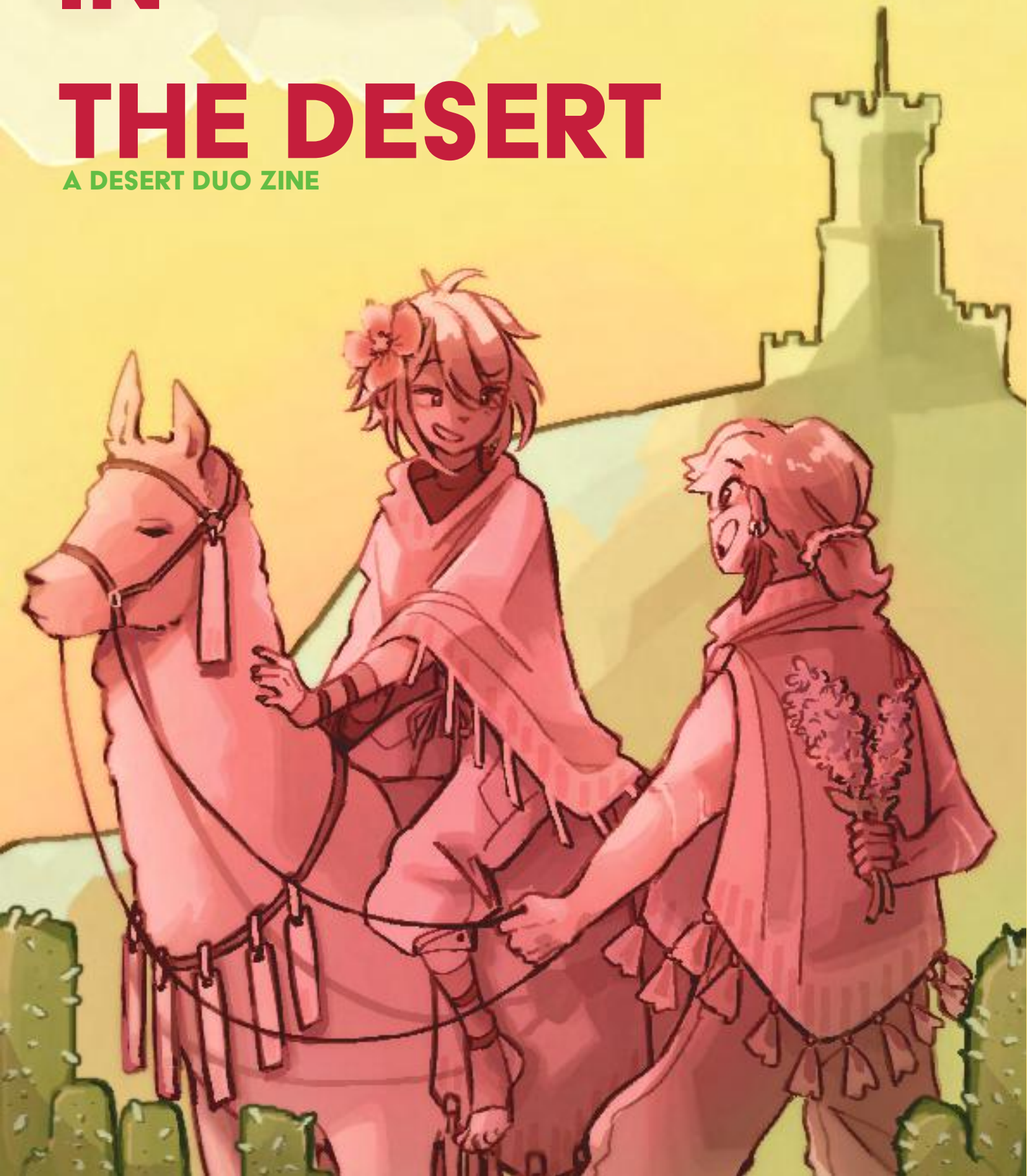


FLOWERS IN THE DESERT

A DESERT DUO ZINE



FOREWORD

HELLO EVERYONE, AND THANK YOU FOR
DOWNLOADING THIS ZINE!
MONTHS OF HARD WORK ARE REFLECTED IN
THESE PAGES, EVERYONES LOVE FOR THESE
CHARACTERS CLEAR IN THE AMAZING ART AND
WRITING THAT HAS BEEN CREATED
I HOPE YOU CAN ENJOY THIS FAN PROJECT AS
MUCH AS WE HAVE, AND THAT YOU MARVEL AT
EVERYONES CREATIONS JUST AS I DID

A VERY ESPECIAL THANK YOU TO ALL THE
PARTICIPANTS WHO GAVE THEIR 120% FOR THIS
PRROJECT TO BE AS AMAZING AS IT IS

FLOWERS IN THE DESERT: A DESERT DUO ZINE
IS A FAN PROJECT, BY FANS FOR FANS
WITH NO DIRECT ASSOCIATION TO CREATORS
GRIAN AND GOODTIMESWITHSCAR



Warning

Some of the works in this fanzine
may include themes
that could be
upsetting to the reader
such as Suicide,
derrealization & death

Viewer discretion
is adviced





Sakura Rides | Miss~Purrrrs

Scarland, the most magical place in Hermitcraft and where dreams came true, was gorgeous. Grian would happily admit that.

It was colourful, bright, happy. Everything that it was meant to be from the very moment the idea had been drawn up on paper. Scar had put a lot of work into the place and it showed in every block that was placed in the area with all the care in the world, and all the attention to detail that screamed dedication.

There was one singular problem that Grian would not admit to though, and that was that he didn't exactly like amusement parks, more specifically, he didn't like the rides.

The avian couldn't really narrow down what it was that he didn't like about rides, maybe it was the heights despite his bird-ness, maybe it was the speed despite how fast he himself moved, or maybe it was giving up control but that had come about in his teen years and he hadn't liked rides ever in his life.

But of course, Scar had put a lot of work into this place and Grian wasn't going to crush the man by declining an invitation to the opening day of the park when all the other Hermit's had already accepted and he lived right next to it.

Somehow that path of thinking had led to where he was now, standing in line at the overly large ferris wheel in the hot setting sun on aching feet with Scar next to him.

The brunette had a grip on his arm, not letting him run away like he clearly wanted to if the way his wings were puffed up slightly was anything to go by. Grian had been trying to not let his panic seep through, but he had been in a tizzy since Scar had found out that he hadn't been on any rides all day and became determined to get him on at least one before the day was over no matter how much he protested.

"Are you sure this thing is safe?" Grian asked with a kick to the solid and sturdy iron gate to show where the line was meant to go, refusing to look at Scar as the brunette shot him an unimpressed look. The gate hadn't moved at all against his enchanted Netherite bottomed boots.

"Yes." Scar said in a deadpan, trying and failing to catch Grian's avoiding purple eyes with his own forest green.

"Then why are we waiting? It's an empty ride and there is no one else in line but us." Grian forced a grin, checkmate.

"The carriage I wanted was in the last position, it had to be brought around again." Scar explained smugly.

Not checkmate.

"Oh look, here it comes now!" The taller man said overly cheerfully, pointing with a marred hand and directing the dirty blond's eyeline to a cat themed open carriage that was slotting into the loading zone.

Grian glared at the thing like it had personally offended him. "Joy." He said flatly.

"Oh come on, it won't be that bad, G." Scar said, looping his arm around Grian's shoulders and leading them into the open seating of the ride, doing up the seat belt and lifting his arms up for him as the metal safety bar came down over them. "I know you don't like rides, but I'll be here the whole time, nothing bad can happen when the founder of the park is with you."

"I don't think that redstone machinery cares about who's on the ride." Grian grumbled, his talion-like nails digging into the cushioned safety bar as the ride started to move. "We're going to die." He proclaimed quietly yet sternly as they were slowly lifted up.

Grian's wings tried to flare out as if to fly him away from the danger he thought he was in, but the small space between his back and the hard metal of the carriage stopped him from moving them. He didn't think he could get past the lap bar or the seat belt anyways so that plan was probably always going to fail from the start.

Scar looked at him at the movement, and huffed a bit with a small frown at the sight of the scared bird.

