearing his face --

After that he had closed the door on every last rosy childhood memory and never looked back. Locked them up and jettisoned the key. He'd had no use for them. Not after that. Not with Dimitri -- gone.

But Dimitri isn't gone anymore. He's looking at Felix, his gaze searching.

"Is it not?"

Felix wonders if he'll find what he's searching for. He knows he's not expressive. Sometimes he wishes he were. Not often. But at a time like this, where the awful stillness of the air threatens to wrest words from him -- he'd take it. He'd take anything for Dimitri to be able to read between these fucking lines.

"If it is not, and you still enjoy them..." Dimitri's thinking fast. At this rate he might figure out Felix's response in... months? Years? Enough time for him to leave Fhirdiad? "Then I would enjoy walking through these gardens once again, with you. Learning of flowers once again. And," Dimitri says, voice splintering around the edges, "I should very much like to hold your hand again, Felix."

That wasn't what he'd been expecting.

Felix cannot think. He cannot so much as move. Not while Dimitri reaches for his fingers, and grazes them, and entwines them between his own.

What is Dimitri *doing*?

"There are many matters I wish to speak to you of... but I know not how to approach them." Dimitri's breath condenses before them. White puffs in cold air. "And I know not whether I deserve to."

"You're *holding my hand*," Felix says. "Do you deserve *that*?"

In the abortive pause that follows, Dimitri tentatively withdraws his hand, or tries to. Felix doesn't let him. He grasps harder and *glares* at the stupid look on Dimitri's face when he does. It's a combination of innocent confusion and wonder that is so extremely him.

"Don't let go," he grumbles, looking anywhere but him. "That... isn't what I meant."

Dimitri opens his mouth.

"Don't *say* anything," Felix says.

Dimitri says nothing. Not at first. He does something even worse: he lifts Felix's hand, very gently, between his own, and clasps it; then, so slowly as to sear, he lifts it higher still and presses it to his lips.

"You would not speak to me for so long," Dimitri murmurs into bare knuckles, and

Felix, Felix cannot breathe. "But I knew well after coming to my senses that I did not deserve to speak with you, one such as I. You knew it too, Felix, didn't you? Is that not why you have avoided me?"

"No," says Felix. His knees are weak. "Dimitri. It's not... that."

He's not wrong. Felix *has* avoided him. But that wasn't *why* --

"I have wanted to," says Dimitri. "And I have waited. I doubt very much whether I will ever truly be worthy of addressing you. But even so, when I heard you were to leave Fhirdiad, I knew I must say *something* --"

"Dimitri. It's -- it was never like that, do you understand? It was --"

He can't say what it was. But if he doesn't, Dimitri will keep talking, and that is worse.

It was never about being worthy. Hell, it wasn't even about Dimitri! It was about *Felix*. It still *is*. It's about himself, because he doesn't fucking know what he wants. Or he does, and doesn't understand it. To apologize? For turning away from that *thing*? For not trusting it was fully gone? Being wrong for the right reasons?

To make up for lost time? Make up for five and a handful of years in three *days*?

Does he want to kiss him?

"Felix," Dimitri says.

There's no time to self-flagellate. Out of nowhere, Dimitri is kneeling. He's *kneeling*. And he's still clutching Felix's hand.

"Get up." Felix's throat is dry. "Boar. You're the king. You can't be seen like this. Get *up*."

But what is a boar if not stubborn? Dimitri does not move. And Felix, trying to wrench the immovable object from its resting place, loses his balance and is flung earthward instead.

The wind's picked up. Petals are flying.

"Stay with me in Fhirdiad," Dimitri says. "That is all I ask."

It's at this point, covered in dirt and flowerbed, that Felix finally glimpses the object in Dimitri's hand.

It's a ring. There's no mistake.

Not a real one -- worse. A childhood callback. A flower-ring. They'd made garlands and wreaths back then, crafted them from whatever they could find, wildflowers and twigs and leaves. But never *this*, Felix thinks, vision tunnelling on the flower-strands as everything else recedes. Never a ring.

A ring is different. And Dimitri knows this.

So why the *fuck* is he --

"I cannot ask for more," Dimitri murmurs. "What my heart desires -- you know it, do you not, Felix? What I am not worthy to ask you." His eye burns bright like glass. Felix can't look away. "But it is no matter. Even to have you by my side as a trusted advisor -- if you were to allow that, Felix, I would know no greater happiness. If you would even consider --"

Something in Felix snaps. He leaps to his feet.

"Shut up," he says. "Shut *up*. No more self-abasement. Do you hear me? I won't -- I won't stand for it, Dimitri. *Get up*."

Dimitri's all wrong. He thinks it's about *worth*. He probably thinks Felix doesn't want him anymore. He definitely thinks he's to blame. Wrong. All wrong.

That doesn't mean it won't be a bitch to say otherwise.

Dimitri gets up. He looks... astonished.

"It's not about being *worthy*," Felix says, through gritted teeth. "You've never *been* -- I know what you're asking. And yes. *Yes*. That's my answer." Dimitri gasps audibly. "But *not yet*."

It's a big *but*. There's so much they have to talk about. To answer for, both of them. He's not about to fucking marry someone he hasn't talked to in seven years! Even if he wants to. Even if he... could.

Even if the more he thinks about it the more *not yet* feels like a *soon*.

"Later. When you're ready. When *I'm* ready. For now -- listen. I won't leave, all right? I'll stay in Fhirdiad. And talk. With you. I'll be your advisor. I'll... be here, Dimitri."

That's it. He's done talking.

Apparently he's not.

"And show me that -- that thing. In your hand."

Dimitri is caught. He hands him the ring.

It is small and delicate, a gossamer thing. Three nested sprigs of baby's breath, lightly woven around each other, just tightly enough to wrap a man's finger. Weak enough to break at a touch. Strong enough for a beginning.

"I'll take this, too," Felix says, with the heady foolishness of one finally saying things left unsaid for fifteen years. "As a promise. Isn't that what you wanted?"

Dimitri is not speaking. The look on his face says he may never remember how to speak.



Instead he chooses that moment to reach for his hand and begin winding the flower-ring around Felix's finger. He does so carefully, slowly, with a fastidiousness Felix would find ridiculous if he were not so caught up in the way Dimitri lifts his fingers and braids around them. He does it with reverence, as if it's nothing short of miraculous he's permitted to touch Felix at all.

Felix closes his eyes.

As a child this moment would have been unthinkable. Five years ago? Unthinkable still. Despite that, there's a naturalness to them standing here that makes him feel it couldn't have gone any differently. Like he and Dimitri were always meant to take the long way round.

Can he -- say that?

Probably not. Words have never done them good. For them words have never been up to the task of description, let alone reparation. Words can't dress the wounds of fifteen years. He can't say *Dima* and make it right.

Can he?

From the way Dimitri is gazing at him, maybe he doesn't need to say anything.

--

Writer - rime / @letrasette

Artist - eman / @kkkkki_

Black and Golden

Dimitri has a gentle awakening, the early morning light that filters through the curtains warming his exposed skin. He stirs and burrows further into the blankets, scooting his body closer to the pool of warmth lying next to him. His face is immediately met with a shock of fine black hair. Some strands catch in his mouth and he grimaces, pulling back a little. He sighs and opens his eye, seeing dark tresses *everywhere*. He takes some of them and brushes them aside, trying to put some semblance of order into Felix's hair.

It used to be shorter than this. When they were little, Dimitri was the one with the long hair; always carefully trimmed, cut before it could rest on his shoulders. However, after the tragedy, Dimitri started cutting his hair short while Felix started to let it grow. Even when Dimitri grew his hair out again, Felix never cut his, always keeping it longer than his king's. The blonde stifles a yawn as he starts carefully brushing his partner's hair, gathering a few strands and letting them go, watching as they slip between his fingers in a light caress on this calloused skin.

He never paid any mind to Felix's hair before they became romantically involved, and he feels like he should have. It is a silly thought, something Felix would deem too sentimental or foolish, but he believes that if he had paid more attention to how his friend's hair grew over the years, always at the same pace as they grew older themselves, then maybe he could have felt more aware of the change the people around him went through—and, in turn, that could have helped him become more grounded much sooner. When Dimitri was completely lost to his demons, he became stuck in his past. He changed and grew into a monster, but, to him, the world stopped. At the very moment he lost his family, his friends, and almost everyone that mattered to him, clocks seemed to stop ticking. He became blinded by the past he could not stop chasing, and was unable to see the growth of the people around him. Felix should have made it obvious to him because, while Dimitri still saw him as a childhood

friend he wanted to stay close to, Felix had grown beyond that. He had seen Dimitri's change, accepted it with a fair amount of rage, and adapted their relationship to that very change. The prince objected to that and continued to approach Felix as if nothing had happened. He was met with Felix's rightful anger each and every time, but didn't relent, going through their academy days still clinging to an illusion of a friendship that didn't exist anymore.

Dimitri was well and truly blind. Sometimes he feels like he lost two eyes instead of one, and sometimes he feels like he never had them at all. Looking back, he can tell that he failed to see so much ever since he was little, even long before the tragedy. As a young boy, Dimitri could see Ingrid's anxieties over the pressures of marriage, but he failed to understand how much clinging to her ideals of knighthood helped her cope with it all. He could see how Miklan hurt Sylvain as a child, but he failed to grasp how deeply that messed him up inside, and how it affected him all the way to his adulthood. He could see the way in which Rodrigue treated Felix differently than he treated Glenn or even Dimitri himself, but he failed to discern how that made Felix feel, and how it conditioned his interactions with his family for the rest of his life. The friends he had known since childhood, the people he had grown up with, were people he took for granted, and it is only by looking back that he can see how unfair he might have been to them, how he clung to a shallow ideal of friendship that he simply could not see through.

Sometimes he feels like he wasn't the only one, and that Ingrid and Sylvain also refused to acknowledge what the Tragedy of Duscour, time and growth had done to their relationship. They all played at being friends at the Officer's Academy while stubbornly averting their eyes from the emotional wounds festering inside them. But Felix saw through it all, and refused to play into those twisted dynamics. He had been steadily growing into a grump as he entered his teens, but during their academy days he was extremely closed off and prickly, always trying his damndest to be alone and away from his childhood friends. He was a little softer on Sylvain and Ingrid than he was on Dimitri—though only a little, for Dimitri knew that the people he was truly softer on were those who never met him during his childhood—but he never blamed him for that, knowing in his heart that Felix was right about him. He simply decided to look the other way; the way that lead to his eventual revenge, all for the sake of the ghosts that had been clinging to him for years on end.

Now he knows that, through his taunts and visible hostility, Felix had wanted to draw a reaction from Dimitri. Even if it was through harsh words and vitriol, his friend had wanted him to look his way, to avert his eyes from the ghosts of his past and look at who was there in the present. Dimitri regrets not realizing at all, he regrets fueling the pain that Felix held inside and feeding him more constant reminders that both him and Rodrigue could only look at the shadow of Glenn's corpse instead of the living, breathing boy that had remained in that family. Dimitri's revenge, as crucial as it felt to him at the time, should have never mattered more

than his friends and their feelings, it should have never kept him from looking back at Felix—who, he knew by now, always had his eyes on him—and realizing the little things he had missed since the tragedy, things like the changes of his demeanor, the improvements in his sword technique, or the growth of his hair.

The king glances at his partner's face, making sure that he's still asleep. Felix's relaxed features ease him into picking a strand of hair between his fingers and slowly, gingerly bringing it to his lips in a reverent kiss. Things have changed now, and Dimitri's one remaining eye is wide open and attentive, following Felix whenever he can. He takes the little details into account now, he carefully chronicles the ins and outs of the man that Felix Hugo Fraldarius is and catalogues them in his mind, mentally filing them out as he does with his paperwork and revisiting them in quiet, peaceful moments like this one. Felix's hair has its own neat little folder. It has grown past his shoulders, reaching his shoulder blades, and its ends are slightly split and in need of a trim. Even though it looks beautiful when it's down he still wears it up all the time, and Dimitri thinks that is because neither Glenn nor Rodrigue ever wore their hair up—though Felix will probably argue it's just because it's easier to fight without his hair getting in the way.

You're so in love, Sylvain told him the other day when he managed to coax the king into having a drink and Dimitri just started rambling about Felix's hair just so. Dimitri agreed with his words. *It has done you good*, Sylvain added after that. Dimitri, smiling softly, agreed once more. He believes being in love has made him a better person as well or, at the very least, gotten him closer to the person Felix deserves to have. He wishes he could say otherwise, but Felix's love was completely unrequited for many, many years, always burning bright and strong. Though Dimitri still has a hard time deeming himself worthy of such devotion, he is trying, and reciprocating the love, the attention and the loyalty Felix always had for him is something that puts him at ease and makes him quite happy. It isn't particularly hard to do either, not when he has finally opened his eyes and managed to look directly into who must be the most fascinating and wonderful human being in all of Faerghus. He was seriously an idiot before, for never assessing Felix carefully and realizing his value as a person, as an advisor and, above all, as a lover.

Dimitri cannot help but indulge himself once more and he kisses Felix's hair again. He closes his eyes, buries his face in black tresses and breathes his scent in.

"Are you sniffing my hair?" a gruff voice asks, deep with sleep, making Dimitri flinch. He doesn't deny it and doesn't move back either, so Felix groans and throws an arm over his eyes. "Shit, Dimitri, do you *really* have to be such a weirdo so early in the morning?"

"Weirdo?" Dimitri parrots, scrunching up his nose. "I was simply lost in thought."



© KNOWTOASTIE

“Which led you to sniffing my hair like a creep?” Felix asks. He turns around to face Dimitri, but he looks too sleepy for the full power of his glare to come through.

“Is it truly that creepy if we’re in a relationship?” the king asks, genuinely curious. “Should I ask for consent every time I kiss your hair?”

“Wh—” Felix blinks a couple of times, his frown disappearing in his confusion before it comes back full force in an almost comical manner. “You were *kissing* it?”

“I only did it a couple of times.”

“Why?”

Now it’s Dimitri’s turn to look confused. “What do you mean, why? Do I need a reason?”

“I— I mean—” Felix stumbles over his words before he grits his teeth in frustration. Dimitri smiles because he likes when he can fluster Felix enough to get him to trip over his own words. “You said you were deep in thought. About what?”

Dimitri takes another strand of long, raven hair, twirling it between his fingers now. “Just about how much it has grown. Remember when mine used to be longer, back when we were little?”

Felix scoffs like he always does whenever Dimitri gets sentimental about the past, but there’s a ghost of a smile on his lips.

“How could I ever forget your little princess look?”

“Hey, now,” Dimitri replies, twisting the ends of Felix’s hair with a little more force than before, as if Felix could feel it at all. It is almost reassuring how not even his strength can break through hair just by pressing it between his fingers. “I never *actually* looked like a girl.”

