

you and i are friends of empty graves

by iztopher

Te'ijal's memory is not what she'd like it to be. Centuries dull the details, and what's left over isn't enough for her. She talks to Galahad about it.

Title from Canary in a Coal Mine by the Crane Wives.

Inspiration re: Galahad keeping notes from "that which hunts on a lonely hill" by snowsheba and the last chapter of "Life in Sedona" by EsmeAmelia.

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As the after party to Edward and Mel's coronation slowly settles further in the distance, and Te'ijal and Galahad make their way towards Pemberly Keep, Te'ijal reflects how fully exhausted she feels. It's a tiredness that stretches further than the last couple weeks of travel and into the last few years of her life. She had hoped becoming a vampire again would reinvigorate her, and it has, but attending a royal coronation merely drives home how sick she is of smiling in the right way and having to "choose her words carefully" to not startle or confuse the people around her. She tries not to think about how her way back home might also be less-than-welcome, how her friends in Ghed'ahre are also less than receptive to the first words that stumble out of her mouth.

So for now it's nice to be outside in the dark, clear and vivid as it always should have been to her, alone save for Galahad. In the night air, with no strangers around, she can breathe easy. And she's enjoying walking close enough to her husband to knock against his armor when she sways her arm in too drastic an arc, although he's yet to take her bait.

"Thais has changed its coronation traditions," Galahad says instead. "It was previously held simultaneously with the royal wedding."

She can't tell if he's talking to her or not, but she treats him like he is. "Was it, now?" She knows her memory can be fuzzy, and the details of both

events had blended together over the years, but she could swear she remembers Elini in two different gowns, Galahad standing by her for one and avoiding her for the other. Surely she had stayed in Thais long enough to attend both separately.

"Yes," he says, and she can *hear* the process of it dawning on him. "You don't remember."

"Correct," she answers, and she doesn't bother stopping her tone from souring. She's surely not *pleased* with it - if remembering her first daylight visit to the Overworld in crystal clarity was her choice, she would in a heartbeat. "It was such a long time ago."

For a moment, Galahad stops and frowns at her. This is normal behavior for him, so it takes Te'ijal a second to register it as the question he intends.

She sighs. "I remember meeting you, my tasty, and everything which unfolded between us, and I remember Elini and Lars and Rhen and- well, all of them. It's just... less clear than I'd like it to be." The specifics of the conversations she had with Lars. The names of Elini's husbands. Whether Dameon braided his beard or just kept a band tightened around it. For the first few decades, she could still remember the pressure of the first time Elini hugged her. It's all been long lost to time now. She chews on her lower lip thoughtfully, appreciating the return of the pressure of her fangs. "The details faded over time."

"You've never given me any indication of this before."

"Well, crumpet, it seemed silly to assume you'd be inclined to talk me through it." They'd talked about their old friends before, but no matter how comforting those discussions were to Te'ijal, her husband was never going to deliberately console her. She knew better than to seek him out when that was what she needed, and so instead she stewed in it alone.

Galahad looks away from her, straight ahead down the path, and starts walking again. It feels pointed, but not malicious. "I see. It upsets you."

"Yes." She walks next to him awkwardly in the silence that follows. She knows better than to expect a comforting word or a hand on her shoulder, but she can't help but find the quiet a little cold. "Can you really blame me?"

"No." He waits, then adds, "You warned me, once, early on, that vampires tend to forget their human lives. Perhaps you didn't intend it as a warning, but I certainly took it as such. I'm surprised you struggle with it, having

always been a vampire."

"Husband, there is only so much room inside my memory. And I waste it on fairytales and miscellaneous historical facts without even trying." There were entire books she could recite nearly by heart, and entire decades of her life gone beyond vague, fuzzy recollections. Te'ijal heaves a frustrated exhale. "You *have* a human life to forget. How are you doing well enough to judge?"

He scoffs. "No judgement intended, wife. I've certainly accumulated my own excess knowledge. In all likelihood I could write a book on Sedonan military history, and *not* from personal experience." He pauses. "The thought of forgetting my humanity made me feel ill, so I did everything in my power to prevent it. I kept journals, wrote down names, things that help me connect the corresponding faces."

The idea that it could be that simple is as embarrassing as it is groundbreaking to her. She'd attempted journaling occasionally in her time, but never with any conviction or consistency, and certainly not as a supplemental history guide. She wasn't actually convinced she could do it if she tried, but it certainly seemed worth trying. "And you just... read these?"

"On occasion." Galahad shrugs. "When I start to falter on something I feel I shouldn't."

The walk through the noble district wasn't particularly long, so before Te'ijal could press her luck on asking what sort of thing *he* struggled with, they were at the door to the manor. She fished the key out of her bag and opened the door, let the silence settle. It had been Te'ijal's choice to return here instead of extending their stay in the royal suites. They'd spent a lot of time here, and she wanted to spend time somewhere familiar where she could breathe without running into a dozen strangers down the hall. Entering it now, she almost regrets the decision. It's never been this quiet before, and it feels empty with just the two of them.