"Grian." He said softly, moving his scarred hand up to catch the avian's chin and carefully move his face. "Look at me, pretty bird." He directed, and smiled when royal purple eyes finally locked onto his green. "There he is."

"Scar." Grian whined again, tensing as his eyes briefly caught the sight of the shrinking ground below them as the ferris wheel slowly moved them up to the top.

"It's okay, Gri." Scar brought the avian's attention back to him. "Keep looking at me, you're completely safe with me."

Grian clearly didn't believe him, but still kept their eyes locked anyway.

Out of the corner of his eye, Scar caught a look at the world around them as the carriage approached the highest spot of the ride.

The sun was setting behind the castle, turning the sky around them brilliant shades of yellow and pink. It was warm up here too, but there was a slight breeze without all the buildings in the way to stop the wind.

With the breeze came a large swirl of cherry blossom petals, and it confused Scar for a moment before he remembered their little stunt with the Buttercups. He knew that cherry blossom trees could have a long reach in the wind, but this seemed almost as magical as he had intended the park to be in the first place.

Grian noticed his eyeline and reluctantly looked around them, eyes widening a bit in wonder at the sight of the colourful sunset and the flowers swirling in the air like dancing sugar plums.

“Y’know, this isn’t how I pictured it.” Scar said a bit absentmindedly, just as a way to keep Grian’s attention on him and not the ground. “I had this whole plan to get you up here and confess in the most romantic way I could think of, but if I had known you were scared of rides beforehand I would’ve gone with the picnic and bouquet idea Pearl gave me.”

“Confess?” Grian asked with a small bird-like head tilt, not needing the hand on his face to help keep his eyes on Scar anymore.

Now or never, Scar.

“I really love you, Grian, as more than a friend.” Scar started to ramble again. “And I know it’s a bit cliché to do this on a ferris wheel like a bad teen romcom, but it seemed so romantic in my head at the time, but you’re terrified and this isn’t working out at all.” The brunette took his hand away from Grian and hid his own face behind both of them. “We can just forget this happened, right? I get a do-over?”

One thing that Scar had failed to see during his ranting, was the way that Grian was calming down, his wings smoothing back out to then only puff up in something other than fright, something nice.

The avian chuckled quietly as a cherry blossom petal landed in Scar’s hair and he reached up to gently take it between his fingers.

“Scar.” He said, catching the man’s attention.

When the brunette looked at him, a little scared between his fingers, a stark contrast to how they started this ride, the avian smiled and used a small wisp of rarely seen purple magic to gather up a good amount of the sakura petals around them and weave them into a crown that was carefully placed on Scar’s head, the soft pink a lovely compliment to the dark brown strands.

Scar’s hands fully dropped as he stared up at the small amount of pretty pink he could see on his head in awe, and Grian quickly moved in until their lips were slotted together gently.

Scar froze for a moment in surprise, but quickly gathered himself and kissed back eagerly.

When they finally broke apart as the ride was starting its slow descent, Grian put their foreheads together softly.

“I won’t say that I’m pleased with your planning skills, but I like the outcome anyways.” He laughed brightly at Scar’s mock-angry little huff. “Next time you wanna woo me, listen to Pearl, okay?” He asked, and then didn’t give Scar time to confirm before their lips were back together again.

Grian was so caught up in trying his hardest to kiss the life out of Scar, that he didn’t even notice it when they reached the end of the ride, or when Scar gave the sign to go again in the middle of making out until they were back at the top and once again surrounded by the sunset and the cool breeze with many cherry blossom petals all over them like a warm pastel pink blanket.

The most magical place in Hermitcraft indeed, and where love-filled dreams most certainly came true.



Fallen Petals | MochiWrites

When Scar sits beside him, the only thing Grian can do is sigh softly. He doesn't offer a greeting or any kind of acknowledgement to his fellow hermit. He simply keeps his gaze trained on the setting sun in front of him. He pulls his knees closer to his chest, wings drawn shut against his back.

"This is the last place I expected to find you," Scar hums, taking his construction hat off of his head. He sets it aside, allowing for the wind to blow through his hair. Brown wisps the very edge of his vision, strands wavy with the flow of air.

"Scarland Castle is easily the best place on the server to watch the sun set." Grian doesn't look back at him. He doesn't tell Scar that it's a weak excuse to feel closer to him despite well — everything.

Scar chuckles quietly in return, and though Grian isn't looking at him, he can clearly picture the soft curves of his lips as he smiles. "Can't argue with you there! You've got an amayzin' view of the sun setting over the whole park. It's perfect."

It's the first time they've spoken since Secret Life.

His chest feels tight, uncomfortable. There's a heavy tension sitting between them, one laced with a deep and twisted history. He doesn't speak, in fact, he cannot bring himself to speak. He's not sure what Scar wants this time. Surely the man would've stopped chasing him by now, but perhaps Grian should know better.

The sky is pink, orange, and yellow, a truly beautiful mix of colors. Scar's right — the view of the sun setting over the park is perfectly perfect. It's almost like a painting, the way the colorful sky acts like the backdrop.

It reminds Grian of home from long ago. It seems so foreign now, all complicated beauty.

"Y'know, I thought I'd be prepared this time," Scar quietly says, cutting right through Grian's thoughts. "I had plenty of experience with being my own ally after Magical Mountain but hoo boy. Being the server villain? Now that was a challenge."

The reminder makes him wince, gaze flicking away.

Scar seems to fiddle with a button on the edge of his sleeve, still watching the sky. "Seems like you had fun though, teaming with Cleo and Etho. Cleo's a good ally," he notes, voice so light and pleased. His words hold no sharp edges, only undeserving softness.

"Scar..." Grian trails off, unable to find proper words to turn him away. He's tired of pushing this distance between them.

"I know, I know," Scar murmurs in return, shoulders slumping in defeat. "There's nothing for us to talk about, right?"

Grian's lips curl in sourness, the feathers of his wings laying flat against his back. "...yeah."

His response draws a tired sound from Scar. Grian doesn't offer anything more, no apology or explanation. He simply sits, silent.

"How did we get like this, G?" Scar asks after a moment, and Grian can hear it in his voice; how upset he is.

Grian tries not to flinch at the question. "Like what?"

"Like this," the man beside him emphasizes, gesturing between them. "We don't talk anymore. You've completely pushed me out! No matter what I do, we're just—" His voice breaks. "We're falling apart, Grian."

It kills Grian to hear the words spoken out loud.

"I didn't understand it at first," Scar continues, voice thick with his frustration, with his despair. "Something changed between us after the desert. You started to pull away from me."

Grian stiffens, going tense.

"I kept asking myself 'why?' Was it something I did? Was I the only one who held what we had in the desert close to my chest?" He chuckles dryly, "Seeing how easily you threw our first alliance away in Last Life... I really had to wonder."

No, no that isn't it. The words are trapped in Grian's throat, leaving him to do nothing except dig his fingers into the fabric of his pants. The desert meant something to me.

"Yet I loved you anyway," Scar softly continues, a wistful tone sitting over his words. "You kept trying to push me away, but I saw how much pain you were always in. I never understood it, and you never explained it." He sighs then, dropping his hands in his lap. Grian's own hand twitches with the urge to reach out and grab it. "I think sometime in Double Life I realized I was the reason you always looked like you were in pain."

Scar's quiet confession is like a knife right through Grian's heart. His chest explodes with a burning ache, leaving him to uncurl himself and look at Scar with some kind of desperation. "Scar—" he tries to speak, but the man turns to him with sad emerald eyes.

He reaches out to Grian, setting a hand against his cheek. "It's okay," he assures, brushing his thumb along his skin. "I didn't understand it at first. But now? Now I do."

It's like Grian's worst nightmare, he thinks. In front of him sits the Life Game's newest victor,

bearing a burden Grian never wished for him. Scar’s eyes hold an understanding that wasn’t there before, one that makes Grian want to shrivel up and hide.

“You never really win,” Scar states, expression crumbling as his hand falls away from Grian’s face. “Back then I thought you winning in the desert was a victory. I mean, you were the last man standing! And I was so proud of you! But it wasn’t a win, was it?”

Grian bites his lip, finding himself slowly shaking his head. “...it was a burden,” he quietly confesses, the murmur weak. “I was alone at the end with your blood on my hands.”