Felix’s grin is unmistakable now, so Dimitri can’t even pretend to be mad when he says: “Hm. Debatable.”

“Do you ever think of cutting it?” he asks, still playing with Felix’s hair.

The other man hums, laying on his back and staring at the ceiling.

“Not particularly. Do you want me to cut it?”

A brief and intense sense of curiosity to see how short hair would suit Felix after so

long takes over Dimitri, but he pushes it down. He does not think that telling his partner that he has ascribed some sort of metaphorical meaning to his hair would be wise, but he truly feels that it is significant that Felix keeps it long. After all, Dimitri still has a lot of growing to do, and he wants that growth to happen alongside his advisor, his love.

“You *do* have split ends,” he says, “maybe we should trim them.”

“*We*?” Felix asks incredulously. “I don’t trust you with scissors, I’ll just do it myself.”

“Alright,” Dimitri whispers, burying his fingers in Felix’s hair and pulling him closer to press a kiss to his temple. “Whatever you want.”

“Shut up,” Felix replies for no reason at all, clearly embarrassed. Still, he cups a hand over Dimitri’s cheek and angles his face so their lips can meet in a long, chaste kiss.

Dimitri smiles into the kiss, his hand still running over the hair he loves so much as Felix slowly but surely melts into it, a noise of contentment escaping his lips and seeping deep into Dimitri’s core, warming him through.

--

Writer - Maria / @deformedcities

Artist - Toastie the Know / @KnowToastie

Silver

Writer - Rosa/ @UNICORNvoid

Artist - Jerome / @machuba_



“Be mine,” he’d breathed. “For the rest of our lives.”

“Tch,” Felix had scoffed, heat in his cheeks and heart in his throat. “Do you even listen to yourself? You make it sound like you mean to put a ring on my finger.”

He shouldn’t have opened his mouth. Hadn’t he learned not to tempt fate, where Dimitri was concerned?

But here, now, in the sweetly clinging darkness and the privacy it afforded, a different sort of warmth suffused his face, and his belly, and all of his limbs, right down to his toes.

The silver glimmered in the moonlight.

Looking glass

The first breath Felix takes outside of cryosleep feels a lot less like breathing and more like dying. He is shivering violently despite all the measures taken to acclimatize his body temperature and clutches at the old-fashioned blanket that someone wraps around his shoulders. The frosted chrome floors don't register as anything beneath his feet as he wobbles after the archbishop.

When did that happen, he thinks, staring at Byleth's back. In his white archbishop attire and glowing green circuitry that wraps around him like a cape and reverent embrace, Byleth looks like one of those technogods come down to smite mankind for their folly. Felix hates it. He has never quite disliked who his professor had been before, but there is something unholy and distinctly un-human about the glow of Byleth's laser-like gaze.

"How long has it been," he asks through blue lips. He clenches his teeth tight to still the tremors and his jaw aches. Seated in the warming station, Felix takes in the relative disarray and dust of the station he had last seen polished to a mirror finish.

"About one hundred years," Byleth says. "Since the war ended. 93 since you went to sleep."

"Was *forced* to sleep," Felix slurs angrily. His mind is still struggling to catch up from its frozen dreams. "What of the others?"

"Your friends are still asleep, but waking. You were the first to break through."

"The *others*."

Byleth blinks at him, then smiles. It is a kind gesture yet it does nothing but strike fear into Felix's heart. "Adrestria is no more. Fodlan's throat has opened to the rest of the world."

A million different memories play over the unmoving chill of the Archbishop's gaze. Flashes of horrifying color and sure carnage, gone in a second. Felix is still too cold to feel the burn of some unexplainable rage, but at least his mind is capable of roiling in its tempestuous mess.

"Why did you force us to sleep?" he demands, sparks flying over his numb fingertips. The energy feels like a photon-quick rush of jagged glass and despair. But it is warm.

For a long moment, Byleth stares at Felix with his sad, blank eyes. The verdant brilliance burns holes into Felix's skull, but he refuses to look away. "I wanted to keep you safe," says Byleth somberly, "and now the world is at peace. Come," he stands and reaches his hand out to Felix. "The others are waking. Let us go greet them."

--

In the few cycles following their wake, they've combed through the entirety of the underground chambers for any other survivors. Felix's stomach is queasy from the unwelcome sight of bones and unfortunate flesh. Faces in rotting torment and expressions of bland, forced peace.

"Some did not make it," Byleth tells him, stating the reality of malfunctioning processors and the lack of power. He sounds sad when he says it, but Felix is still feeling quite blind with rage and on the verge of being sick. He doesn't want to hear it. "I advise you not to look into the malfunctioned chambers."

He had been the only one to actually look into the chambers, whether it be out of spite and refusal to listen to the archbishop, or out of some misled belief that he is *wrong*.

But, as usual, Byleth is never wrong.

Felix looks over the cold, miserable group of people. Compared to his memories from a century ago, there are holes in the portrait where someone should be. Names are slow to come to his mind; he still feels sluggish, but he feels the memories of their faces burning into him. He imagines in their place the results of their horrid fates. Some are frozen past the point of return, leaving them little more than humanoid blocks of ice. Others are halfway to rotting, their stasis interrupted by the irregularity of power flow.

"Soon we'll need to find another place to stay," Dimitri says when their bodies have become limber enough for walking normally. "I don't expect the power reserves in this place to hold out for much longer. Once we've gathered what we can, we should set out." No one points out that he is sitting in vigil, knees pressed together punishingly before a weak blue circuit flame he somehow had the energy reserves for. His hands are clenched tightly—one of his tells. Felix knows that Dimitri's fingers must be burning from the sudden exertion after so long. He does not want to show that he is shaking.

"We don't have anywhere to go," Felix retorts. Dimitri turns those sad blue eyes on him, haunted in a way that makes it seem as though the past hundred years were spent more in purgatory than sleep.

The circuit flame isn't exactly warm, but everyone huddles around it as though it is a campfire. Stares at the names scratched into the corroded plate floor in pained silence while Felix seethes. "The archbishop has offered to take us back to Garreg Mach," says Dimitri. "Apparently it is now a haven city and he has already prepared spaces for us to stay."

Felix bites his tongue to stay quiet, jerks away from Sylvain's concerned nudge. He can feel everyone, alive and dead, burning holes into him with their tired gazes. The rest of his body is freezing, but his heart feels like the scorching sun in a cage too small.

"Fine," he says through his clenched jaw. "Then go."

"Felix," Sylvain says, close and warm and sweet. His body is angled toward Felix and away from the others, as though he is trying to appeal to Felix with his body language. Sometimes it works, but only when Felix is in a good mood. "I'll stay with you."

He takes a long look at his old friend. Sylvain's pale skin looks gaunt in the nearly-absent lighting. The fire in his hair is gone, dimmed to a strange copper that looks a lot like dried blood. He looks back at Dimitri: head haloed by the grim emergency lights, face illuminated by electric fire; a red-blue statue between heresy and piety.

The words that leave his mouth next are knives on his tongue. Despite everything, he tastes nothing but static.

"I have no wish for animal company," he says coldly, draws himself off the ground to glare at no one in particular. The archbishop is silent, eyes glowing. "If you must follow some ill-omened deity to know your own names, then so be it. I'm not about to obey some god that decides who to kill and spare on a whim."

Felix leaves, chest tight and heart in his throat. Outside the cryo chamber facilities, he cannot stop shivering.

--

True to the archbishop's word, most of Faerghan architecture has been left intact. There had been small pockets of resistance during the war and some structures have the obvious signs of wear from battles and sieges, but it is hard to see much past the thick sheets of ice that coat them. The capital itself is blockaded with a terrifying amount of security wards, likely to be unlocked by the archbishop's biosignature alone.

Felix bypasses the sleeping city, carving his way through corridors that have grown unfamiliar beneath a layer of history and ice. He adjusts his breathing mask, pulls his carbon fiber scarf a little higher around his throat as though that will help fend off his internal chill. After spending so long in icy stasis, the year-round wintry weather is but a soft, careless breeze.

None of the cities are the same. Not that Felix had been expecting them to be, but the spiraling intricacies of newer structures and flashier, quicker technology makes him feel ancient. Unsurprisingly, none of the tech responds to his own biosignature—does not even recognize him as a human entity.

"Where do you hail from?" a guard asks him sharply, suspiciously. They eye his sword with a great deal of mistrust. Felix looks up at the tall, arching gate and its gold circuits, bright lion blue cascading down the pillars in sheets of lambent holobanners.

"From the Fraldarius territories," he replies. He is prepared to fight his way out of this if he has to, shifts his sword hand to the hilt in a slow but serious gesture.

"I'm putting you in quarantine until we can verify that," the guards says. Clearly the Fraldarius name is not enough to get him out of trouble. Perhaps having a name so closely associated with the sleeping king returned is nothing *but* trouble. "We need to confirm—"

"No. You don't," Felix says caustically and turns on his heel. His sword, still sheathed, crackles with unreleased, thunderous electricity as he walks away. It is threat enough that the guard does not seek to pursue him. There is a bad taste in his mouth, bitter like betrayal, though he isn't sure what has betrayed him: the natural flow of time or everyone who has moved on without him.

--



From a mountain, Garreg Mach is a small but blinding pinpoint of festivity, no doubt shining ever more brilliant in welcoming the king thought lost to deep slumber. It looks almost like a sunset, if it were not for the fact that the climate in Faerghus has grown only more overcast and cold over the years. Felix squints through his optic enhancements, adjusting the image so the glare isn't so bright.

He can see the resplendent glow of the bustling trade spires and what is no doubt the grand church, the glittering dots orbiting various hubs in organized paths of neon traffic. From this far away, the tri-city looks almost like one of those bubble displays meant for children, built with laser-cut circuitry and glass-filament. Felix glares for a moment more then shuts the optics off, closing his eyes as the vertigo from the sudden zoom out hits.

Felix wanders, heedless of the ache in his hip from the weight of his sword, knowing not whether it is day or night. In the past, he and the others would often escape the confines of lessons on propriety to sneak glances at the silent geoliths around the capital. He finds himself before one again; this one is structure that looks oddly like a cage of bones. A glowing red mass of memory ferrofluid that looks like a terribly malformed heart.

He tries speaking to it. Tries asking it to show what memories it has from the war. Although the heart-mass lights up in response to his voice, it does not give him an answer. So he moves onto another one.

“I figured I would find you with these things,” says Dimitri, words carrying over the wind as though he is far away. Felix is sitting against a geolith in the figure of a worn lion, his back to the westward wind. He forces down the instinct to tense at the sudden noise, blinks away the veil of half-sleep from his eyes and picks out the slight tremor in Dimitri’s voice.

It’s out of place. Dimitri only sounds like that on nights he wears a hole in the ground from pacing, unable to sleep. Only when he jerks awake, eyes wild and wet, bright like the carnage of his dreams.

Felix sneers. “Don’t you have some coronation to be at?”

“I wanted you to be there,” Dimitri replies, rounding the geolith so he is but a few paces away. “So it’s on hold until you will be.”

Felix takes in Dimitri’s appearance. He has changed into newer clothes, ones that fit with his monstrous height with a combat edge. A blue synthetic cape flows down from his shoulders like the crush of a distant avalanche. Destructive and renewing. Admittedly a welcome distraction from the endless white and grotesque hearts that do not beat for him. Even through his smile, the princeling looks haggard.

“You look like hell,” Felix says, and Dimitri laughs.

“I do,” he says. When Felix does not respond, he sighs and walks a bit closer. Not close enough that they would be sitting side to side, as they had done before, but with just enough distance to be out of Felix’s sword range. “I asked the archbishop about the war. About why he chose to put us to sleep as the world destroyed itself instead of letting us fight.”

“Edelgard died by his hand,” Dimitri continues. “There are... pieces of the war, memories of those who died scattered into these geoliths around. I could never speak with them when we were younger but,” he stops himself for a moment, turning around so that he can lean back against the uneven structure and slide down. “I tried again just before I found you. I saw things from even before the war.”

“Duscur,” Felix says, almost reflexively. He quickly averts his eyes when Dimitri turns to him.

“I won’t ask you to go to Garreg Mach,” Dimitri says. “But I do want you to return with me to Faerghus soon.”

“You plan to go memory diving,” Felix says numbly. He finds it gut wrenchingly ironic that despite being launched a century into the future, the poor prince is still scouring for anything to piece together what had been denied to them.

“You know me well,” Dimitri intones. The tremor in his voice has died down, just a bit. His hands are still clenched.

“The war is done, the threat is long dead. This time has no need for *soldiers*,” Felix says scathingly, finding that the words come out angrier than he feels. Right now, he is just so tired. “Faerghus needs a king, not someone who wants to relive the memories of a god’s massacre.”

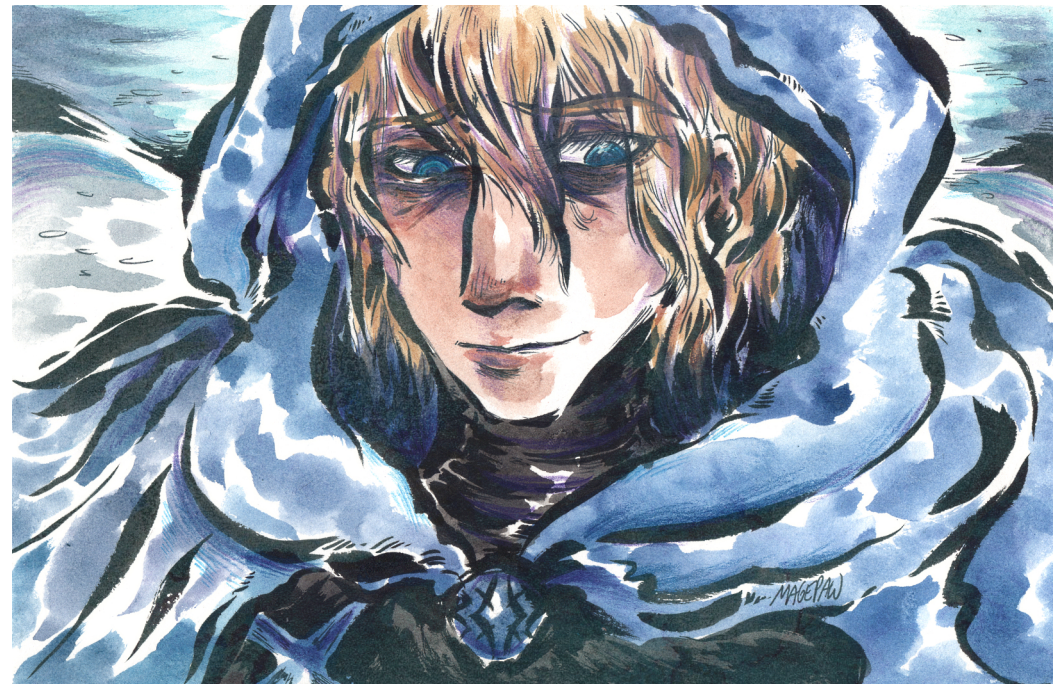
“He had his reasons,” Dimitri says, “And the archbishop has made it clear he will provide all the assistance we will need in reawakening our home. Would you accompany me?”