She wants to fill it with what little noise she can, so she follows her winding brain to a new stop in their conversation. "When you were... away, the prince and the moth and I stumbled upon an old temple in the Northern Arishta Isle. It was familiar to me. It belonged to someone we knew, briefly, that we met traveling with Rhen. I can remember what she looked like: dark brown skin, vivid purple hair, warm eyes. I... I remember that she guarded over wisdom. I called it a Guardian Temple, for the children. But I do not recall her name, or her true title."

Galahad's brow furrows. "Are you asking me?"

"Well, husband, it seems as though you might know."

His face relaxes, and he steps to the small table beside the sofa to take a match and light the lamp on it before sitting down. It's completely unnecessary for them both, but he had just gotten back in the habit of needing to, and she knows he would have wanted to regardless. "Her name was Daena. She was a druid, although that word has taken on a different meaning since, if the group we encountered in Naylith is of any indication."

Yes, Daena. Druids. Dameon was the sun *druid*, she remembers now.

"You've taught yourself that with your notes?"

He stiffens for a moment. "Not her. She made an impression. She was the first druid whose soul we rescued, you know, after you had taken mine."

"Oh."

"Indeed. I suppose you could say I was jealous. I wanted nothing more than to slay the demon which held my soul captive, after all, but unfortunately for me she had somehow landed on the right side of things and so I was not allowed."

Te'ijal looks at him, and he makes no effort to glance back at her, so she walks behind him and drums a couple fingers across his pauldron while she does for good measure. "Well, all's well that ends well, isn't it?"

He lets her sit in her discomfort for a moment before replying, a gesture which Te'ijal understands logically is fair but finds no less aggravating for it. "This is hardly the ending of anything, serpent spawn. Just more things to remember."

She sighs. He's right, she knows, and it weighs on her uncomfortably. She finishes her loop to sit down on a chair nearby the couch, her elbows on her knees and chin in her hands. "So you remember all of the druids." The word feels familiar, right, to say. She likes that.

"Certainly." Galahad counts casually on his fingers. "Daena, Wisdom. Dameon, Sun. Talia, Dreams—"

"Wait! Stop." Te'ijal raises her hand on reflex, but she's not sure he catches it. "Will you... let me do the others?"

He turns to regard her quizzically. "You think you can?"

"Tell me their domains, I'll tell you their names. I should be able to do that."

"Very well. Darkness?"

She smiles. He lasted longer than the others, staying in Ghed'ahre for decades after leaving his post. "Rashnu."

"Time?"

"Ah..."

Te'ijal stumbles through the list, somewhat hoping for coaxing or coaching or encouragement and getting none of it. When she falters on the syllables of a name, Galahad's expression stays steady, betraying no indication whether she's gotten it right or wrong. He pays no effort to include any gentleness when he tells her she's misspoke, just glances away and waits for a new reply.

She remembers Vata with difficulty, and Eithera with ease. Armaiti, the first druid she helped rescue, falls somewhere in between. She gives up on Vohu Mana, and even though she only met them once or twice, it troubles her.

"My memory is not as clear as I would like it to be."

"It takes practice, wife. It's like a muscle, you have to stretch it."

"By grasping at straws I can't recall?"

"Have you considered reading a history book? I've added plenty to your shelves over the years."

She resists the urge to roll her eyes at him. "Yes, thank you, husband, but I do already do that. It will help with the things other people think are important, but what about the things I do? The things we do? They're not immune." Te'ijal frowns. "Even though they should be, even though I wish they were. I'm not like you, I didn't have the foresight to keep track of it before it was too late."

"Well, they say there's no time like the present. You have a few years to catch up on now." He pauses, and she can practically feel him reading her face. She suspects it isn't difficult to tell she's unhappy. He offers awkwardly, "since we'll be returning to Ghed'ahre, I could... read some of my notes to you."

It's unlike her to turn down an opportunity to talk with him, but the hesitation in his voice suggests she owes him an out. "You could also lend them to me to read myself. I'm sure it would be less trouble, my duckling."

Galahad sighs. "Unfortunately, no. It took me quite some time to learn to separate my personal notes from my historical ones. They are not all unbiased."

Te'ijal's eyes shoot wide open. Her hands fly to her thighs on reflex, almost clapping in excitement. "You keep a *diary*!"

"I do not, demon." He corrects her firmly, glaring at her. "I write down memories I would care not to forget, and, when particularly frustrated, the things you do which irritate me."

"You don't seem to understand what a diary is," she muses. "That sounds right to me."

"If that helps you understand why you can't read it, then fine, I keep a diary. Would you like to hear my notes or not?"

Te'ijal thinks about sitting back home in Ghed'ahre, not unlike this, across from him, or maybe next to him on the sofa so she can be closer and Galahad can avoid her eyes. Maybe they'll be bickering then, too. Most likely. She imagines listening to his voice drone on a list of names she can't remember until she does again, interjecting the related stories as they come back to her. She thinks about spending a few more days in the Overworld, after all, for the sake of having more to remember, and sinks into her chair comfortably. "I think I'd like it quite a bit."