“I don’t feel like I’ve won anything, now that I’ve survived my own game.” Scar’s eyes are dark, murky with something akin to remorse. “I turned around and Pearl was gone. It was just me, completely alone.”

Hearing Scar speak, listening to his words, Grian finds himself shifting without a second thought. He finally allows himself to reach instead of push, bringing his arms out. He embraces Scar, holding him tightly against him. Scar doesn’t hesitate to wrap his arms around Grian in return, letting out a shaky breath.

“I hated every second of it. It was so silent.” Scar’s voice is muffled against Grian as he tightly clutches the material of Grian’s jumper, as if to keep him from disappearing. “It was so lonely, Grian. I felt terrible.”

“I know,” Grian mumbles, wrapping his wings around Scar. He holds him as close as he possibly can, until their heartbeats can become one, like they once were.

“I don’t know why it was me.”

“I know.”

“I feel horrible for surviving.”

“I know.”

“...I missed you.”

Grian’s lips wobble. He buries his face in Scar’s hair. “Scar...”

Fingers dig into the back of his jumper, rough and desperate to cling onto him. “You can’t keep pushing me away, not anymore.” Scar’s voice cracks as he speaks, thick with emotion. “For years I thought... I thought it was my fault. But I get it now, I know what it’s like now!”

Grian breathes a weak sigh, trembling and heavy as he shakes his head. “You don’t,” he mutters sadly. “I killed you, with my bare hands.” He pulls away slowly, tugging his hands back into his lap, as if he were burning Scar. As if he doesn’t deserve to touch him. “I was the reason you died when I lo—”

He chokes on the words.

“When,” Scar prompts quietly, licking his lips, “when you what, Grian?”

He can’t look at Scar, can’t face him. Yet something about Scar’s gentle and honey-coated voice brings Grian’s gaze up to meet him. “...when I love you.” It feels weird to say out loud, after everything. After what he’s done. “I felt sick, Scar. I destroyed the desert, I stained everything red. I took a victory I shouldn’t have gotten because it meant losing you.” He takes a breath in, “So you... you don’t entirely get it. Winning isn’t going to make you know what it’s like to kill the person you love and swore to protect.”

Grian sees the way Scar’s face crumbles, the way his eyes grow sad and empathetic. “Oh, Grian...” It’s Scar pulling Grian into him this time, and like it’s ingrained in his blood, Grian leans into him, following.

“I pushed you away to protect you from me, you idiot.” Grian clings to him tightly. “I tried to do everything I could to make you hate me so you’d stop coming back.” He buries his face in Scar’s shoulder. “I’m not good for you, Scar. I’m only going to hurt you, why can’t you understand that?”

Yet here he is, refusing to let Scar go.

“G...” Scar trails off, almost breathless. “What I understand, is that you’ve been carrying this for way too long.” He pulls back to force Grian to look at him. His gaze is tender, yet heartbroken, as he stares Grian’s pain right in the face. “I could never hate you, Grian, never in a million years! You’re... everything. I don’t need to be protected from you.” He gently brushes some of Grian’s hair out of his face, gaze softly somber. “I forgave you for everything a long time ago. I’m not giving up on you.”

Scar reaches for Grian’s hand, squeezing it in his own. “Your hands do so much more than hurt. You make me better. Let me prove it to you, okay?” He smiles softly. “You just need to let me in, let me choose for myself how I want to be with you.”

I don’t want to be lonely anymore.

The prospect of letting Scar in is terrifying. Grian’s spent so long pushing him out that he’s not sure he knows how to lower his walls and let Scar inside. But he wants to be there for Scar, too. He’s missed him just as much, if not more.

“I might hurt you again,” Grian warns him, because he’s scared of it. He’s so scared of tainting the beautiful person that Scar is.

Scar looks at him, green eyes bright, “And I trust you’ll be there to heal me, too.” He reaches for something behind him, where Grian can hear rustling noises. Seconds later, purple and red petals are filling his vision, but there’s something new.

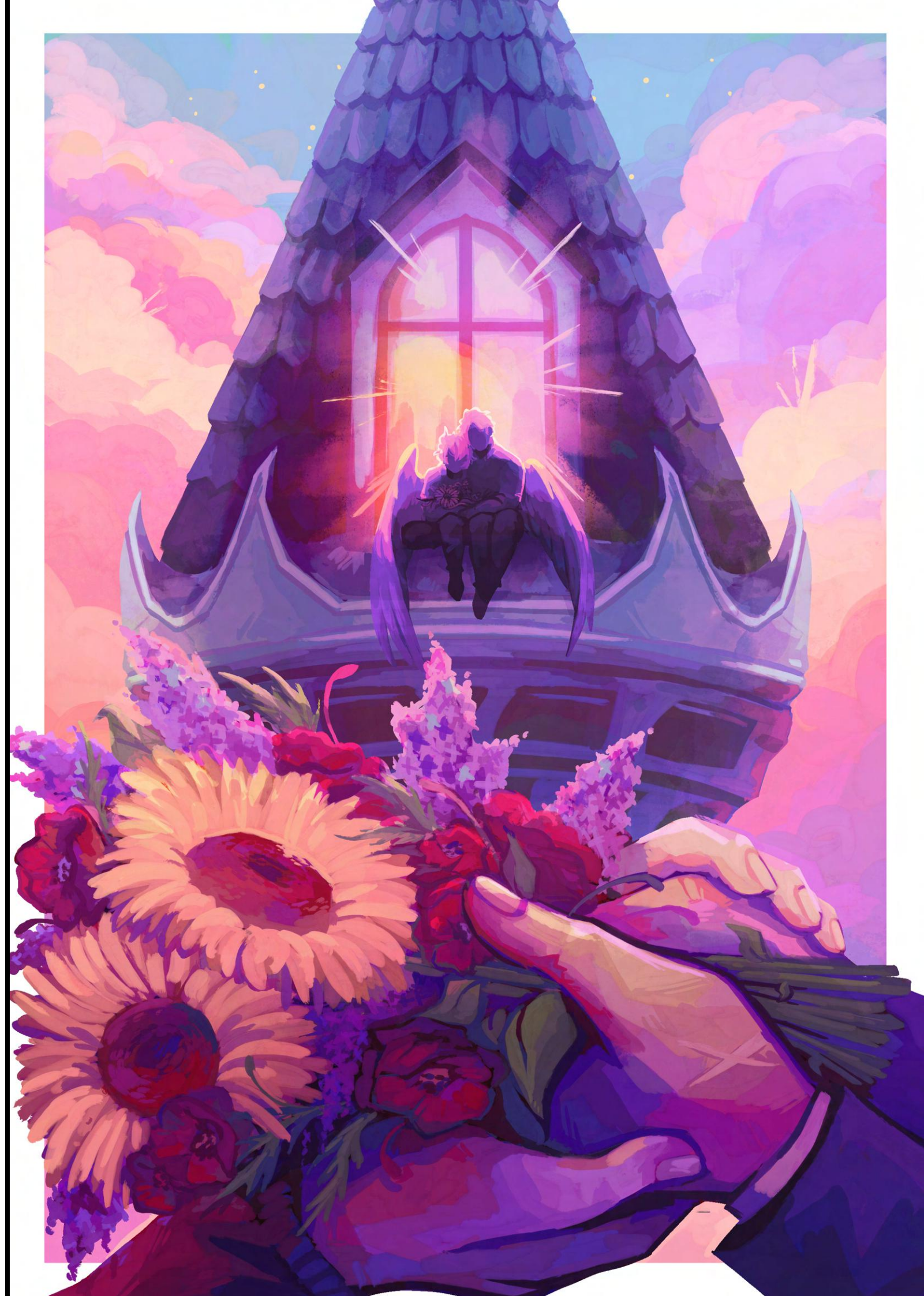
A sunflower is nestled between them.

Once more, Grian’s met with Scar’s bashful expression, so shy and nervous. His lips curl in a tiny smile, one that perfectly echoes the past. “So... can we still be partners?”

Grian’s eyes sting with tears that he refuses to let fall. Instead, he leans forward, placing his lips against Scar’s forehead. He takes the bundle of flowers from Scar’s hands, and finally voices the one word he’s had trapped behind a cage of iron. “Yes.”