Felix closes his eyes. On his other side, the geolith’s lights pulse in time with a heart-beat he cannot hear or feel. “Why should I.”

“I could never ask Sylvain,” Dimitri says, so suddenly and seriously that Felix bites his lip to keep from chuckling. “The others don’t like to fight. Many have already set aside their weapons for other pursuits, but you haven’t. You haven’t forgotten battle.” He doesn’t even falter when Felix fixes his glare on him. “You *can’t* forget.”

“Shut up,” Felix says, standing abruptly. “You don’t get to decide that for me.”

Dimitri’s smile is sad and Felix hates it. Hates that he cannot look away from it.



“Your sword is outdated, by the way.” Dimitri stands as well. Walks closer slowly as though that will help any of Felix’s nerves. Felix finds himself craning his neck to look Dimitri in the eyes, unnerved by the quickening of the geolith’s red pulse over pale skin. “I got you a new one, just in case I actually found you.”

“Presumptuous.”

Dimitri tilts his head, and Felix follows the movement of his golden hair with an anxious gaze. In the silence he had been feeling somewhat cold, and the world feels unfairly warm now. He draws his sword and points the photon-bright tip at Dimitri’s chestguard, close enough that the light refracts off the nanoweave onto the snow around them.

“I won’t go mad from talking to them, if that’s what you’re worried about,” Dimitri murmurs, eyelids lowered. His gaze is blue and demure beneath his lashes, reflecting twin strips of light. He glances meaningfully to the geolith right beside them, then back at Felix. Even now, with his haunted visage and dark circles, Felix has to tell himself that Dimitri is *not* pretty.

“You’re already mad. That’s the least of my worries.”

“Then what are you worried about?”

Felix does not answer. He has already sheathed his sword and started trekking uphill to the next towering geolith. It looks like a crude flower of flames, slowly unfurling to reveal the violet glow of a silent, emptied heart.

--

Writer - Jin / @ kkamaguii

Artist - Miyu / @magepaw

Hide & Seek

(finding your way back to me)

From an early age Dimitri accompanied his father during his many journeys all over the country, but they always spent the first month of the year in Fraldarius. When asked why, his father would smile and lift him up on his shoulders, high enough to see the entire world. “Fraldarius is beautiful in spring,” the king would simply say. And he agreed. Winters in Faerghus are cold but every Great Tree Moon, like clockwork, the snow melts in Fraldarius and the world hidden underneath comes back to life, each shade of green each more vibrant than the other and interrupted only by the occasional pink blossom peeking in between. Perhaps most vividly he remembers a sky so clear and blue that Dimitri felt like he could see into tomorrow.

But the best part was that every year without fail Rodrigue, Glenn and Felix would be waiting for them at the heart of all that beauty, welcoming them into Castle Fraldarius. Ingrid and Sylvain’s families would join before long too, as their parents had been childhood friends. While Miklan and Glenn could barely tolerate each other on a good day, the four of them had been inseparable from birth. Away from the public eye, the month spend in Great Tree Moon felt like a holiday. From dawn till dusk they would run through the woods, play hide and seek and carve their initials into trees.

Like everything good in his life, it all came crashing down after the Tragedy of Duscure. Once his physical wounds had healed, the scars on the country became apparent, and with riots and discord around every corner, there was never time for a holiday, nor did he feel like he deserved it. Beauty wasn’t gone from the world, but Dimitri felt detached from it, as if he were looking at a painting of a wonderful landscape instead of experiencing the spring rain dripping down his face. In the end, it was easier to just stay away than to be confronted with yet another loss.

But the Tragedy had been over a decade ago and instead of a wreath of flowers, a crown of silver and gold rests on his head. Dimitri changed as much as his Kingdom, and now that his days are slowly starting to once again fill with light, he can’t help but wonder: has Fraldarius changed too?

When he asks Ingrid after a late-night cabinet meeting, she looks at him owlshly. “Of course it has; it might have never fallen into the Empire’s hands, but that doesn’t mean the people didn’t suffer during the war.”

“Of course, of course,” Dimitri immediately backtracks, “I never meant to imply that the people haven’t suffered greatly.” Any memory of spring rain evaporated from his mind, replaced by equal parts self-loathing and guilt.

Before he can be consumed by it, Ingrid places a gentle yet stern hand on his shoulder. She’s been doing that more often lately, whenever she sees him slip into his own mind. “If you’re curious, Your Majesty, why don’t you go and see for yourself?”

“Fraldarius?” He asks, surprised. The thought hadn’t crossed his mind, not seriously at least.

“Spring in Fraldarius!” Sylvain exclaims from his seat, happily shoving the research funding proposal he had been pouring over away to make space for his legs. “Remember when we were kids, how we would play hide and seek? And Felix would always win because the little shit knew all the good spots?”

Dimitri tries not to wince at the mention of his name, and the way Ingrid’s posture stiffens betrays that she is attempting and failing at the same endeavor. While Ingrid and Sylvain join him in the capital as often as their busy schedules allow it, he hasn’t seen Felix more than once since the war ended nearly a year ago. In a way Felix is still winning at hide and seek, only this time it isn’t a game and Glenn isn’t here to drag him out of hiding spots.

Dimitri swallows deeply and pushes the dread pooling in his stomach away with increasingly less difficulty. He’s come a long way. “Fodlan is still recovering. We can hardly afford to take a month off.”

Running a kingdom after a five-year war is more than enough to keep his mind off the issue of his (former?) friend. He barely sleeps and if it weren’t for Dedue – ever stalwart – he probably would have dropped dead within the first month after his coronation. But he isn’t alone this time, and he has learned to ask for help when the voices become too loud. Mercedes and Annette remain in the capital, each busy with their own lives but never too busy to have lunch with him every now and then. Ashe returned to Gaspard, but his new knighthood has their paths often cross. Gilbert is like a shadow, and although it isn’t always a comforting one, he never falters.

“Of course we won’t be taking the time off! Wait, I swear I have this somewhere...” Sylvain exclaims and then starts digging for something into a seemingly unending pile of documents. Just looking at all the proposals and reports makes Dimitri feel twice his age. “Aha! here it is! Ingrid and I-”

“Don’t call me that,” Ingrid interjects Sylvain with a slap on his wrist with her pencil, although the blush painted high on her cheeks undoes the effect of her threat.

“Ow, you didn’t have to hit me! Anyway, the two of us have been planning a gourmet trip through the entire continent before the war even ended. We were so sick of Faerghus food and rations, that this plan really sustained us during our darkest hours,” he explains, unfolding the parchment to reveal a crudely drawn map.

“That sounds wonderful, but I don’t see how this has anything to do with my -- our current situation,” Dimitri says.

Ingrid smiles. “What Sylvain conveniently forgets to mention is that it would benefit the unity of Fodlan greatly, if you went on a diplomatic tour through to meet your people in their own homes. That way, they will come to see you less as a foreign warrior king and more as one of their own, do you understand? ...And there will be great food, too.”

Dedue nods. “That would benefit affairs indeed, although I doubt that an extended leave from the capital would be wise so shortly after the end of the war. There is yet too much to be reconstructed to leave for a year.”

Dimitri feels a familiar panic swirl up into his chest, seizing his lungs.

Ingrid takes it away as soon as she spots it. “We agree, which is why we planned to be away for merely two moons at most. We’ll spend a week in each Duchy, visit a few key locations and partake in local delicacies. We could even visit the professor in Garegg Mach and have dinner at the Monastery like old times!”

With every word she and Sylvain speak, detailing their plan, Dimitri feels his initial resistance fade away. Fhirdiad has only recently become his home again, and more often than not he misses the many days filled with nothing but marching under the hot sun. The war was a dreadful time but now that peace, meetings and dark rooms fill his days, he can admit that they also had a silver lining.

“It would indeed be lovely to see the Professor again...” Dimitri wonders out loud. He is about to agree to the trip when he sees the first destination. “We should consider excluding Fraldarius, I think. The people know me well, so there is little need for us to visit.”

It’s a lie, of course, and a bad one at that. They all know the real reason. Dedue looks at him with something resembling disappointment, and Dimitri immediately feels compelled to add: “Besides, Felix is busy. We all know that the legacy Rodrigue left behind is not a small one.”

While he and Felix have inherited their father’s titles and duties, Sylvain and Ingrid’s fathers are still alive, and thus they enjoy the luxury of being eased into their future roles while Dimitri, Dedue and Felix were tossed headfirst into it by loss. It is unfair, but as Dimitri reminds himself, that is the very nature of life. Only in the privacy of his own mind is he able to acknowledge that it is easier to think that Felix isn’t answering his summons because he is busy with his job than the other explanation, the one that keeps him up at night along with the voices. He has become adept at ignoring them, too.

For a moment, nobody dares to call him out on his obvious lie. Although Sylvain's smile breaks into a pitying, insincere one. It is Dedue, who knows him like the back of his hand, that breaks the silence. "I have never been to the Duchy myself, but I have heard stories about the beauty of Fraldarius flowers in spring. I for one would not mind to see them for myself, one day." His voice is calm and monotone, but Dimitri doesn't have to look at him to see the worry in his gaze.

Sylvain slams his hand on the table excitedly. "See! We can't deprive Dedue of the sight of the flower fields! That's just criminal! Right?" His voice sounds jovial but his carefree demeanor belies the worry in his eyes.

They aren't the children they used to be, but he finds he can still recognize the urgency in his old friend's eyes, willing him to agree.

In the end, he does and prays Felix will forgive him.

--

Lone Moon comes and goes, and when it does, his friends ensure that he has no excuses to break his word. Gustave and Annette hold down the fort in Fhirdiad while they're out 'connecting with the people,' and their old Professor promised him that she would step in swiftly if anything went wrong. He trusts her - how could he not, after all she had done for them? - but the morning they embark he still feels anguish crawling up his spine like an old friend.

He had written to Felix that they were coming, several times in fact, but the letters he received in return remained few and far in between, and rarely gave any indication that Felix has read his. As such, he isn't surprised that when they arrive at Castle Fraldarius, the Duke isn't in residence.

Sylvain enters as if he owns the place, and not for the first time Dimitri wishes he had his natural confidence of easy-going nature. The white castle hasn't changed much, although Dimitri does notice that the painting of Glenn that used to hang in the central hall, has been replaced by a more contemporary religious painting depicting Saint Cichol. The staff is more than pleased to serve the Savior King himself, but they're less helpful in revealing where Felix is.

"His Grace is rarely home. There is much to rebuild, after all," the ancient Fraldarius steward tells them and Dimitri is ready to call this whole thing off to return home and lock himself into his own chambers. They're full of ghosts, but he has been getting a grip on them more with every passing night. Here in these memory-filled halls, there are very few defenses to their whispers.

Dedue notices, because *of course* he does, and reminds them all kindly that they came to meet the people rather than stay in an empty castle, and insists they keep up their schedule even if Felix isn't here to join them. Dimitri gratefully pretends it is not because regular exercise and sleep keep his demons at bay, and goes through the motions as is expected of him.



On their second day Ingrid insists they visit a familiar town, the very same they helped rid of bandits together with Rodrigue what feels like a lifetime ago, even if in reality it has only been seven years. The major welcomes them with open arms, ushering them through the small city's newly repaired highlights with uneasy pride.

By chance, they stop at an-almost repaired church to pay their respects to the fallen ones. It's an absolutely beautiful old church, tastefully decorated with stained glass windows depicting a wonderful rendition of Saint Cethleann herself. But it is not the building that makes him stop in his tracks.

Dimitri had wondered privately if he would recognize Felix if he saw him in the crowd. It turns out that the answer was a resounding yes, because there he is, hair long and wild, covered in sweat and dirt from head to toe, repairing the roof of church with his own two hands. His eyes are inexplicably drawn to the man that was once his best friend, on elegant fingers bruised from labor, the dirty strands of hair falling into his hair as he worked.

Felix looks breathtaking Dimitri realizes all at once, and he has no idea what to do with that revelation. He doesn't get time to process it either, because Sylvain spots Felix mere seconds after Dimitri.

"Hey, Felix! There you are! We've been looking for you all over the place!" He yells loudly and starts running towards him.

Felix looks up, startled, and then schools his expression back into a withering look directed straight at Sylvain. He still lets their old friend pull him down and hug him, so Dimitri knows it's a facade. While Felix half-heartedly threatens to maim Sylvain like nothing has changed at all, Dimitri watches them silently, his heart beating fiercely. He had missed Felix, but he hadn't quite realized how empty that space he left behind felt now that he fills it again. Hadn't anticipated how the mere sight of him would fill him with warmth and dread alike, and he detests it almost as much as he craves more of it.

Dimitri forces himself to meet Felix's eyes even if the gesture isn't returned when the man appears right in front of him, not long after Ingrid and Dedue have caught up.

"What are you all doing here?" Felix demands, wiping the sweat from his brow in a very distracting manner.

"Felix!" Ingrid scolds him with unshed tears in her eyes. "Can you at least show an inkling of manners? We wrote to you we were coming. Several times, as a matter of fact!"

Felix averts his eyes from hers and Dimitri imagines that it is probably the exertion that paints his cheeks pink rather than embarrassment. "I've been busy," he grits out.

"I can see that," Dimitri interjects before Ingrid is able to spit out a retort. "It's almost as if war has never touched this place. You've done well, Felix."



"It truly does look wonderful," Dedue agrees earnestly, and even Felix has a hard time blowing off a compliment with such sincerity.

"Well... we've been busy," Felix replies after a long silence.

"Why don't you show us around for a bit?" Sylvain asks before Felix has time to ruin the touching moment by saying something hurtful.

"Ugh, do I have to?"

Ingrid raises a single brow. "Yes, you have to."

With a surprisingly minimal amount of complaining by Felix's standards, he complies. The town, as it turns out, had been ravaged by bandits and war, though not terribly so. They had seen Enbarr burn, the scent of burning bodies forever etched into their brains. Politics may never be Felix's forte, he at least had plenty of experience in clearing rubble, so instead of ruling his lands from his stately home, he traveled from town to town to help with the restoration effort, or so Dimitri gathers from his stories.

"Leading by example," Ingrid sums it up, probably enjoying watching Felix squirm from receiving praise.

Dimitri doesn't need to ask around to see that she's right, and while the Duchy is far from healed from a decade of decay, but it is healing.

He takes the opportunity to listen to his voice, to watch his messy hair sway in the wind, to bask in the easy banter between his old friends. Frankly, Felix looks like the bone-deep exhaustion Dimitri feels in his bones every day, and it feels shameful to have to reacquaint himself with all the little things that make Felix, a person he used to know better than himself. When did they become strangers, albeit intimate ones? Was it after the Tragedy, after the war had started, or after this year spend apart? More importantly, was it too late to make amends?