As they shift back to face the setting sun, Grian pulls the gifted flowers into his lap, being careful with his precious cargo. He finds himself shyly moving to lean into Scar, resting against his shoulder. Scar makes a startled noise but smiles fondly, pressing his cheek on Grian’s head. He then reaches for Grian’s hand, holding it. In turn, Grian wraps a wing around him, keeping him close.

For the first time in a while, Grian truly does believe they’ll be okay.





Floral Tea | Unclecrickett

There had always been something particularly unsettling about mirrors, in Grian’s humble opinion. He found the longer he stared into his reflection, the worse it seemed: the more it twisted and contorted until it was something he could no longer recognize. Until it was a face that was not his own. It never meant anything, of course—purely his paranoia getting the better of him.

This mirror was different.

His newly bought house had a generally eerie feel to it. Especially the attic, because of course it does. In the attic, there was a mirror. Rusted gold that swerved and curled into elaborate shapes that framed the dusty glass. The reflection he saw through the glass was not his own. The first time he looked into this mirror he knew something was wrong. It was not his reflection staring back at him. It was something else; something looking at him through the glass.

Now Grian looks at his reflection with curiosity. He now knows what awaits him on the other side. A world entirely unlike his own. A place where up is down and left is right, where cats grin and rabbits cry. Grian had only scratched the surface—only daring to enter past the mirror with the guided hand of a madman.

Now here he was again, face to face with his reflection. His teeth pressed against his bottom lip anxiously, biting down on the tender skin until it was red. Slowly, the man pressed his palm to the hard glass. It didn’t take much, just a little push to make the hard surface of the glass distort, rippling like a pond. Grian had only done this one other time and the sensation was just as off putting. It took a little effort, but he could push himself through the glass. His world was warped and torn as he stepped through.

Grian blinked. His feet met fresh grass, and his head turned to look at his surroundings. Giant mushrooms of unrealistic sizes loomed over his head like a roof, shielding him from the bright sun. It was just as gorgeous as Grian remembered it.

He turned to face the mirror. Vines rooted in the soil were wrapped around the mirror as if embracing it. Grian saw himself in the reflection. He looked different. His clothes had been swapped for new ones, he still isn’t quite sure how it worked, but it had happened the last time as well. His red jumper was replaced with a purple vest, and a bright gem stood out at the collar of his shirt. His hair was a much brighter blond compared to his usually mousey brown. Grian looked nice.

He huffed and stepped away from the mirror, taking note of the area as he began his journey and found himself on a dirt path. Grian knew where he wanted to be, but had no clue how to get there. Each step he took was full of uncertainty. He had almost considered turning back until he spotted a fence with a slightly open gate. He knew that gate—a mixture of relief and dread washed over him.

The blonde pushed the gate door open and peeked inside. He spotted a familiar table placed in the middle of a flourishing garden. There were all sorts of sweet treats scattered across the table. Cakes, scones, cookies, juices, and teas with flowers spilling out of the cups, but the sweetest thing sat right at the end. A man sat at the farthest corner of the table. Grian knew his face well.

The boy stepped forward, only the noises of his footsteps finally alerting the man of his presence. “Oh!” The other jumped in his seat, startled by the noise. “Why— Oh, you scared me!” He raised a hand to fix the crooked red hat on his head. His frazzled expression shifted into something sweeter when he realized it was Grian who stepped through his gate. “Well, isn’t this a lovely surprise! I wasn’t expecting to see you again so soon!”

Grian had a small smile on his face. “It was getting boring in my dusty old apartment. Figured I could grace you with my presence.” He exclaimed, earning a laugh from his friend. “It’s nice to see you, Scar.”

Scar smiled bright like the sun. The blond never noticed how sharp his teeth were. “What are you still doing over there? Come, come! Have some tea.” He purred, beckoning Grian over. It worked, of course. The shorter man made his way over and sat right next to Scar. He observed as Scar took his hat off his head and shoved his hand inside it, rummaging around until he pulled out a kettle. He set his hat to the side, allowed his brown hair to flow freely, and poured himself a cup of tea. Soon after, he dug his hand into his hat. Grian raised an eyebrow as he watched the man rummage around until he pulled out an already-poured cup and placed it in front of Grian.

That was weird.

That was very weird.

The blond looked down at the tea. It was a golden brown with bright red flowers floating in the glass. He squinted, looking closer. After readjusting his glasses, he realized that he recognized the flowers. They were poppies.

A knot formed in his stomach.

He quickly glanced at Scar’s drink—Small delicate petals of lilacs swirled around the cup, drowning in the tea as Scar stirred sugar cubes into the drink. Scar’s eyes raised to meet Grian’s, to which he quickly looked away.

“You know, I’m starting to think you were anticipating my arrival,” Grian said simply.

Scar tilted his head. “What makes you say that?”

“Premade tea? Surely you must have been thinking of me.”

Scar let out a hearty laugh. “I’ll have you know I always keep a spare cup of tea with me!” He

huffed. “But maybe you're right. Just this once.” He quickly added, sipping at his tea sheepishly. Grian laughed with a little too much air.

Grian was no florist, but he knew what plants he could consume safely. Lilacs, what Scar had, were perfectly safe to consume.

Poppies, however, were deadly to humans.

Grian looked at his cup, poking at the petals with a spoon. Knowing that Scar had made this tea in advance worried him. Surely Scar wouldn't intentionally poison him, right? He couldn't be sure. While yes, he considered Scar a friend, Grian didn't trust the man as far as he could throw him. His piercing green eyes bore into Grian’s like a predator staring down its prey, ready to pounce.

“So, G, what do I owe the pleasure?” Scar asked after a beat of silence.

“Oh, um. Well, I don't know.” He muttered. “I just wanted to see you, I guess?”

Scar held his hands to his face and cooed. “Awh! Aren’t you sweet, Gri! You're warming my heart!”

He laughed lightly. “Don't take it too personally. I'm just curious.”

The brunette took a sip of his tea. “Curious?”

“I mean, yeah.” Grian nudged his cup. “About all of- this. How could I not be at least a little curious?” He waved his hand, motioning to the world around them. Scar hummed.

“Are you sure you just didn't miss me?” Scar asked teasingly.

Grian grinned. “You’d like that.”

“I would,” Scar replied.

There was a pause. The brunette brought his drink up to his lips, taking a sip with a pleased hum. A few lilac petals spilled out of the glass as he did so. “Your tea is getting cold.”

“I’ll drink it when I want.”

Scar snickered. “You're being a very rude guest.”

“Since when do you care about that?”

Scar furrowed his eyebrows. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Grian grinned. “I’ll tell you right now Scar, you have some of the worst manners I've ever

seen.”

“Wuh! Well- Why, I have amazing manners! I’m a gentleman!” Scar exclaimed, placing a hand on his chest.

“Absolutely not.”

“You're hurting my heart over here, G!” He sulked. “I let you into my garden, I give you tea, and this is how I'm treated! You're tearing me apart!”

“Stop being ridiculous.” Grian hummed.

Scar huffed and mixed his tea with a spoon. Grian rolled his eyes. The blond glanced down at his cup. He carefully wrapped his hands around the delicate glass. It was smooth to the touch. Scar was many things. Crazy, mad, weird, but Grian wasn't sure if malicious was one of them. He could feel Scar's eyes boring into him; expecting, waiting.

Scar was not an easy man to trust. He wasn't a man you should trust, period. But there was a side of Grian that wanted to trust him.

Idiotically, He picked up the cup—cold glass touching the soft skin of his lips. Scar was looking at him.

Grian felt like he was suffocating.

He didn't know if it was Scar’s eyes or the tea going down his throat that made him feel that way.









ShatteredBlueFlames

Scar is dead. He's not quite there yet, he can still see Grian standing over him, tears in his eyes and blood on his fists. He can still see the sunset, all the pinks and purples and the whites of clouds tinted in carnation red. But he's dead. He can't get up, can't speak to Grian, can't lift an apple to his mouth or pour a healing potion down his throat.

Grian might be able to, he thinks. He's not sure if it would do anything, if it would somehow bring him back, or if it would just go to waste. His wings are uncomfortable, squished against the sand. Grian's saying... something. Scar can't hear him, can't hear much of anything. He can hear whispers, he can hear words but not what they are, he thinks he recognizes the voices. He doesn't try to match them to faces.

Grian is holding him, he doesn't know if he knows that Scar is still alive-but-not, or if he would be doing this even if the vex was one of the whispers that seem to grow louder. He can feel the blood on the avian's hands clump in his hair, or maybe the blood was already there?

He's placed on a bed, their bed, more gently than Scar thinks he should be. He doesn't see this from his body, his eyes are closed, but he sees it anyway. It's harder to breathe now and his heart beats slower. Grian stretches Scar's wings out, the torn and tattered transparent blue limbs laying on either side of him. Scar appreciates it, even though he can't tell Grian. The bed is so much more comfortable than the sand, and the scavengers can't get him here.

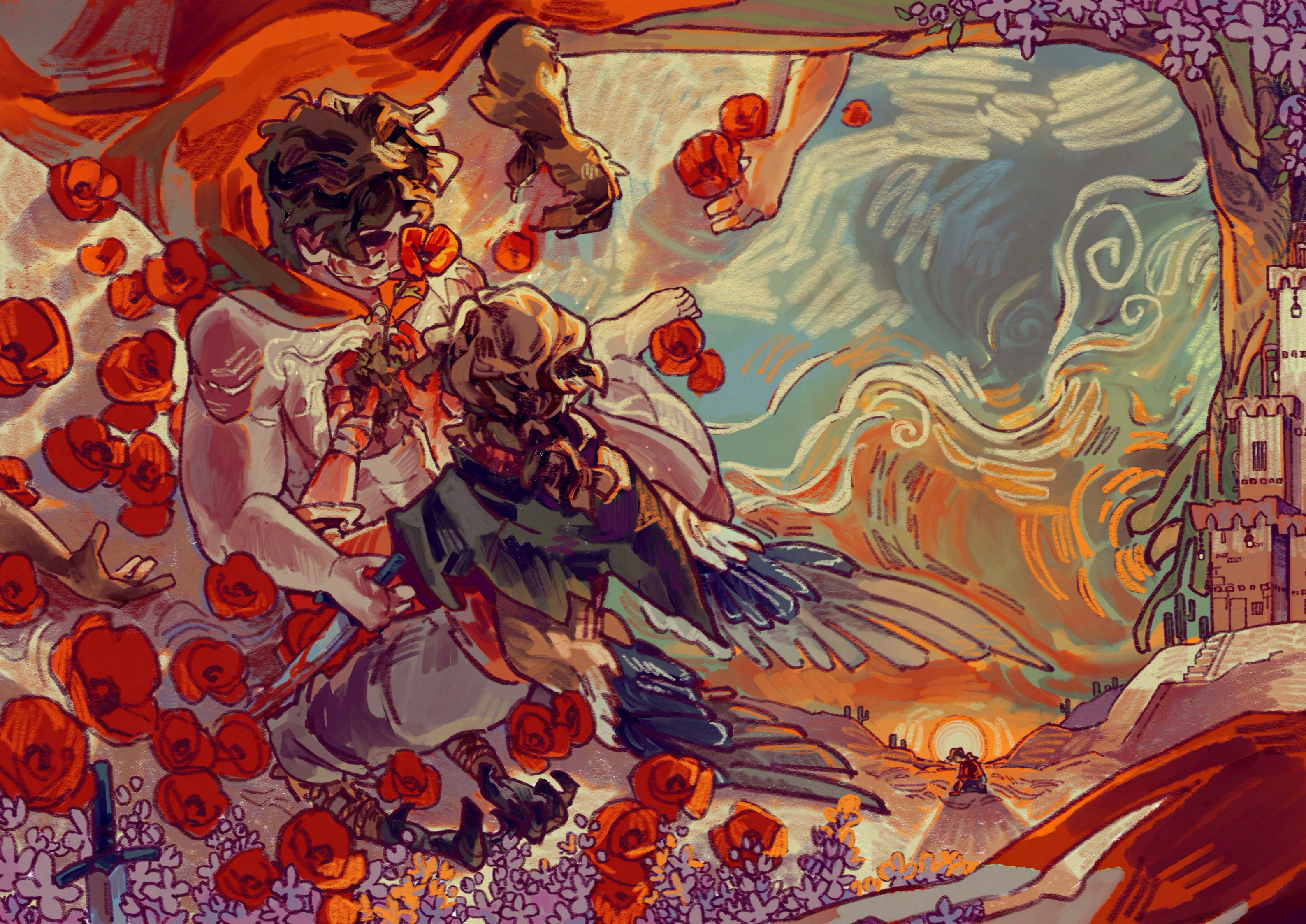
Grian pulls the blankets over Scar, it almost looks like he's sleeping. If Scar pretended like he wasn't the one on the bed, maybe he could believe it.

He hears a chest opening, and talons tapping on the wooden floor. Fingers and flower stems glide through his hair, thorns pricking his numb flesh. He sees red on the petals, roses perhaps? Or poppies, having grown with the cacti and gained spikes.

Chrysanthemums are wrapped around his arms, talons delicately not piercing scarred skin. A single carnation is placed on his chest, petals resting on now-dried blood.

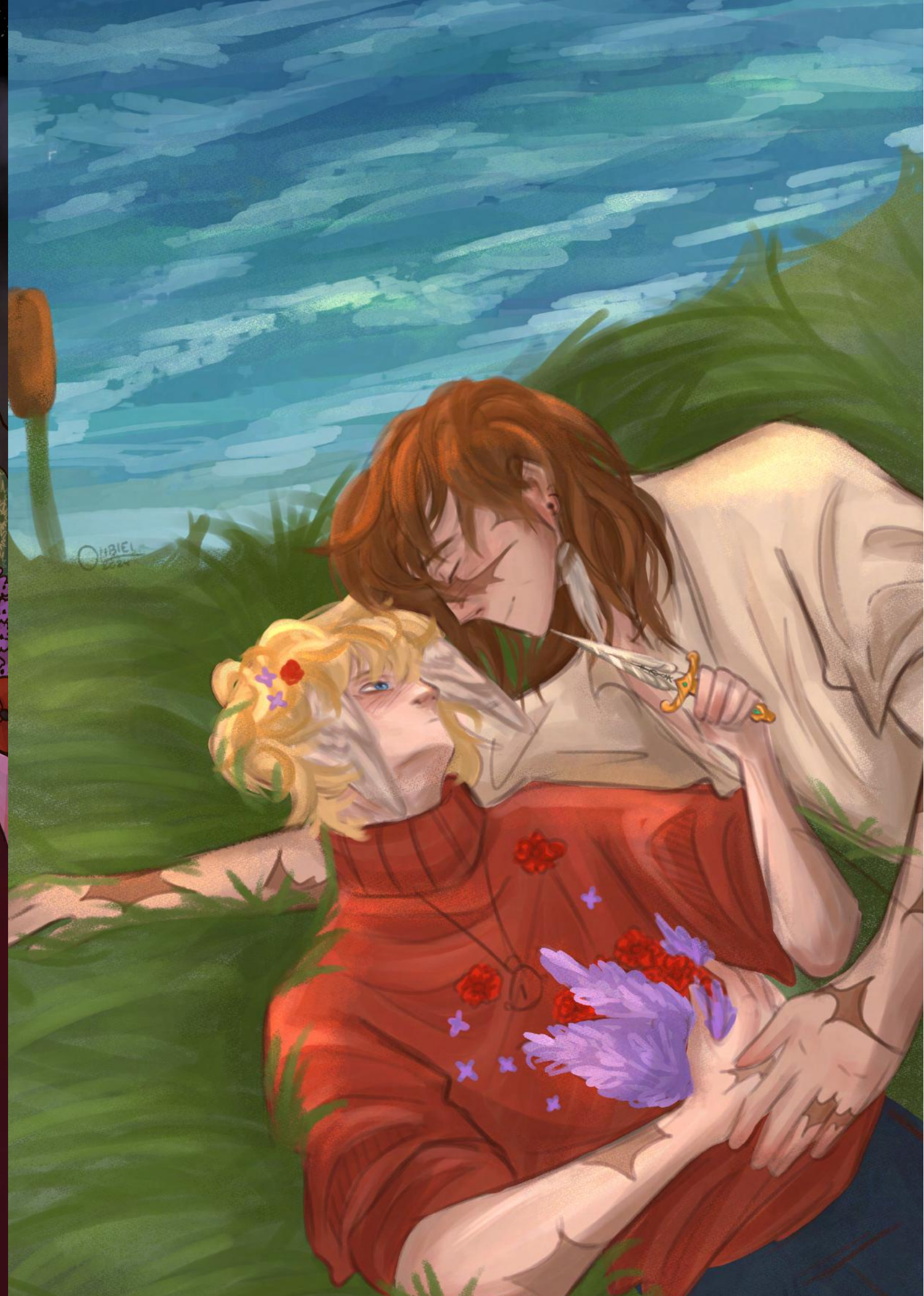
Grian leaves, shutting the door gently behind him. He watches the avian, eyes far from his body – his corpse. Clipped wings spread open, and he falls. Spine hitting the hard packed sand with a crack.