Before Dimitri can spiral further down in self-doubt, Felix turns to him. "You still didn't tell me why you're here."

"We're on a diplomatic tour," Ingrid offers.

"We're here to show Dedue the flowers," Sylvain replies at the same time, both truthfully and really, really not.

Rightfully, Felix doesn't believe him. "*Seriously?*" He turns to Dedue in the hope of a different answer, but the man merely nods.

"Spring in Fraldarius, does that ring any bells?" Ingrid says with a nagging tone in her voice that is all too familiar. "We decided to combine an old tradition with our Gourmet trip and a diplomatic tour which, *again*, you would have known if you had read my letters."

"Shut up about the damn letters already!"

"Not until you promise to read and answer them regularly!"

Dimitri takes a step forward before things can escalate. "My apologies, Felix. We shouldn't have come without your permission, tradition or not. We can leave, if you wish," he says sincerely, trying to meet Felix's eyes without success. Were they always this warm, and always so shadowed by lack of sleep?

It takes him a second to register that his words successfully stopped their argument, but he must have done something wrong because Dedue is sending him those pitying looks again that he does appreciate but also is starting to feel rather annoyed by.

"I—" Felix opens his mouth to say something, and then closes it again, repeating this process several times.

The silence eats at Dimitri's nerves and not for the first time he wishes he could rewind time and try again. He's halfway through another apology when Felix raises his hand.

"You're already here, it would be stupid if you would just leave after traveling this far," he says in a voice that sounds uncannily much like Glenn.

Dimitri wants to retort that it is barely a four-day journey from Fhirdiad to Castle Fraldarius, but that would be acknowledging that Felix could have visited him at any time and didn't, and he isn't quite ready to face that. Instead, he just bows deeper than his station normally allows, "We thank you for your hospitality."

"Under one condition!" Felix exclaims, already sounding much more like his usual self. "You'll spar with me, all of you. My sword is growing rusty!"

Dimitri smiles and feels like perhaps it isn't too late yet. "With pleasure."

They spend the remainder of the day helping with the repairs to the absolute mortification of the local nobility, which is something Dimitri suspects Felix takes great pleasure in. They work silently next to each other, seamlessly in a way that is more than just comfortable, if not for the persistent shaking of Felix's hands.

When the sun sets and steals the heat along with its light, the town throws an impromptu bonfire party in his honor. It's excessive and unnecessary, but a year of being King has taught him the importance of gestures and ceremony, so he graciously accepts it. The food tastes the same to him as always, but the company more than makes up for it. The fire sets him on edge, but instead of walking away from the burning and the memories, he faces the fire, willing these new memories to overwrite the old ones, the cheers to overlay the screams. He hears his father's voice but drowns it out by mentally repeating a mantra: *I have earned this peace and I deserve good things*. He keeps at it until he almost believes it, at which points the ghosts are merely charred whispers in his periphery. If his friends notice that he is less talkative than usual, they don't mention it.

To his pleasant surprise, Felix goes out of his way to introduce a few Duscure refugees to Dedue, who turn out to have known his family before the Tragedy. His most stalwart companion is reduced to tears that Dimitri nearly shares while they recount memories, often slipping into a language he is ashamed to barely know.

He resolves to do better, not just for Dedue, but to all of them. For once it's almost as if he can hear the professor talking to him instead of the voices of the dead, urging him on with kind words.

"Thank you," he says to Felix when he finally finds him late at night, sitting alone in a patch of grass far removed from the festivities. He doesn't object when Dimitri sits down next to

him, instead of nursing what he can only assume is not his first goblet of wine. Together they watch their friends from a distance, the bonfire highlighting the deep shadows under Felix's eyes.

Felix looks at him unveiled skepticism. "For what?"

For caring, even though you pretend you don't, Dimitri doesn't say.

"For your hard work," he says instead and sits down next to him. For once Dimitri is relieved that the local populace seems reluctant to approach them, allowing them for a rare moment of privacy

"It's my job," Felix answers, a dark shadow casting over his eyes.

"A job I forced you to take," he reminds him. It had been a selfish thing to request after the war, but Rodrigue was dead and Felix's uncle had been sickly for years. The man had a daughter, but she was so very young.

After a surprisingly painless discussion, Felix had begrudgingly accepted the title, sheathed his sword, and returned to his childhood home. On the day of his coronation, Felix had surprised him by dutifully kneeling before his King like the other nobles, and sworn the same oath their fathers had vowed before them. That was the last time Dimitri had seen him before today.

"I've missed you," he blurts out before he can stop himself, and he has no liquor in his blood to blame for it. "I mean, you have been missed by everyone. Including myself."

He doesn't have to imagine the heat that rises to Felix's cheeks.

"I've been busy," he grits out, before downing his drink in one go. He looks as awkward as Dimitri feels. "My father may have been a brilliant leader, but his math was pathetic! Going through his accounts has been a pain, not to mention his tax system! Honestly, it's a wonder this place isn't bankrupt! I did the world a service when I threw all of it into the fireplace."

He rants on about population growth, harvest returns, and statistics that Dimitri generally outsources to the treasury. He is unable to suppress a chuckle. Felix was never good with people, but he had always been good with numbers. When they were young and still shared everything, Felix had explained to him that there was comfort in their predictability, in adding and subtracting and knowing that as long as he did the calculations right, the answer will always be the same. Although Dimitri has always been hopelessly terrible with his numbers, he can see the merit in that certainty, so unlike this strange post-war world, they are living in.

"Stop laughing at me!" Felix exclaims when Dimitri can't keep his laugh to himself, swatting him on the shoulder. Dimitri shouldn't feel so elated at the contact, the first since Felix kissed his hand after swearing his oath of fealty. But beggars can't be choosers.

He hides his smile behind his hand, unable to suppress it. "My apologies, my friend. It feels

good to know some things haven't changed."

Felix swallows heavily. "I haven't changed much. Not at all, really."

You have, Dimitri thinks but doesn't dare to disagree with Felix lest he loses this little bit of amicability between the two of them. Another silence falls between them where neither of them know what to say without hurting each other, which perhaps hurts more than anything else.

Dimitri distracts himself by watching Sylvain bully Ingrid into a dance. At first, they playfully sway together along with the locals, neither possessing natural grace nor dancing prowess, but they soon find their rhythm. He feels a deep adoration for the two of them swell up in his chest as he witnesses them fall into a pattern that suits them, seemingly lost in a world of their own making. He wonders if either of them realizes the obvious love they share for each other, and how he could have missed it up until now.

When he turns to ask Felix about it, he finds him staring at him instead of their lifelong friends' budding relationship.

"Is something the matter?" He asks, subconsciously reaching for his eyepatch to ensure that the hideous scar underneath is still covered. It is.

Felix's brow furrows and he looks away swiftly. It takes a while for him to answer, but Dimitri is surprised he has received one at all. "...you look well," Felix says softly, but Dimitri knows what he truly means.

"Peace has been kind to me, but in truth, it is due to the kindness of our friends. Although I still feel like I can never atone for my atrocities, they make the impossible task at hand feel less of a burden and more like a privilege," Dimitri admits with a hint of pride in his chest.

Felix nods but doesn't comment.

Dimitri hesitates, uncertain. What pulls him through is the tremor in Felix's hand that he has been spotting all day, one that was never present during the war.

With a softer voice, he admits: "I am trying to listen to your advice, Felix. I have chosen to take up the crown, to listen to the voices of the living rather than the dead. Their doomsaying serves as a warning rather than guidance nowadays, but it is... lonely in Fhirdiad sometimes, especially since there is someone missing at my right hand," he dares to say and reaches out for Felix's trembling hand.

Before their fingers can touch, Felix draws back into himself, mortification evident on his red face. "S-stop spouting such bullshit! Y-you don't need me at your right hand! You have Dedue, and don't you dare take him for granted after everything he has done for you!"

Dimitri shakes his head, letting his gaze sweep over Dedue, who is dancing a traditional Duscure dance with an older woman, radiating joy. To see him so happy makes him feel happy too,

if only for a moment.

“I do cherish him and all he does for me every day. But Dedue is my dear friend and confidante, my caretaker when I need it. Like... like family!” He realizes the truth of his words as they escape him like a puzzle piece falling into place and resolves to tell Dedue as soon as they have a private moment.

Next to him, Felix is still decidedly not looking at him when he continues speaking. “But while he cares for me, he always takes my side and rarely expresses his own opinion. He never vocally disagrees with me, even if I know he does. He doesn’t challenge me, make me think again, make me aspire to be my very best. He... he isn’t you. Nobody is.”

“Stop talking already!” Felix all but shrieks, drawing more than a few curious stares.

But Dimitri has come too far to quit now. “Felix, despite everything that has happened between the two of us, you must know that there will always be a place for you at my side.”

“Don’t say such things so casually!”

There is something about the red dusting the tips of his ears that gives Dimitri the courage to press on. “My apologies, seeing you today merely reminds me of our childhood and those dreams we used to share back then. Do you remember? Your brother would become Duke Fraldarius, and you would be at my side forever, like Kyphon and Loog.” Dimitri takes a deep breath, steeling himself. “But we’re grown now, and despite everything that happened our father’s mantles rest on our shoulders, although not quite like we envisioned. I have changed, and I believe for the better. So tell me, Felix, why.... why are we still so far removed from each other, even now we are side by side? What happened?”

Felix squeezes his eyes shut, balling his hands into fists. Dimitri knows he must imagine the hint of tears reflecting the distant light of the bonfire. “Y-you know what happened. Glenn is dead. My father is dead. *Everyone* is dead. Don’t waste your breath on such trivial sentimentalities when there is work to be done!”

“They are not trivial to me. Those memories of the days we shared, running around together on these streets, playing hide and seek, getting scolded by my father for neglecting our duties... On dark nights, they are all that pull me through,” Dimitri confesses, feeling a little bit desperate and a little bit daring. “What happened Felix? We are mending roofs and rebuilding bridges, returning the country to its former glory. But why can we do all that, but we can’t seem to move past our differences?”

Felix doesn’t yell at him in embarrassment for once, nor does he resort to violence as Dimitri had expected. It’s far worse: he looks pained, young and vulnerable as if Dimitri’s words have taken the energy out of him.

Felix drops his head into his hands. “Do you ever feel like you’ve stolen someone’s future?” He asks, his voice softer than Dimitri had heard in a decade. “Because I do, every day. All of this... I wasn’t made for this. You’re right, this wasn’t what we imagined when we were young. I was

never supposed to be my father’s successor. It should have been my father sitting here, or even better; Glenn. I never had any ambitions to become Duke.”

“Felix, I...” Dimitri doesn’t know what to say. In truth, he had asked Felix to take up the title for selfish reasons. The reality was that he had taken one look at the wild look in Felix’s eyes at the end of the war, and known that if he didn’t do something right now, Felix would leave with the wind and Dimitri would never see him again. This had been the only thing he could do to keep him from slipping in between his fingers.

“And you know what I hate the most about it?” Felix interrupts him before he can apologize again. “That I’m good at it. That I know this land like the blood that flows through my veins and coats my hands. I’ve been all over the world, seen it torn apart by war and disaster alike, and yet this place remains the same. Just like me.”

“You have changed Felix, and for the better too,” Dimitri says honestly, because somewhere in the past decade Felix has become absolutely and utterly breathtakingly beautiful, and Dimitri has been too blind to see it up until now. It’s not the only thing he has been missing, he thinks, and awkwardly puts his hand on his friend’s shoulder quite like the professor would do when he felt desolate. Felix shivers, which surprises Dimitri because he feels so very warm underneath his touch.

Then, barely audible over the crackling of the bonfire raging in front of them, Felix whispers in a voice so broken: “Then why do I still feel so lost?”

He wishes for nothing but to wrap his arms around Felix, but knows better than to overstep his boundaries.

“Some days I wake up and the whispers are too loud to ignore, the burdens so heavy I can’t even rise from my bed,” He confesses instead, allowing some of his carefully wrapped up sorrow to seep into his words. He feels Felix’s shoulders stiffen under his touch.

On the edge of his limited sight the scorched image of Glenn scolds Dimitri for being so heartless. He soldiers on, ignoring the burning visage. with an ease born from rigorous practice. “Every time I cross a bridge or stand on a balcony, they tell me to jump. And some days I can’t pretend I don’t want to follow their command.”

Felix all but jumps up, ready to assault him. “You! you.... you roar! You idiot! Y-you can’t do that, you have a country depending on you!” He yells, but his eyes are bloodshot and brimming with unshed tears.

Dimitri tries to smile reassuringly. “I won’t,” he promises. “But I’ve imagined death so much it feels more like a memory. I can’t erase what I have seen and done from my mind. I can move on now, with all of you by my side. But that doesn’t mean I am fully healed, and I don’t know if I ever truly will be. But I will never allow myself to slip up again. I will keep trying, every day and every night, and I won’t stop until my dying day.”

“Don’t!” Felix roars instantly, before biting his lip to stop himself from shouting. “...Don’t

speak of dying so casually,” he adds softly. He still won’t meet his eyes this time there is no denying the tears that finally spill down his cheeks. It shouldn’t feel like a revelation that Felix can still cry for him, but it does.

Before Dimitri realizes it he catches one with his thumb, “I did not intend to hurt you, my apologies,” he whispers as he brushes it away, savoring the soft skin underneath his fingers, wishing now more than ever that instead of learning how to hurt, someone had taught him how to heal and comfort.

It takes him a moment to realize that Felix has gone completely still, his eyes wide and pupils blown wide. Dimitri quickly retracts his hand.

“I apologize again. I truly wish for things to return to what they were before the Tragedy, before the war. And I have tried to keep my promise to you: Actions, not words. I hope you can see that,” he all but pleads. “I know things have been difficult between us, but I truly want things to return like they used to be when we were children.”

That snaps Felix out of it. “Stop apologizing! Is that why you’re here? To chase your ghosts?” And there it is, that familiar rage that Dimitri knows all too well. “The past is the past, let it sleep quietly! We’re not kids anymore, and neither one of us can erase what we have seen and done. Do you hear me? I don’t want to return things to return to what they were!” Felix explodes, slamming his goblet on the grass with enough force to crack it.

It’s not the only thing that breaks, and the pain that surges up in Dimitri’s chest couldn’t have been greater if he had run him through with his sword. “I... understand.”

“Do you? Do you really?” Felix sneers back.

Dimitri sighs, trying to keep his voice even. “I understand that the things I’ve done make it impossible for you to be my friend.”

Felix stares at his hands incredulously for a moment before hitting himself on the forehead repeatedly, muttering: “Goddess fuck me sideways.”

“Please stop hurting yourself for my sake.”

Felix turns back to him, looking absolutely livid. “You don’t get it all, do you? You really fucking don’t. God, why are you so blind?”