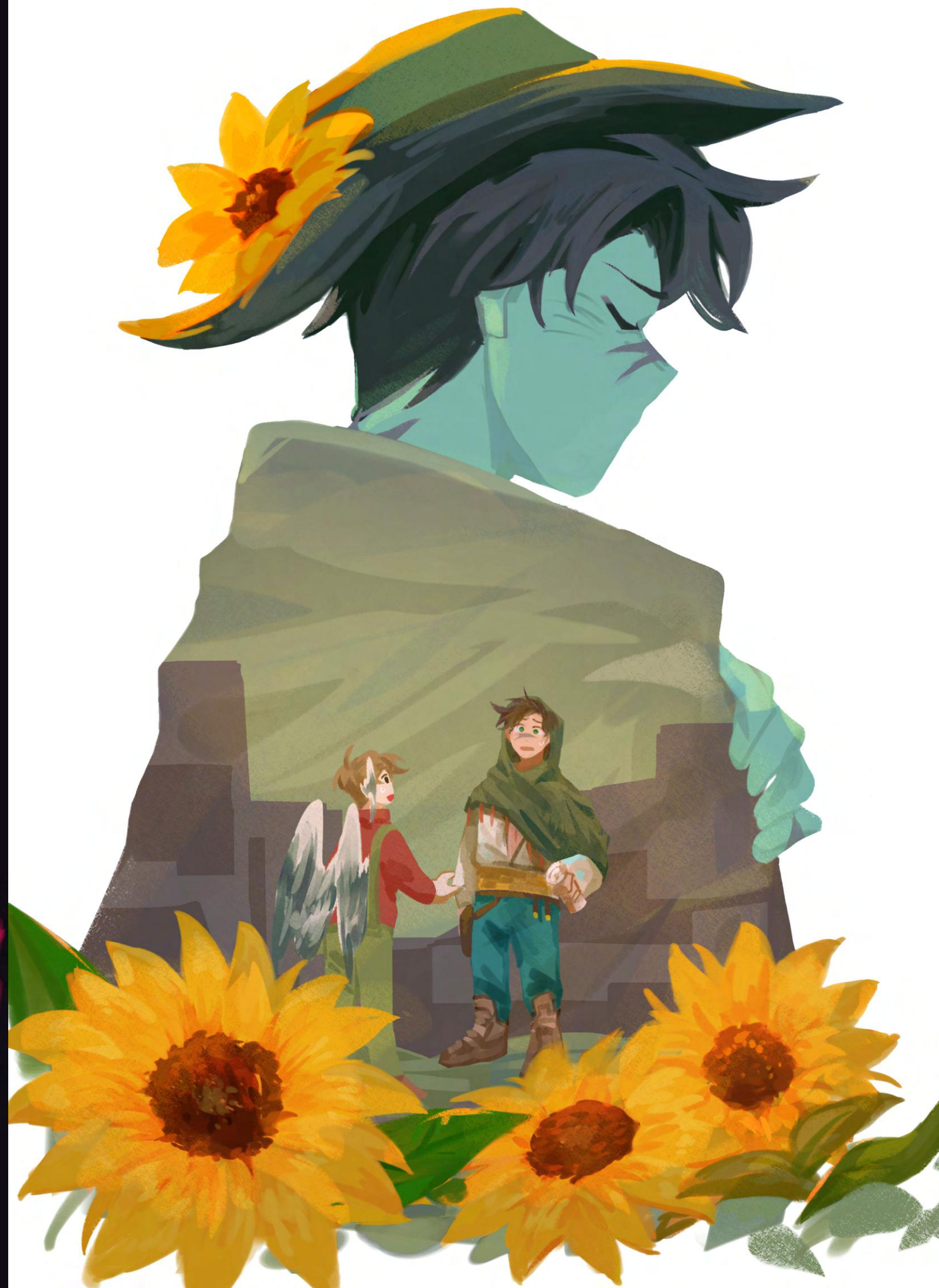
















like 2 sides of a coin...



together... yet apart



Sunbleached | Birrdies

Sunflowers.

Over the flat, endless plain they stretch as far as Scar can see. Roots and leaves branch like veins and arteries through the soil on the verge of something alive. The sunflowers face the limitless blue above— no beginning or end— the stretch so vast that time itself feels as inconsequential as a marble rolling around in his hand.

Scar doesn't understand it.

One second his feet had been on the stone where Pearl had fallen, where lightning had struck with finality, and the next he's up to his waist in sunflowers. Each golden petal stands on edge. As if they know something he doesn't. He reaches out to touch one of these petals; they tickle the pads of his fingers. Shy, pretty things.

It's quiet here and Scar isn't sure if it's a silence he finds comforting or damning. He thinks he should be afraid, but how can he be? It's warm here. The earth smells of freshly fallen rain beneath his feet, despite not a single cloud in the sky above. The fresh, dewey scent that soothes him, almost convinces him that this is a good place to be.

"You're here," a voice says behind him.

There, enveloped by the countless sunflowers, is Grian. His hair is pale, sunbleached, and his cheeks are pink. Everything about him has been touched by the light in some way, down to the faded red poncho draping his shoulders and the speckling of freckles across his nose bridge.

He's drowning in it— this light. He's made of it. And Scar's eyes fall to find the sunflowers around him withering and decaying quickly. The yellow petals curl and desiccate into gray husks, breaking off their buds and fluttering to the ground. They're dying. Not by lack of sunlight, Scar realizes, but by an excess of it. Burnt to a crisp.

And like the sun, his skin blisters. The skin of his hands and the redness slathering them have no beginning or end. Gashes and swelling bruises and split knuckles. The blood never clots, a constant red drip falling from the fingers held limp at his sides. A quiet drip, drip, drip the only sound across the windless field. Not even so much as the sound of a breath. Just that blood.

"Grian," Scar says. "I'm here."

He doesn't know why. He doesn't know why Grian's here either. But he's grateful he is. Their nightmare— or, had it been a dream?— ended long ago, the desert gone and buried several games past. The Grian in front of him now isn't the Grian he'd fought with moments ago. This Grian was younger. More afraid. More capable of burning.

"Where... where is here, exactly?" Scar asks.

Grian curls those bleeding fingers into the nearest living sunflower. As if he's unsure whether he wants to caress it or yank it from the ground, roots and all. His face is twisted, it's always twisted when Scar's around. But he yearns for the days when that twist had been of wicked delight, the way green-lit eyes exploded into starbursts at the sight of their mutual destruction.

"You won," Grian says simply, taking a sunflower by the stem and starting to pluck the petals. One by one. "Congratulations."

Scar falters. A victory. A bolt of lightning striking the earth, the loud thud of a gavel. It's over Scar, he hears, a constant echo in the back of his mind. You won.

Grian's anger burns. A second petal falls.

"You're upset." Scar will do anything to make it stop, to untie the knot tied between Grian's eyebrows, to take those cracked, bleeding hands in his own and mend them until the skin is whole again. To take away the pain, the regret, the guilt.

Grian never left the desert, no matter how much he wanted to. And Scar could never go back. No matter how often he wished he could.

"This is your dream, Scar." Grian turns his face away. "It's been a long time coming— a victory."

"I don't feel like I've won anything," Scar says honestly. A victory implies the heavy yet welcome weight of a crown, the fleeting yet intoxicating rush of excitement. But all Scar feels is the emptiness in his chest, the air around his crownless head. Blood on his hands that he can't see, but knows is there all the same. The same way it stains Grian's.

Grian plucks a third petal. He barks a cruel laugh, but it sounds more like he's about to cry. "How do you think I felt?"

Scar frowns. "It's still about the desert? After all this time?"

Grian plucks another petal. Four. It flutters to the ground to join the others, yellow petals torn and crumpled, slowly turning gray. The edge of his mouth tugs into a knife-like smile.

"I'm sorry," he says. It's all he can manage, though he doesn't mean it. Nothing can make him regret that day, knelt in a cool pond with the weight of a diamond blade against the junction of his neck. The hand he used to hold onto it, digging it into his own skin— asking for it. "You deserved to win."

"I deserved this? To be alone?" Grian throws his arms out to the sides, to the endless curvature of sunflowers drowning the both of them. Nothing to shield them from the unrelenting sun above. "Because that's what winning means. You're alone, Scar."

Scar’s heart plummets into his stomach. “You’re here.”

“Am I?” A fifth petal. “Or do you just want me to be?”

Scar stares at Grian, uncaring if the scalding brightness gives him sunspots, or if the pain of looking at the spoils of his own choices burns him up from the inside. You won, Scar, his voice echoes again and again in Scar’s mind, a scratched record. His fists curl up at his sides, into the black cloak sewn with lilacs and poppies along the hem.

Is that what this is? A cruel illusion to make him realize what it truly means to be the man at the edge of the world, to be the last man standing? If this is victory— Scar grits his teeth and twists his fists into his cloak— then he doesn’t want it. He’s never wanted it. It was never about winning, it was about—

“About what, exactly?” Grian snaps, plucking the through straight from his mind just as he does with a sixth petal. “Is it about this? Sunflowers? You can’t hide behind them forever. Not here. Not from me. Not from yourself.”

“Stop it.”

Grian’s in front of him now, bloodied hands shoving him by his shoulders. Scar stumbles back and barely keeps himself upright. This isn’t right. This isn’t Grian— not the one he knows, not the one he needs.

“Why aren’t you angry, Scar?” Another push. “After everything that’s happened to you. All the people that have betrayed you. All the times I left you behind.”

Scar grapples for self control, to reign in the flash of anger burning the back of his throat. “What are you trying to prove?”

“Stop lying. For once in your life, look me in the eye and tell me you’re angry.” Grian yanks a sunflower from the ground and shoves it, decaying leaves and all, against Scar’s chest. “Tell me these are just a sham.”

It’s on the tip of his tongue: the truth. A terrifying, bitter thing that burns crawling up the back of his throat. Because it betrays everything he’s worked so hard to build, the masks he’s sported like second skins, the confidence which he flaunts like a shield. Without it, what does he have left? He’s stripped clean, Grier’s hands against his chest burning like sweltering charcoal. Sunflower petals slip between his fingers.

He opens his mouth to let it up, to tell the truth, and then—

The sky above him changes. Only slightly. If he had blinked he would’ve missed it. But clear as day he sees them overhead: clouds. Slowly rolling across a blue sky.

And he’s on his back, blinking spots from his eyes as breath rushes into his lungs. The air tastes fresh, crisp, like seawater. Eyes fluttering, he tries to remember what he’d just been about to say.

“Scar?”

Eclipsing the sun beating down on him overhead, a head peers down at him. Dark, wide eyes, a slanted mouth. A sporting of freckles across dusty cheeks.

Something knotted unravels in Scar’s chest. “Grian.”

Grian’s lips wobble into an uneasy smile. He wipes sweat from his brow, and Scar catches a glimpse of his hands: dirty, packed with mud, but bloodless. “Whatcha doing down there, pal?”

Scar’s arms lie limp at his sides. He’s not sure he could move even if he tried. If he wanted to. Something about this peace is fragile, uncertain. As if simply breathing the wrong way will make the world shatter in two and send him back to that place. One wrong move and he’ll be alone again.

“Dunno,” Scar says breathlessly. Stalks of wheat tickle his arms as the wind kicks up, ghosting over his body. A sunflower stands over him, waving in the breeze. “Appreciating the view. Clouds. They’re nice.”

“Come on.” A hand reaches out to him. “Stop trampling my wheat.” Scar has to stare at it to remember that it’s not covered in blood. That it’s just dirt from a long day tending to wheat and sunflowers. That the Grian smiling down at him is the real one. Not the one made to torment him.

Scar reaches for that hand, allowing their palms to slot together. Grian’s skin is callused and warm. He’s there. He’s real. Scar isn’t alone.

What if it was all for love?

That's what Scar thought as he woke up in that bed. He felt the same bloodlust he felt a lifetime ago, though there was a ping in his chest, and a feeling in his head that he hadn't felt in a long time. It was a little voice in his head saying that he had woken up in the wrong bed. His bed was covered in sand, this one was not. Maybe that's what caused him to find his way to a flower field filled with those reminiscent poppies and lilacs, from a far away lifetime that he wasn't even sure he had lived.

It's that same feeling that caused him to take off that yellow sunflower poncho, and pick up that same cloak he hadn't seen in lifetimes, one that used to smell like mimosa pudicas. It's funny that, that was the only flower that had grown near him during last life. One of the few flowers that can grow far away from others, completely alone. He had also learned that they curl up inside themselves when felt. Never touched, never watered. Like his shoulders concaving at touch. Always alone, always remembering.

It's that loneliness, Scar thinks, that caused him, as he was kneeled in that flower field to take notice of the quiet footsteps finding their way towards him, and though he hadn't looked up to see the figure yet he recognized who it was. The same careful footsteps from all those lifetimes ago. Never crushing a single flower, as though the flowers were the only thing holding them together. Maybe they were.

A reminiscent feel of a rose vine connecting their hearts. Or maybe it was a rose bush. Just as the rose bushes growing in their house during double life had taught him that roses were not kind, they had thorns that made it where you couldn't touch them, they were not soft like the poppies and lilacs. Their relationship seemed to be tangled and intertwined together. For some bizarre reason this gave him hope.

Grian.

Maybe if this were different circumstances he would have leapt up and found his way into Grian's arms. Just as he had after he got back to Hermitcraft after 3rd life, but these were not those circumstances, this was a different lifetime. Though the smell of the poppies and lilacs around may make him forgot that. Maybe it was the smell that caused Scar to catch Grian's eye, and for Grian to catch his. They stared for what could've been a second to an hour. Scar wasn't sure. Time seems to stop whenever he sees Grian. Or slow. Or not matter at all. Every dumb trope and cliché and song lyric about love never fully leaving is proved correct as the metaphor clicks. Though he quickly reminded himself that this was not 3rd life, and he could not allow himself to think that anymore.

Scar broke eye contact when Grian started walking closer and began taking off the sunflowers once more. It was funny that he chose sunflowers this lifetime. As sunflowers were always going to mean a long happy life, and it seemed that, that would never find the two of them. At



least not here.

Grian's hands find their way near Scar's as Scar finish's taking off the last few sunflowers. The two collect the poppies and lilacs. Grian getting the poppies, and Scar getting the lilacs. It's ironic how this spoke more than anything they'd ever said to each other this lifetime, because poppies will always symbolize death and lilacs will always symbolize love. And that's what they were, weren't they? Death and love. Or better yet, they seemed to exist in the space between mourning and the happy days ahead. Though those happy days never seemed to find them in these games. Yet, this felt so close.

As they were brought together again. Quietly, still not a word said. As they set the poppies and lilacs in a soft pile next to the cloak. Unmoving for a moment, just staring at the pile of love and death. It wasn't an apology, it wasn't another ask of the question they seemed to always find their way to. A reminiscent sound of, "can we still be friends" ringing through their ears. But it was close, maybe as close as they would ever come to an apology. Maybe as close as they would come to any mention of that sand castle from many lifetime ago. Intertwining flowers into a cloak they had both grown to only have bad feelings towards, until they had finished.

Grian then went to encase Scar in the black cloak. Slowly, being careful of every flower as Scar mindlessly made Grian a flower crown out of the poppies, lilacs, and sunflowers. Maybe there were invisible roses, morning glories, and mimosa pudicas hidden in that crown. Time seems to stop or slow again. Scar notices that the world looks beautiful again. He started to remember what was keeping him alive every lifetime before this.

It was Grian.