Life may be unfair but so is Felix, or so Dimitri thinks. “You disappear for a year and ignore all my summons and letters. How am I supposed to understand you, if you’re not willing to take my outstretched hand?” He asks, trying and failing to keep his frustration out of his voice.

“Do you really think I never tried? For months, I kept trying and trying, but every time I tried to come closer you were the one that pushed me away!”

Ab, Dimitri thinks as his own anger deflates. Of *course* it always came back to the Tragedy. He barely remembered those days, too overwhelmed by the trauma of losing everything he ever knew. Vaguely, he thinks he can remember Felix crawling into his bed to soothe him, but in those days he could barely keep the living brother apart from the dead one, so even in retrospect, he can’t exactly be sure. After the rebellion there was no more reason to doubt, because Felix never looked at him again.

Wisely, he doesn’t tell Felix that. “You were a child. You were never responsible for my declining state of mind,” he says delicately instead.

“Are you really that dense? Do you really think I’m that heartless? That I never laid awake at night when we thought you were dead for five long years, wondering what would have happened if I had only tried a little harder? If I had reached out a little more?” Felix rants, his voice pitched high and feverish. “I thought I was *so* clever, being able to see the boar, but I was just as blind as everyone I despised, wasn’t I? I never could see the crying boy underneath. Could I have prevented your descent into madness? Could I have prevented my father’s death?” Felix’s breath hitches as he speaks faster and faster, the suppressed sobs making him heave.

In a moment of clarity Dimitri realizes that for once, the roles have been reversed. Is this how people see him during his episodes? Does he look this mad when he starts spiraling into his own delusions? Does their heart ache just as much with every hateful word he says about himself?

What would the professor do? What would he need in a moment like this? Dimitri racks his brain in panic but draws a blank.

“I don’t blame you. Goddess above, I never blamed you,” he says when he feels like he can’t wait any longer, but it feels inadequate. Should he call Sylvain and Ingrid for help, or would that make things worse?

“I’m not asking for your forgiveness! Not until I’m ready to forgive myself!” Felix lashes out before Dimitri can make up his mind, his hand reaching for his sword, holding on to the hilt like a lifeline.

At last finally clicks: Felix isn’t mad at him, he’s angry with himself. And if isn’t that a feeling he is intimately acquainted with.

“Why weren’t we enough? Why could the professor, Dedue and my father reach you, but not me?” Felix’s voice breaks at the same time as Dimitri’s heart, and he’s surprised it can still hurt so much after all this time.

As much as he wished he could, he doesn’t have the answers Felix is looking for. He tries nevertheless. “I don’t know. It.... it wasn’t that simple. You all helped all the little bits that helped me find myself again and. I... You were enough. You still are.” *but I wasn’t*, he finishes mentally and swallows deeply.

Carefully he wraps an arm around Felix, pressing their sides together. The crowd in front of them seems like worlds apart from them. It's not quite a hug, but Dimitri somehow feels like this is the most intimate he's ever been with anyone.

Felix struggles for a second but it is nothing more than a token of resistance, a survival mechanism. Dimitri holds on, doesn't give up on him, and when Felix finally stops pushing and starts clinging to him, not unlike those childhood days so long past, it feels like a victory.

"I forgive you whether you will allow me or not," he mutters stubbornly, feeling so very young.

Felix makes a strange sound, something caught between a sob and a snort. "Ingrid is right."

"About what?"

It's stained in tears and careful at best, but Dimitri swears he sees Felix smile. "We're both idiots."

A bark of laughter escapes Dimitri, and it feels like he is on the brink of a revelation.

For the first time in what seems like years Felix meets his eyes, and it blows him away. Felix has always possessed an unparalleled focus and to have it centered on him is maddening. His eyes are rimmed with red, his pupils blown wide, impossibly dark and full of hunger. He looks like wants to consume him whole, and all Dimitri can reply is a dumbfounded, "Oh"

Then his eyes drop to his mouth for a second too long, and Dimitri knows what he is about to do before he moves.

Felix's lips are cold against his own, moving without any finesse at all but full of that same hunger that both scares him to the bone and makes his heart beat faster than he thought it still could.

It's over before he can fully understand what is going on and Felix looks at him with an uncertainty that echoes in Dimitri's very soul. Felix is nothing like the demure noblewomen he had been expected to court since birth. With his hair wild and dirty and a storm of emotions on his face, he reminds Dimitri of a forest fire: beautiful but deadly, uncontrollable but captivating.

Felix finds his words before he does. "I... I don't want things to return to the old days. I want something more. But I don't think I deserve it," he whispers with a guilty tone that is so unlike his usual angry lashing out.

"Oh," Dimitri repeats dumbfoundedly. Never in his wildest dreams had he considered Felix like that. But... he's considering it now, and it somehow feels like a long time coming.

It feels like coming home and discovering something new at the same time. He is on fire, but

not unpleasantly so. The feeling overtakes him, and he can't help but smile from ear to ear as things finally start to make sense. "*Oh.*"

This time, when Felix doesn't meet his gaze, Dimitri lifts his chin with his hands until he does. "I think I understand it now," he says, breathless, and dives in. Their noses bump awkwardly but then Felix tilts his head slightly and suddenly it all clicks into place. He deepens the kiss, each movement of his lips drawing out an immediate and enthusiastic reply. He shouldn't be surprised that even this is a competition to Felix, but he's surprised all the same to find that he *likes* it. Hands roam hungrily across his skin like lips press against his own, seeking more and more and more.

When they part Felix laughs freely, and it's a sound so addictive Dimitri wants to hear it every day for the rest of his life. He feels unhinged but in a good way. At long last, they have found their way back to each other.

He steals another chaste kiss from Felix's lips before pressing their foreheads together. If Felix was flushed before, he is something akin to a tomato now, but he's smiling too. It's nothing short of breathtaking.

"You know? I think I want that too," he confesses, and the look of hope he is rewarded will stay with him for the rest of his days.

The spell is broken when Sylvain shouts something lewd at them from a distance. Suddenly aware of where they are and who can see them, Felix pushes Dimitri off him and surges up to his feet, although Dimitri can't remember drawing him into his lap. He barely registers what kind of vulgarity Felix hollers back at their friends, still too occupied with the feeling of his lips, now slightly chapped for entirely different reasons than usual. Mercifully, Ingrid pulls Sylvain away with a knowing smile on her face before Felix can make good on his threats.

Later, he will probably freak out about this, but right now he is overwhelmed with emotion and sensations so foreign yet so welcome that it leaves him trembling.

It hasn't subsided when Felix finishes his tirade. "Are you cold?" he asks incredulously.

"Yes," Dimitri lies and feels only slightly bad about it when Felix rolls his eyes and sits back down next to him. Any semblance of regret leaves him when Felix allows him to drape an arm around his shoulder and pull him close.

Slowly but surely their breathing synchronizes and the world starts turning again. Felix's hand finds its way into his hair of its own accord, playing with the strands until Dimitri feels the persistent tremor fade into nothingness. They don't speak, merely exist together as people around them celebrate. They've seen too much to join in, but Dimitri has hope that one day he will feel free to dance among his subjects, and perhaps Felix will be there too.

For now, this is enough. For a moment they are Dima and Fe again, but only for a second. He no longer knows his friend like the back of his hand, doesn't know if his favorite color is still royal blue or if he still has that pegasus plushy he was so attached to.

But he knows how Felix looks when he is trying to hide how much he cares about his friends, he knows how much he loves his people and what he will sacrifice for them, and he knows how strong he is, especially when he allows himself to be weak.

Their childhood is over. It has been for a long time and there are a thousand things neither of them are ever getting back. For once, that thought doesn't fill him with despair. The little smile on Felix's face tells him that they have time to discover a thousand and one more things that will make life worth living.

There is peace, hard-fought and well-earned, and they deserve to be happy. They aren't alright, not yet, but they will be.

An hour from now they will sneak away into the forest until they find one of the trees that still bears their initials. He will push Felix against it and kiss him until neither of them knows where one begins and the other ends, eagerly exploring this wonderful new dimension between the two of them. Dedue will smile at him when they return, but contrary to Sylvain's, it will be filled with nothing but pride.

A week from now when their boat is set to leave for Deirdru, Felix won't be waving them goodbye on the shores of Fraldarius, he will be standing right beside him. Dimitri will hold his hair when the seasickness becomes too much, and he will lose hopelessly when the five of them play cards later that night on the deck. It won't be like old times exactly, but in between Dedue's additional company and Sylvain's seemingly never-ending liquor stash, that is not necessarily a bad thing. Especially not when Felix's hand finds its way into his own under their shared blanket.

A month from now their tour will take them to the monastery, where the Professor will welcome them all fondly and tell them how very proud she is of them. Which in turn will compel Felix challenge her to a duel on the spot out of sheer embarrassment. He will sit with her one night and admit that *yes, at long last, he thinks he feels happy.*

A year from now, Ingrid will propose to Sylvain, and Felix and Dimitri will act as their best men at their wedding. Felix will deem his affairs in Fraldarius properly managed to accept the position as Dimitri's right-hand man. Commoners and nobles alike will come to fear both the blade and the sharp tongue of the King's Right Hand, but they will also come to respect the man who wields them. Only Dimitri will find out that Felix is more honest in the dark when their bodies move as one to the beat of an ancient drum.

A decade from now Dimitri will wake up one morning and realize that the voices are quiet. His lover will finally accept his proposal and blush brightly as they are married under the same roof he once helped fix. Dedue will name his firstborn after him, and call him uncle Dimitri henceforth. It will be his most precious title of them all.

A century from now they will be remembered not as an echo of their ancestors, but as the men who led Fodlan into a new Golden Age. They will be buried side by side, surrounded in death at last by friends and family, visited every now and then by their old Professor as time

moves ever forward.

A millennium from now they will be reborn, and the cycle will start anew.

But right now Dimitri doesn't know that. He *does* know that for once he feels like he is at the apex of the world, and he is not alone. In this moment they're young, the stars above them are bright and the soft spring breeze is nothing but a promise of all the beauty they have yet to experience. They'll fight and disagree, but they'll always find their way back to each other.

His father was right, Dimitri thinks as he dares to press a soft kiss into Felix's hair. Fraldarius is beautiful in spring, but for the first time in many years, Dimitri is looking forward to summer too.

--

Writer - Emma / @Ingrimasname (Tumblr)

Artist - Mikan / @yadntve

Meet me in the dark

Year 1171

As it turns out, the castle which is so open, spacious, and welcoming in the light of day is foreboding as a dragon's lair at night, high ceilings and long halls full of swirling blackness. It's far past curfew, yet here they are, with Dimitri holding his hand tightly as they walk the dark corridors of the castle at night. Felix's eyes dart around the thick darkness that envelopes the corridor, and Dimitri's hand squeezes his. Their only light is the lamp that Dimitri brought with himself, and Felix keeps as close to it as he can.

"It's ok," he whispers. "My room is close now."

And Felix nods, too scared and unfamiliar with this place at night to talk. Dimitri knows Felix trusts him, and that everything will be alright as long as they are together.

He suddenly stops, letting go of Felix's hand, and so his friend clings to his arm instead. "Here!"

He opens the door, revealing his personal chambers behind. Felix sighs in relief and rushes inside, followed by Dimitri's short laugh and the door closing. "That was scary."

"It's not that scary... The knights are protecting the castle at all times."

"Still... it was so dark." Felix pouts, standing by the bed.

"It's alright, Felix," Dimitri replies, and Felix looks up, and Dimitri's eyes meet with adoring amber. "You know... When you're around, I feel braver than ever."

That gaze burns into Felix's chest, and will keep burning for the rest of his life.



Year 1180

It's common knowledge that, if you want to find Felix, the training grounds are your best shot. Despite the knight's hall being Dimitri's preferred place for sparring, sometimes he will choose the former, and when considering why, his thoughts always wander to the heir of House Fraldarius.

His eyes do as well, to the speed of his movements, the progression of his skill, and, more embarrassingly, to the strands of hair that fall out his bun, colored by the sunset, the curve of his nose, and his eyes, brown and always filled with fiery determination, looking forward.

Dimitri wishes he could stare into them, like he'd do in times that are already too far gone, too different and too distant for them. At least, that seems to be what Felix thinks. And Dimitri doesn't feel like he deserves anything more than staring from time to time some days.

Suddenly, Felix's eyes make contact. Amber on blue. With a gasp, Dimitri snaps out of his reverie. He blinks, and finds himself once again looking at Felix in profile.

"What the fuck are you looking at?"

Dimitri can feel embarrassment coloring his face red. "I... Your technique has improved noticeably."

"I know. If you're not going to train, get the hell out of here, boar."

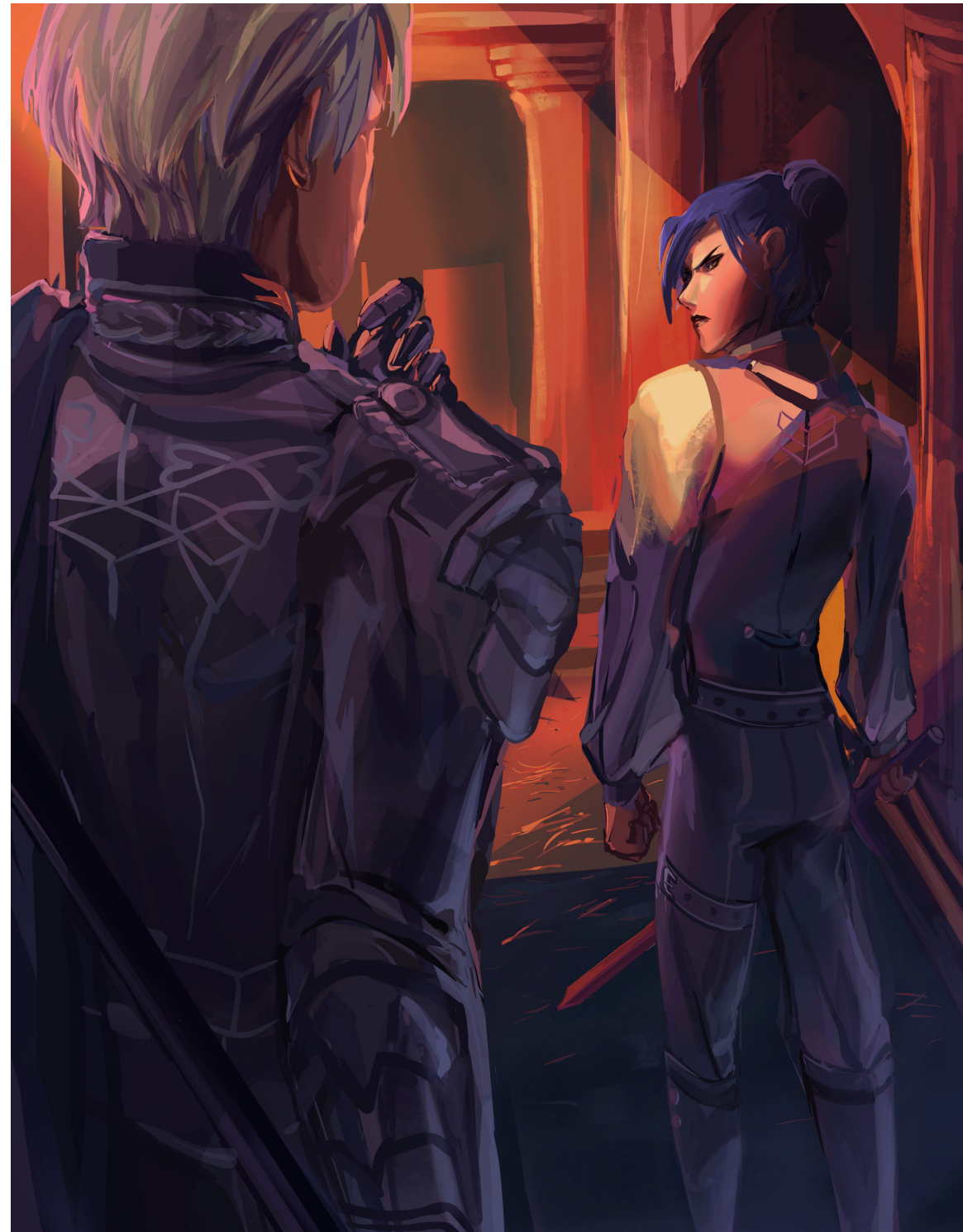
Between the loose strands of midnight blue, his eyes burn with anger, frustration, and more emotions Dimitri doesn't dare to unpack. "I apologize if I've disturbed you."