He believes he had the same thought back in limited life. A life surrounded by morning glories. Short lived, beautiful when there, but always taken away so fast. Morning glories have a lifespan of no more than one day, but when they die they bloom more flowers. They come in big beautiful bunches just as no alliance broke that lifetime. Always together until they had no other choice, but to die. Even with death though, it seems both Grian and Scar found each other anyways. Death seemed to be nothing more than a minor setback.

As Grian tied the cloak on him Scar was about finished with the flower crown. He took notice of the beauty surrounding them, and how the sun was cast just over the trees. Scar realized just how perfectly the sun reflected off of Grian. He'd burn alive just for the soft light it brought to Grian's face. A thought he hadn't given himself the chance to have since the smell of these flowers came with the feeling of love and not of death. Scar placed the flower crown on Grians head as Grian finished tying the cloak. They stared at each other again. It was the first time since double life that red eyes stared back at red eyes, maybe since 3rd life when those red eyes stared at each other with a hint of love. The red in Grians eyes were beautiful, but only ever seemed to hurt Scar. The red in Scars eyes, at least to Grian, seemed to be a reminder of a place much different than this one. This for once though, felt right. Red staring at red. Not with hate or stress, or

or bloodlust, but finally, after many lifetimes without it, love.

It was all for love.

It's that love, that caused Scar to encompass Grian into the most loving hug he'd given him since being in a place much different than this one. And Scar believes it's that same love that caused Grian to hug back just as tight. The two basked in the glory that was each other, and Scar finally, finally felt peace. Hearts beating in time. There was a love Scar had here with Grian that he believed he would never have with anyone else.

That thought, Scar thinks, is what caused him to be reminded of the fact that there was always going to be sadness and tension, and grieving what they never had. Because that's what it felt like; grieving a love that they could never have — not after all the two of them had done. There was never going to be a happy ending, was there.

Scar would've taken the time to reject this thought, fall back on to Grian and let this be okay. But as soon as he had thought it, Grian was gone. And Scar was alone in a barren, lonely flower field with nothing more than a reminiscent feel of hands on shoulders and a ringing in his ear telling him in a voice he would always remember. Not asking him for friendship, but instead informing him of the death of one, "She's dead Scar, you won." And Scar looked around to find that in fact he wasn't in a flower field anymore, but instead he found himself in a small ravine with no flower field to speak of. And with the only thought in his mind being, "how did the guy with no friends win?"

It's too late now to change what he had done though. He could do nothing but stay doomed by the narrative that was already written out. It's not like he could've changed anything anyways.

He's learned that by now.

Maybe it wasn't for love after all.



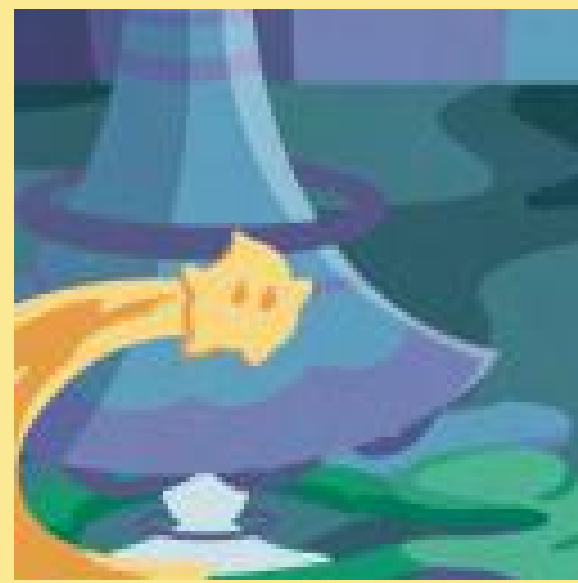


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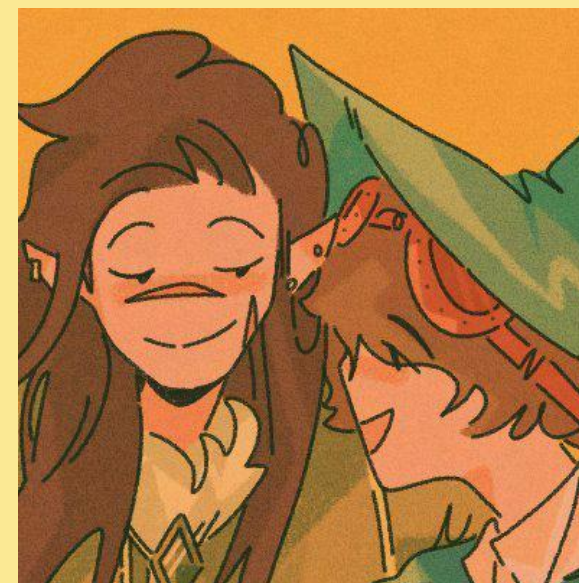
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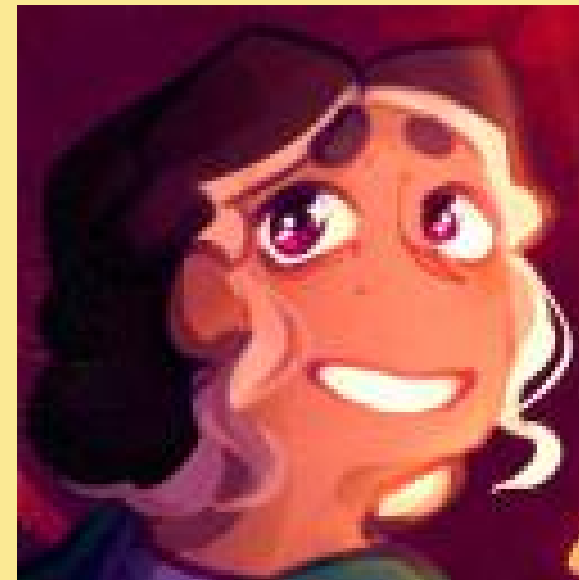
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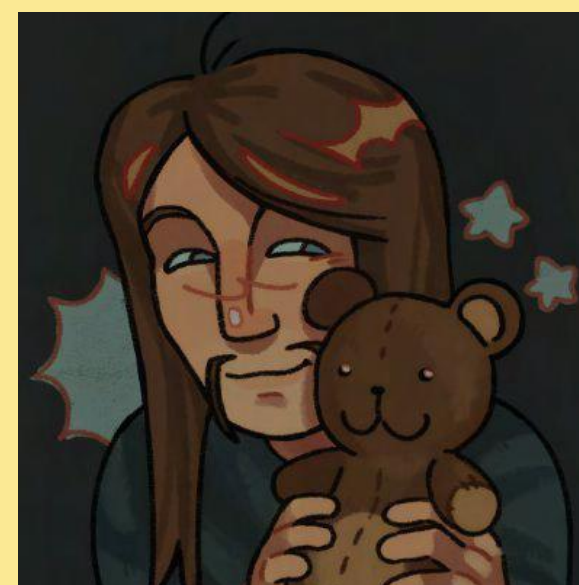


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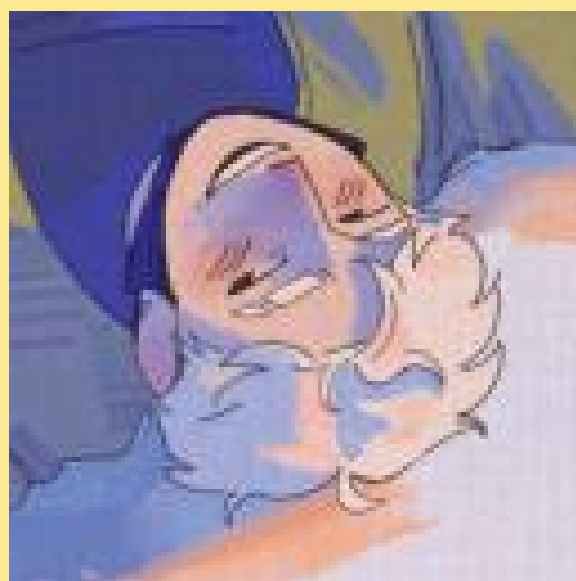


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And thank you for reading! I hope you enjoy this project as all of us have done <3

Atte: HatzuiKhaz, Mod & Organizer "Flowers
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