Felix scoffs, mutters something to himself, and turns his back to him, and yet Dimitri's eyes still linger on Felix's lone form for some seconds, before sighing and returning his focus on his own lance to continue his training.

Year 1185

Moonlight falls from the cracked roof of the cathedral, cascading gently over Felix's face. The shadows under his eyes, however, are not only a result of the light: Dimitri remembers too many nights like this, where again and again, Felix wanders alone at night around the monastery, yet only to always end up back here.

When the light that filters through hits his eyes, they appear auburn. As usual, Fe-



lix's eyes are narrowed and his brows are ceased, hands turned into fists, but there's something Dimitri doesn't remember seeing in a long time in the way he frowns and clenches his jaw.

Sadness. Disappointment.

How strange for someone that supposedly had given up on him long before anyone else.

"You," he starts, with his strained voice, the echo so loud it silences the voices around Dimitri. "When will you stop? Standing here away from everyone like that will improve anything."

Why do you still care, Dimitri wants to ask. But he has no time or energy to be wasted on the distraction Felix is, on foolish questions that won't bring the dead justice. All he needs from him is to keep killing the living soldiers behind Dimitri's trail.

Or that's what he tells himself, in a desperate need to deny that Felix being there still makes him feel something. That watching his pained face aches him.

"The dead don't fucking care about you sacrificing all of the living for them. They don't care and never will. Why can't you- Why can't anyone realize that already?"

There might be angry tears in his eyes, glistening under the moonlight, or it might be Dimitri's imagination, trying to remember a time when the Dimitri he is now would've made a younger, sweeter Felix cry.

He'd never wanted to do that. But this time it's inevitable, isn't it?

His only eye follows Felix as he storms out of the cathedral, his personal mission failed yet again. Dimitri hopes the ghosts don't hear his wish of seeing him again the next night.

Three months later

Nights like these, when the moon shines bright in the sky along the stars, reflecting on the slow waves of the monastery pond, have a strange soothing effect on Dimitri's mood no matter how hard the day has been. And days are usually hard when you're in the middle of a war, getting ready to kill the person you've always considered your sister and all of her ideals.

But he's glad to be struggling with the idea. It makes him feel like his humanity is partially back, at least. The words of the monster he was, when only the boar remained in his mind, will not fade that easily, a reminder of his many flaws, mistakes

and sins he would never fully atone for.

Familiar steps walk closer, and Dimitri recognizes them from the multiple nights he'd hear them in the cathedral.

The steps halt, and Dimitri turns his head to find Felix standing on the other side of the pier.

"Can't you sleep?"

Felix ignores him, walking on the pier to the place where he's sitting, and Dimitri notices he's carrying something.

He squints, and distinguishes the outline of... fishing equipment?

"Have you taken a liking to fishing?"

"Shut the fuck up," Felix replies, in a whisper, and under the trembling light of his lamp, he starts preparing the bait with a certain clumsiness that Dimitri finds rather charming.

So this is a recent development, he thinks, unable to hold a small grin back.

"Did the professor teach you?"

Felix doesn't answer, which coming from him is most certainly a yes, and he casts the line.

Seconds go by in silence, and Dimitri is surprised to find out he finds it comfortable, unlike the tense silences they had been sharing for nearly seven years. Felix frowns, deeply focused on the fish or whatever might be going through his mind, and Dimitri's eye alternates between the placid water and his company.

He looks beautiful until such intense moonlight, he thinks, and his heart makes a little jump.

"They told me," Felix murmurs, suddenly. "It was good for... focus. Patience. That they'd do that when... When they can't sleep."

That is such a professor thing, Dimitri thinks.

"I see," he says instead. "So you couldn't sleep either."

"I guess."

Dimitri would've expected Felix to go to the training grounds, but he doesn't say it out loud, afraid of ruining the fragile moment between them.

Hours pass by, on and on without many words, as the stars follow their way across the night sky. No fish bites, which makes Felix groan in irritation, but, for the most part, he's too lost in his own thoughts to care, whatever said thoughts are. Dimitri himself lets his mind wander to the Academy times, when he'd watch the professor fish almost every day after class, and then walk to the training grounds, when his eyes would always follow Felix.

Dimitri sighs, looking up at a slightly clearer sky, and right at that moment, something tugs at Felix's rod.

"Shit-!" he exclaims, almost missing the catch if it weren't for Dimitri's hand over his keeping it from sliding from his hands. "Fuck, this thing-"

"This fish is strong," Dimitri observes, still holding Felix's hand, but letting him pull out the fish on his own. After another second of fighting, Felix finally pulls it out of the water.

"The fucking- bucket!"

Dimitri nods, leaving Felix's hand alone to give him the bucket. The fish flails in it desperately, and Felix looks at his prey with a satisfied smile.

"I don't know much about fish," Dimitri comments, "but this looks like a nice catch."

"Still the only one in the whole night."

"Sometimes it's like that." He remembers an entire day of Byleth, expert fisher, not being able to catch themselves a single fish. "Still, this will make a nice meal for the army."

Felix huffs, still grinning, and his eyes meet Dimitri's when he looks up. Blue and amber. The first rays of sunrise painting their faces.

And, soon enough, there's a splash of red all over Felix's face, before he grabs the bucket and the fishing rod angrily and storms off to the dining hall.

"Felix, the bait-" But Felix doesn't hear him, or doesn't want to. So Dimitri lets him go, his gaze longingly following the man as he walks up the stairs.

Year 1186

The end of the journey is right in front of them, a massive imperial palace at the centre of Enbarr that towers over them, morning sun shining over them. The pained whines of the civilians and the fallen soldiers make for a horrible background sound, as Dimitri looks up at the place he had wanted to reach for so long.

He's braver and stronger now, but a part of him is terrified still. Of losing his comrades now, in the most difficult battle they've faced so far. Felix stands by his side and looks up, following Dimitri's gaze, with one hand on his waist and a million thoughts going through his head.. Even now, Dimitri can't claim to understand him fully. But he can try.

His hand grazes Felix's, and he doesn't pull away from the touch, encouraging Dimitri to wrap his fingers around it. Felix sighs, looking away, but Dimitri can still see how red his ears are. Still, Dimitri wishes he could look at his eyes, so immensely warm as they've always been, even when Felix's gaze pierced him with sheer hate.

He'll allow himself this little moment of levity, just this once, before entering the place where one of them might lose their lives, where everything might be lost. He pulls Felix closer, and Felix doesn't resist, seeming to settle into...

Or everything might be won, and they will go back home. And maybe they will manage to go back to each other then, to walk the dark corridors of castle Fhirdiad at night, spend entire hours together, and maybe, one day...

They'll understand each other, even better than they used to.

--

Writer - Ostovandi / @Ostovandi

Artist - minophisch / @minophisch



The softening sound of the night

Felix stood in front of the King's office with a scowl, wax dripping at the bottom of the candleholder in his hand. In the flickering light, the shadows were darker, deeper, echoing in the silent hallway. Even Dedue had been dismissed, but he had known better than to leave Dimitri alone with the weight of the world on his shoulders.

With a push of the shoulder, the door opened to a room only illuminated by the fire burning in the hearth. The office was a lived in room, with the royal cloak thrown at the back of a chair, plates and small crumbs of food here and there on the table near the fireplace. One of Felix's coats was on it, too, the fabric carefully stretched in a hoop, with thread and needle laying next to it.

Dimitri was sitting at his desk, chin in one hand and quill in the other. Softly snoring. He was still dressed in his armor, from the audience with the lords in the early afternoon. How he could sleep with the metal of his gauntlet biting into his flesh was a complete mystery that Felix never solved and never would.

"Dimitri."

No reaction. Not even the most subtle movement of the eye. The king was more tired than he expected, Felix mused while approaching the desk. Not surprising, considering the stacks of papers he was surrounded by, and the too many meetings he had during the day. He was better at letting his friends help him with his work, and they were better at taking it from his hands when he was running himself into the



YOUR BEASTLINESS,
YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO
SLEEP IN A BED,
YOU IDIOT.

ground. And yet.

Yet.

“Dimitri,” he repeated, louder. He raised his hand and pushed strands of hair behind Dimitri’s ear, with the same reverence he showed to a beautifully crafted sword (with a tenderness he showed only when no one was watching, only the beast, the man who had taken his heart so many years ago). The other man answered with a muffled noise, eye still closed. “Your Beastliness, you are supposed to sleep in a bed, you idiot.”

“Felix...?”

His voice was hoarse and low, and it made warmth bloom in Felix’s chest. He rubbed at Dimitri’s cheek, just under his blind eye, and the other man leaned heavily in his palm.

“Who else, boar.”

Dimitri slowly blinked himself awake, as if coming back from a too comfortable dream that he never wanted to leave. Felix knew better – knew that, left at his desk, Dimitri would soon thrash himself awake, taken by nightmares pressing down his chest and cutting his throat and breath. He had caught him at the right time, just before the shadows clawed themselves out of the exhaustion fueled sleep.

“What time...?”

“Late. Get up. You need to go to bed.”

Dimitri blinked once more and slowly rose to his feet, unsteady and almost sending the desk’s chair tumbling to the floor. Felix gathered the royal cloak in his arms, fur and fabric still warm from the dying fire of the hearth, and waited for the other to come with him.

“We both need the sleep.”

Only a smile, broken by a long and silent yawn, answered him, and Felix tightened the cloak against his chest to fight against his sudden want to grab the man and kiss him.

Silent and empty corridors echoed with their slow steps, until the entrance to the royal apartments. The night guard gave them a respectful nod and opened the door for them, unsurprised by the late appearance of their king and his right hand man.

Dimitri stood at the center of the bedroom, eye half closed and hair still mussed

and tangled from his nap at his desk. Felix took the time to look at him, still too aware and awake himself. Since the end of the war, they had both worked on their shortcomings, their issues, and the many ways they could hurt each other in small ways. They had learnt to live together, as they were now: two adults with too much hanging between their hands, with too many shades threaded through their bodies and badly scarred wounds in their minds. But the Dimitri he was seeing, right now, struggling to stay awake and upright, with a smile brighter than the cold Faerghus sun, was a Dimitri he was seeing more and more.

He dropped the cloak at its usual place and turned to Dimitri, holding out a hand.

“Give me your arm.”



Dimitri blinked. Blinked once again, reminding Felix of the sleepy dogs he sometimes saw Dedue and Ashe feed at the academy. He then raised his hand and nestled it in Felix's palm, with all its angles and sharp corners of metal. With movements far gentler than he ever showed in public, Felix eased the gauntlet off of Dimitri's hand. He pulled off the leather glove and unbuckled the vambraces, putting them aside and he asked for his other arm.

The king was pliant and soft under his touch, knowing the intricate intimate ritual

as well as Felix did. For a long, long time, Dimitri had worn his armor to whatever hole or corner he could fold himself into when beaten into submission by his exhaustion, ragged raw and thin by the barking beasts and ghosts floating at the edge of his consciousness. Then it was Dedue, loyal and strong Dedue, who had carried on the task to remove each plate and each scale of Dimitri's armor, the only one he could trust to do it.

Felix remembered with a stark precision the first time Dimitri had allowed him to remove the black metal, during a night not unlike this one. The first of many nights and evenings.

(a night of vulnerability and trembling hands, and of whispered confessions and clumsy hands)

When they were done with the chestplate and the shirt under it, he pushed Dimitri to sit down on the bed, and he kneeled to remove the greaves and his boots. The king's gaze was soft, and Felix could feel himself blush under the attention. It didn't matter if he was used to it, if the other man was generous with his feelings, if... He focused his attention on his fingers, on the leather under their tips.

“Do you need help?” Dimitri whispered, weaving his hand through the dark hair, tugging it free of its tie.

“No. Go and lie down.”

With a sigh, a breath soft on Felix's skin, Dimitri folded himself and wrapped his arms around his neck. A searing kiss was left on his forehead, and then it was the cold, cold air all around him, left on the floor, alone, and yet - and yet -

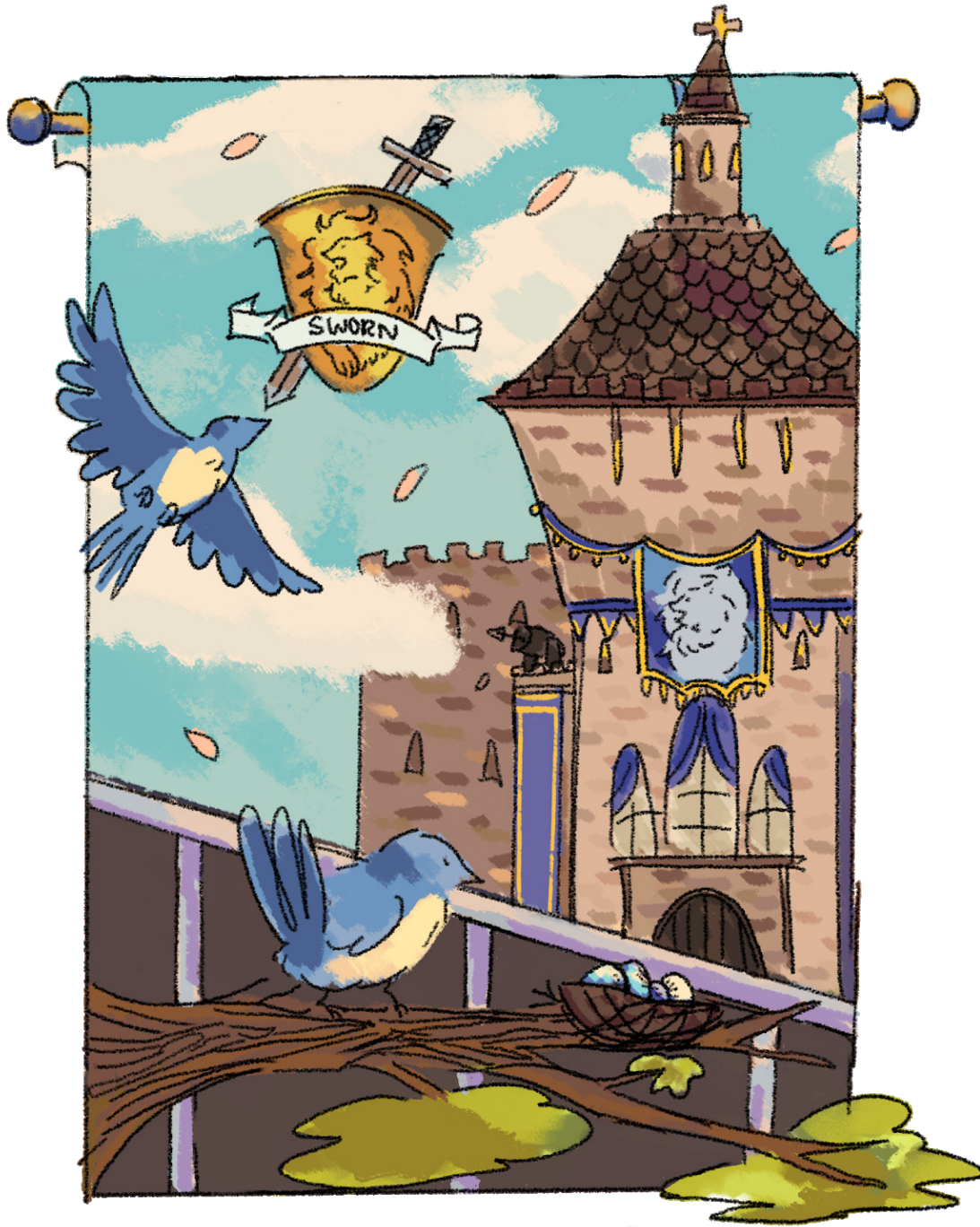
Soon, he heard a soft snore rise from the bed.

Felix smiled.

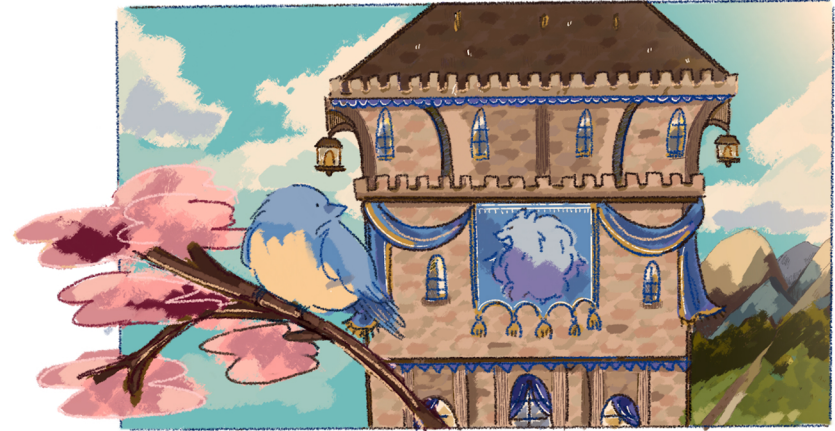
--

Writer - Ash / @LumehaAsh

Artist - juju / @Nyasebe



Entwined



The spring arrives in Faerghus with mud and birds that sing far too early in the morning. It's what Felix wakes up to on the second day after his arrival in the capital - and while he is used to rising at the crack of dawn, today he wishes the birds had more sensibility and would allow him the sleep he hasn't got recently.

Standing up and dressing for an early training session is not much of an option either -- not with the weight and heat that pulls him close to itself, as though said weight thinks of him as a stuffed toy from days long gone.

It's not the worst thing to wake up to, but Felix's limbs are restless and awful at staying still when his body aches to get itself moving and ready for the day ahead.

Alas, Dimitri is a *cuddler*, now that he's all right with physical touching once more. Felix is - Goddess help him - glad for it, glad that some things have returned to the way they used to be, but.

Still.

He always wakes up before his... *something* Felix doesn't care to give a name to, smothered in his body heat and at least one arm vaguely numb from being squeezed beneath one of their bodies. Dimitri's always snoring softly behind Felix's head, and somehow his breath manages to tickle Felix's neck from that position.



It's a one-of-a-kind torture Felix hadn't been prepared for when they first reached the conclusion that maybe their feelings were worth sharing and acting on. It's especially bad on the mornings immediately after Felix's return from Fraldarius territory, and so Felix feels suffocated and overheated.

He doesn't move, despite that.

--

He doesn't remember Dimitri coming in last night, so the fool probably stayed working in his study overtime despite Dedue's kindly worded warnings.

Ugh. Felix should have gone to fetch him himself, but he had been tired, the effects of travel having lingered longer than he had expected.

The only thing he can really do is let Dimitri sleep a bit longer and stay as still as humanly possible, since Dimitri is just as easy to stir as Felix himself. A lasting after-effect from living from fight to fight and battle to battle during the war.

Felix isn't cruel enough to disturb Dimitri's sleep when it's this peaceful, and so he resigns himself to his fate of burning away from the furnace that is his... his...

Even now, Felix can't think of the term without his mind going blank and short-circuiting, and so he halts that train of thought before it can progress further.

One would have thought having the time after the war to figure out and properly categorize his feelings would help with coming to terms with Dimitri and him becom-

ing... something other than friends.

Well, it hadn't. Whether it be due to the limited nature of the relationship - limited time, limited interactions - Felix still wasn't entirely used to the feeling of waking up to Dimitri's breath against his skin, firm arms around his waist giving more warmth than harm.



Felix listens to that breath now, doesn't lift his hand to move his hair so the exhaled air wouldn't tickle his admittedly sensitive neck. He does let his hand go to the arm hanging loosely over his side, lets his fingers run over the scars before settling for entwining their fingers together.

He loved holding Dimitri's hand as a child.

Not that he needs to know, though naturally he does - of course Dimitri knows, he seems to remember all of Felix's most embarrassing qualities with sharp clarity. It makes Felix flush with exasperation every time Dimitri suggests as much, which in turn results in Dimitri smiling and his one visible eye crinkling with mirth.

Now Felix quietly, without fuss, presses his palm against the back of Dimitri's hand

and finds himself relaxing once more when Dimitri's fingers part for his to go between them. The breath against his head shifts, comes out as a huff instead of a gentle exhale, and Felix can't help the way his mouth lifts at that.



“Good morning,” he says, squeezing at Dimitri's fingers that curl against a still fading scar on his stomach. It's not from the war, like so many others are - rather, it's from a silly training mishap that had had Dimitri distressed for weeks afterwards. But like so many hurdles, they've long since overcome that.

Dimitri inhales deep, then, before chuckling deep from his throat, the sound rumbling over the birdsongs in the distance. A gentler, but just as deep, voice replaces the laughter soon, and it has Felix squirming just so he can get a peek of Dimitri's face as he says, “Good morning, beloved.”

There's no eyepatch covering the other eye, so Felix catches sight of the faint scar over the closed eyelid on the side of Dimitri's face that's currently pressed against a well-slept on pillow.

The eye that *is* open looks at Felix with sleep-soft adoration that has Felix's heart stuttering and his skin prickling with the familiar refusal to accept that anyone could

look at him like *that* and not mean it for someone else.

It irritates him that he's probably never going to get fully used to being wanted and cherished so unguardedly again.

“Could have said something if you were awake,” Felix grumbles, though does nothing to remove himself from the chest his back is so snugly pressed against. He turns his head away simply out of the ache the creeps upon his neck. “You're like a damned furnace.”

“I rather enjoy you pretending to sleep just so I can rest a bit longer,” Dimitri says lightly, as though he's unaware of the heat that flushes across Felix's face the moment he says the words. “It is so... very charming, Felix.”

That is not a word most people would use of him, not unless they have the same singular brain cell as Dimitri does.

(Or they're Sylvain and got a wish for broken ribs.)

“So you say,” Felix says, though not terribly. He only sighs when Dimitri begins nosing at his hair with the drowsy sort of affection that is almost endearing. He continues in a low grumble, “I don't remember it being me that always had people swooning over him at the Academy.”

“You usually avoided people. They never got the chance to swoon over you.”

The very idea of people having the gall to sigh after him like a lovesick fool is -

Then again, Felix *is* currently pressed against the biggest lovesick fool of them all. Felix snorts at his own musings, though it comes out rather close to a breathless laugh. “Well,” Felix says dryly, “aren't *you* lucky, then.”

Dimitri's fingers squeeze Felix's between them, so stubbornly loving as he says sincerely, “I am.”

Felix still feels like he's been kicked in the gut whenever Dimitri admits to it so easily, so effortlessly, like loving him isn't a difficult task -

It must be the spring silliness that affects him, for Felix's eyes threaten to tear up right then and his face heats up at that more than it does at Dimitri's sappiness. Then the heat grows further when Dimitri leans down to kiss his shoulder, at a scar left behind years ago by a wide swing of an Imperial spear, and turns their hands until palm is pressed against palm.



Felix lifts their hands up, until the back of Dimitri's hand is under his lips. "You big sap," he mutters against the rough, dry skin. "It's too early for that."

Dimitri's laugh tickles over Felix's pulse point. "I'm inclined to disagree, beloved."



When Dimitri turns him around, Felix sees no point in resisting; even less reason to do so when Dimitri presses their lips together in a long, closed-lipped kiss that has Felix relaxing and melting into the king-sized bed once more.

He's willing to overlook the morning breath. It's not like he's staying in this bed for much longer, anyway.

So he tells himself, just as a songbird right outside the king's chambers begins singing anew, unknowingly offering cheerful music for a sweet morning moment between the King of Faerghus and his advisor and lover.



--
Writer - saunatonnttu / @saunatonnttuija
Artist - Dids / @Didscodance

hearts

Writer - whisk / @luciel_hm

Artist - sirane / @dreamdropdorks (Tumblr)



Since Duscour, Felix has imagined Dimitri's heart as a frail thing; marred with scars, angry veins charred with the flame of his hatred. A pitiful remnant of what had once been beautiful. As good as dead.

But right now, as they stand in front of his father's makeshift grave - as Dimitri holds out his heart to him - Felix realizes he is both right and wrong.

"I have selfishly held onto both our hearts for too long," Dimitri takes his hand and puts his heart on Felix's palm. It pulses, once, twice, strong and so very much *alive* despite everything. "It's time you had mine in return."

It's an apology. A promise of returned affection. And then Dimitri's fragile, resilient heart is beating inside Felix's once empty ribcage, and he thinks of the time he had given his own away to Dimitri when they were children: bright, young, free.

shockingly enough

It is no secret that the people of Fodlan love crest-bearing children.

Not to say that they would say no to a child if they were to be born without a crest—any child is a blessing, a sweet gift to a family, a parent’s greatest joy, etc. etc.—but rather, if you were to propose to Fodlan nobles that they could modify their crest-less children into a crest-bearing child with a relatively simple, moderately painful, undoubtedly inhumane procedure—you would have an alarming number of takers.

This is only said slightly in jest.

Still, it is not as if having a crest-bearing child is an unendingly gratifying experience. Children with minor crests are known to be a handful—given that crests have a tendency to activate upon the manifestation and expression of strong emotions, it isn’t unheard of for crest-bearing children to cry and shatter rows of glasses, for them to laugh while playing and suddenly sprout flowers underfoot. The worst, people would usually say, are the ones gifted with fire affinity, who are known at times to burn down whole rooms with the force of their temper tantrums.

Crest-bearing children are exceptionally coveted for their rarity and specialness, but the prospect of raising them give all expecting parents the faintest hint of dread. In this way—even among crest-bearing children—Felix is an interesting case. There is no marker for identifying when a baby holds a major crest. Even the Fraldariuses aren’t sure of when and how exactly it was discovered—and over time, the story

has changed so extremely in its many variations that there is no certain answer.

Some claim that they had known from the moment that Felix was born to the world, when there were accompanying bursts of electric discharge so sudden and powerful that all nearby curtains caught on fire. Others state that they knew when his older brother Glenn, still young and naive at the time, had screamed that his little brother was a possessed, demonic beast—and that if it was enough to scare a child with a minor crest, then surely it was something quite unique.

It is not worth discussing the details. Regardless, as a result of his major crest, Felix is disciplined more carefully.

Children with minor crests are already taught from youth to manage their emotions—Dimitri remembers learning this lesson himself from his mother and his nannies. Felix is given even stricter lessons on how to notice and manage his feelings, how to take deep breaths to calm down if he feels himself getting worked up to where his crest activates outside of his control.

This is likely why, for as long as Dimitri remembers, Felix has always had the best regulation of his crest ability compared to others. Or he was much better than Dimitri at least, who had never quite gotten the hang of it and would easily grow anxious enough to snap chairs in half. This incredible discipline lasted Felix well even throughout the war—even when he was snapping at Dimitri, when he was fighting for his life on the battlefield, when old friends and classmates died in front of them—he never fully lost control.

This is why Dimitri is caught off guard when he reaches over in the middle of a council meeting to fondly rest a hand on Felix's knee under the table and immediately—immediately—yelps in surprise.

The surprise comes from three separate events, happening so fast that Dimitri's brain recognizes it as one.

The first—Felix giving a violent jolt in his seat, large enough to where his leg slams up against the bottom of the table with a ferocity that has him hissing.

The second—a harsh shock of electricity so painful that it ricochets all the way up Dimitri's arm and makes his head fuzzy.

The final—a shower of electric discharge from Felix that sparks up wildly enough to catch on a few paper reports on the table, setting them aflame with a gusto that quickly catches on the wood table itself.

It is a complete disaster. As castle staff rushes in to douse out the fire with buckets of water, Felix jumps out of his seat. He very nearly makes it out the door before Dimi-



tri realizes what he's attempting and manages to follow just in time, tripping on the corner of his chair in the process.

"Felix, are you—?" he asks, catching the heavy door just as it's closing and pushing it open enough for him to slip out behind Felix.

Felix continues down the hall at a brisk pace.

"I'm fine."

"Really? Because I've never seen you—"

"I'm fine."

For an adult noble, an accidental crest activation has about the same gravity as a toddler wetting the bed. Dimitri regards this incident with the solemnity it deserves.

Felix makes it halfway down the hall before stopping in the middle of a step and looking around, as if checking to see if anyone is watching. Dimitri suddenly finds himself being dragged into a random room to their right by an iron-tight grip on his forearm, one that he's never been in before. After Felix throws open the curtains, he can tell it's a sitting room.

The light is harsh today, as the snow from the night prior amplifies the sunlight into a searing, cold burn. Dimitri is left blinking, trying to adjust to the sudden brightness while Felix starts to pace on the carpet.

"Felix. I'm very sorry for that, I didn't realize that it would catch you off guard—"

"I'm never caught off guard," Felix says reflexively. He makes a pinched face, like he's just bitten into a lemon. "That wasn't off guard—that was—I don't know what that was."

"It seemed like your crest. Which—"

"I know it was my crest."

"Yes." Dimitri pauses, expecting Felix to continue, but Felix does nothing except turn and stalk towards the other side of the room. "Well. I have to say that I'm very surprised, I don't believe I've seen you accidentally activate your crest since we were—oh...perhaps since we were children."

"That's because I haven't," Felix mutters. He paces faster.

Dimitri hums and continues tracking Felix with his eyes, an act that is admittedly beginning to feel tiring.

"Perhaps it's the contact?"

"I don't freak out every time someone touches me."

"I did surprise you."

Felix shakes his head. He is practically clearing the room in a light jog at this point.

"I'm never caught off guard," Felix repeats. Dimitri starts to think off in another direction.

Their relationship—if what they were beginning to slide into could be called a romantic relationship—is still in its inception. He's unsure of how much experience Felix has with these sorts of romantic gestures, but at least speaking for himself, there is nothing outside of the sparse and very unfortunate paired outings that Sylvain had dragged him off to during their monastery days that Dimitri can count towards romantic experience. It amplifies every little act that he does with Felix—the degree of happiness that Dimitri has in doing them with him.

"Perhaps it's the affection?" Dimitri asks, tentatively.

Felix's toe catches in the corner of the carpet and he stumbles.

"What."

"The affection," Dimitri repeats, louder in case if he hadn't heard the first time. "My affection for you."

"It's not the affection," Felix says, stuttering over the last word.

"Hmm." There is something funny happening with Felix's face, to where it's starting to pinch again. Dimitri finds it endearing. "It may not be."

"It's not."

Dimitri nods.

"It's not," Felix repeats, with feeling.

"I agree." Felix does not look convinced, so Dimitri nods emphatically. "I am agreeing with you."

This only seems to make him more upset.

“I wouldn’t be so easily overwhelmed by something like aff—something like romantic sentiment.”

This is starting to feel confusingly personal. Dimitri isn’t sure where he slots into this conversation anymore. He’s not entirely convinced, but he supposes there’s no way they could figure out the actual source of Felix’s loss of control.

“I understand,” is all he can bring himself to say.

Felix nods, quick. He clasps his hands behind his back, turns back to the window. Then pivots and glances off to the fireplace to the far end of the room. He scratches at the side of his thumb with a fingernail.

This is an interesting sight. Felix is not the type to fidget. It’s one of the many tendencies that they try to train out of noble children in their youth, and Felix trained very well.

“Are you concerned about the other lords?” Dimitri asks.

Felix shakes his head. His fingernail digs in a little further.

“Felix?”

Felix seems to freeze up, considering something, before he acts all at once and very quickly.

He grabs Dimitri by the sides of his arms and moves him, bodily, until they’re facing each other. It takes Dimitri back to when they would practice grappling techniques, back when they all sparred regularly with each other during their monastery days. Indeed, there’s something to Felix’s face that makes it look like he’s squaring up for something grievous.

“Oh. You really don’t need to push yourself if you don’t want to. You have nothing to prove with me.”

“I know that.”

Felix’s ears are bright red, dark enough in color that Dimitri is convinced he’d be able to feel the warmth if he reached over. Dimitri is feeling quite warm, himself. The look in Felix’s eyes—of vague terror—confirms this.

“I’m going to kiss you,” Felix explains, “And then we’ll use that as proof to see if what happened earlier is due to the affection.”

“Okay,” Dimitri says, because there isn’t much else to say to that.

This is new for them. They haven’t kissed as of yet. When Felix puts it like this, it sounds very weighty of an event. Dimitri feels that he is still not entirely convinced that this is happening. He wonders if it would be too obvious if he reached over to pinch himself.

They stare at each other for a moment longer.

“You’re going to have to lean down,” Felix says, through grit teeth.

The implication of that statement, along with Felix’s less-than-amused expression, makes Dimitri lean in a little too quickly. His forehead bumps against Felix’s just hard enough that he feels a little bit of pain—but no shock.

Felix seems to realize this as well, which only makes his face darken even more.

“If this is actually it,” Dimitri hears him muttering, “If this is actually it...” Felix glances back to him. From this very close distance, the gold of his eyes looks quite stunning. “Close your eye.”

Dimitri obeys.

He’s pretty sure that he stops breathing, too, up until the moment that he feels something very soft press against his lips.

He does manage to register, in the back corner of his mind, that there is no electric shock this time. This realization is quite small and insignificant to him in the moment, considering the massive, sweeping wave of affection that swells in his chest. For that reason, it’s actually quite instinctual what he does next—turns his face just slightly, kissing Felix back.

It’s like kissing a thunderbolt. He blacks out blissfully.

Dimitri isn’t sure how long it is until he wakes up from his stunned state. When he comes to he finds himself sitting on the ground, staring off blankly in front of him, his hand being held much too tightly by a very, very angry Felix next to him. The first thing that Dimitri thinks, consciously, is that it’s quite cute that his ears are still bright red.



“Well, I guess that’s that,” Felix says, livid.

It is the affection, Dimitri realizes—but is wise enough to not share it out loud.

--

Writer - Yao / @aphrodi

Artist - Jaime V / @vermilleons



As they Professed their Grief

They couldn't bury Rodrigue on Fraldarius grounds. The first Duke Fraldarius who could not be brought home in memory. Felix couldn't even mourn. Not properly at least, there was still a war on. And they just got Dimitri back, after all. Ostensibly, Rodrigue's death had been for good. Felix wanted to retch. For good. As if a death could be good. He'd wished for Rodrigue's death before, of course he had, but not like this. In fact, Felix wasn't sure he wanted him to die at all. Just to realize what he'd done wrong. The child he'd left behind. Like Rodrigue had only ever had one son. One son, and one wayward mistake. A good death. He'd heard about it since he was a child, that it was noble to die in the service of your king. Like Glenn had. Like Rodrigue had. Like Felix was expected to, one day. He wanted to scream. He wanted to destroy something, to fight, to dismantle this entire stupid *fucking* system where fighting, where dying, where these constant battles and wars were considered noble. Death in battle was something to be aspired to. Leaving families behind to serve, to fight and kill and die in the service of the Kingdom. No right or wrong, just the will of the king.

They buried Rodrigue in Garreg Mach. Felix couldn't bring himself to attend the small service they managed to scrape together, he couldn't listen to their platitudes. Couldn't listen to Dimitri, that boar, praising Rodrigue, calling him a second father, admirable, a hero. A hero to who? Certainly not to the family he left behind to pick up the pieces when they lost Glenn. He couldn't stand to see their tears, to hear all the people who claimed to be sorry for his loss. He'd lost Rodrigue a long time ago.

So instead he sat in his old dormitory room, knees tugged to his chest and he felt like a child again, hopelessly wondering if there was such a thing as an afterlife, and if he would see his father in it. His mother, Glenn, everyone he'd lost. If he would see the man Dimitri used to be. If it would be better than this hollow emptiness that crept into his chest, his still beating heart. It pulsed in his head, *thump thump thump* with each beat reminding him that he had lived, that he hated it, that he had lived, he

had to be the one to survive and play witness to all this. Hated biting the tears back, he couldn't be that whining child anymore, expecting to be taken care of, to have his emotions placated.

They buried Rodrigue in the pouring rain, appropriate. Of course the skies would open for him, the Goddess herself would shed a tear for the man who played father to the orphaned king of Faerghus and neglect to play father to his own son. Kings were more important. *Serve your king, like a true knight. Serve your king to the neglect of all else.* He bit back tears so hard he bit into his lip, tasted blood and salt, proof he couldn't hold back anymore. Coughed, curled on his side, and let the tears come.

"Felix?"

Typical boar, he couldn't even be bothered to knock. Like he was entitled to this place, to everything that was Felix.

"Felix, we missed you at the service."

He couldn't respond, curled away from the sound of the boar's voice. He didn't need to be berated for missing a funeral service for a man he had hated.

"Are you, a- are you crying?" He felt Dimitri's hand fall to his shoulder, and Felix flinched instinctively, broke on a small, weak sob.

"Fe, please." Dimitri's voice was as close to begging as he had heard since before Dusc, before the boar.

"Go." Felix forced. He couldn't face the king like this. "Let me be."

Instead, he felt a solid, heavy weight on the edge of his bed, the boar sitting. Like he belonged there, like he could just take that space. A rough hand brushed through Felix's hair, soothing, gentle touches.

This wasn't a boar. This was Dima, his Dima, his childhood best friend, coaxing him through another juvenile crying fit. Felix only cried harder, because he knew it couldn't last. Eventually he would go back to being the king, the boar, the beast that made bile rise in Felix's throat and hate spew from his lips.

"Please go." He wished he didn't have to send Dima away.

"Fe, let me stay. Let me help you."

Please, please stay, he wished he could cry, wished he could bring himself to turn and throw his arms around Dimitri and hold on until everything else faded from his

senses. *Don't ever leave me again. Don't leave me with the boar. Stay, Dima, stay. I need you.*

But he couldn't bring the words to his lips. Too much sat between them, even in his closeness, a great chasm of vitriol and blood spilled that sprawled endless and unfathomable between them.

"I'm sorry, Felix. I should have done more. I should have been there." Dimitri started, still touching, gentle, to his shoulder. "I should have been able to save him. Anyone. Felix, dear Felix I'm scared I failed you one too many times."

Felix curled away from him. From his touch, from his words. "You didn't fail me. I'm still here."

He felt movement again, and then Dimitri's arms around him. Felix didn't have it in him to struggle against the hold. He just moved against Dimitri, holding himself, let his head rest against the solid weight of his chest and tried to breathe. Tried. It came in chokes and heaves, the pathetic coughs he used to get as a child when he cried too hard. Dimitri's hand was a solid weight against his back, his body warm and so, so, achingly alive. Everything Felix thought he wasn't anymore.

"I still feel it's my fault." Dimitri mumbled, his face tucked against Felix, he could feel Dimitri's warm breath. "Too many have died trying to save me."

"They thought you were worth saving." Felix tried to look for kindness. "They thought you were a worthy king. Worth dying for."

"And you, Felix? Do you think I am a worthy king?"

He didn't answer. Just held on to Dimitri. He was worth holding on to, he could give him that much. Worth living for. No, no, not worth dying for. Worth living for, worth fighting for. Worth the strength that Felix cultivated, strength so that no one had to die, especially not his king. Maybe he was a worthy king, but Felix didn't have the words. He felt the tears encroaching again, bunched his hands in Dimitri's shirt.

And Dimitri held him, stroked his hair, tried to soothe him. Pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

Felix broke under the kindness he was being offered. The tears came back, and he tucked his entire slim body into Dimitri, letting the king's strength hold him up and he cried a wet stain into his shirt. He couldn't breathe. And Dimitri kissed the top of his head again, rubbed his back.

"You can cry, Fe. It's okay. I'm here."



“You’re here.” Felix echoed, and he couldn’t find the usual spite in his voice. He couldn’t hate Dimitri, not then. He couldn’t breathe under this kindness, the care, the affection. He sobbed, felt his hands tightening in Dimitri’s shirt, he couldn’t find any more words, just echoed, “You’re here, you’re here.”

He was the only one who stayed. A constant, even when it was just the boar, he was there. He called Felix by name, offered him more kindness than anyone ever had. He looked up to Dimitri, through his tears, blinked them back to study that glistening blue eye, all the affection behind it.

He had to ask for one more thing.

But there were no words to ask. Nothing he could say that would make what he was about to do, what was bubbling up inside of him, okay. He had to be prepared to lose everything.

Well, everything else. Everything he had left. And there wasn’t much.

He slipped his hand to cradle the back of Dimitri’s head, and as careful as he could, as careful as his rough exterior would allow, he kissed him. Kissed the king of Faer-

ghus, soft against his even softer lips. Kissed him despite the tears that streamed down both their cheeks, despite the fact that they held too hard, despite the fact that Felix wanted to scream, to keep screaming, to hate and rage and drive everyone away so he didn’t have to lose anything else.

Dimitri kissed him back. Traced his hand into Felix’s hair, the other around his waist, and kissed him. Kissed him again, and again, and again. Kissed his lips, his forehead, his cheeks, back to his lips.

“Felix, my Felix, my love, my only love.” Dimitri mumbled between each kiss. “I’m here.”

--

Writer - Addy / @AddyTepes

Artist - Xiao Xiao / @Xiao_Xiao_Nii

Thank you

Hi everyone! Thank you so much for reading the community project digital zine. The passion and community of the dimilix fandom has blown me away this past half year. I am so glad to be a part of it and to be able to organize this amazing project. I really think our fandom is filled with some of the most talented writers and artists I've seen, so I'm really glad this project can be a tribute to that. Generally I only interact with the artist side of fandom... I actually rarely read fic. But that's completely not the case with dimilix and that's partly why I was inspired to make this. Thank you again and again for your support. And of course, thank you to my wonderful co-organizer Elzie for being awesome and helpful in navigating the fic and writing portion of this project.

-- Fai

To everyone who has lent their support to this project: I can't thank you enough. To our creators, thank you for your hard work on your submissions. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have worked with so many skilled and passionate people, and I look forward to seeing what your talent will produce in the months and years to come. To our readers, thank you for your time and your attention, as always. Your support for the things you love is what keeps the spark alive. And to everyone, once more -- thank you for loving Dimilix!

-- Elzie

susie | Elle
Ambirdoodles | Ash
sumaru | pittoo
Bhai | cheshire
Bringmemisery | Shidreamin
V | Rhyse
chickentocino | HapSky
Sarah | Aeryx
Bianca | KANA
Vic | Leo
Elayna | Sica
Takeshi | TK
Izumi | QuillFeathers
Jano | Rook
nu | DimensionSlip
Yusukelogist | Kit
eman | rime
Toastie the Know | Maria
Jerome | Rosa
magepaw | Miyu
Mikan | Emma
minophisch | Ostodvandi
juju | Ash
saunatonnttu | Dids
sirane | whisk
Jaime V | Yao
Xiao Xiao | Addy

