

Shame

Pyri doesn't know why it takes them so long to go in, but it does.

A full ten minutes of waffling outside Seph's door in fact. Well, it isn't really *their* door, in the usual sense. It's the door of a spare room nearby Hekate's, so she can check on them and be nearby if something changes. Nobody had been sure whether Seph would be all right with people coming in and out of their private space, so they'd decided to just keep them here, instead.

But it's the door behind which Seph is, as Charon might point out, and that means that for all intents and purposes it is *Seph's door*.

They rock back and forth, heels bearing their weight until their toes do, and back again and forward again, fingers scrunching in the hem of their tunic. They want to go in. They do. They just... don't know if they ought to. It feels almost wrong, somehow, but the reason is a thought they're having trouble touching. Like if they focus too hard on it, something bad will happen.

Pyri's pretty sure they've never been the type for much introspection, which might explain why doing it now is so difficult. But there isn't really a lot else to do, lingering outside the room like this, and it's also hard to go in. Go figure.

Come on, Pyri, get it together? What if they wake up and think no one bothered to come visit?

It is, actually, the sort of thing Seph might think. They've never been very good at seeing their own worth, as far as Pyri can tell. Hermes had all but confirmed it, though obviously he wasn't going to go into detail about stuff like that. That was private, and the sort of thing they'd have to decide to tell someone themselves. And Pyri wants to know all those things, but they also know they have to earn it. That it wouldn't be the same to learn it from anyone but Seph.

In the meantime, though, it's important that Seph knows that people care about them, and they aren't going to know that if Pyri stays stuck out here behind the door, right? Right!

Well, it's not like the others haven't come by to check on them, obviously, but—

Growling softly in frustration, they cut off the thought abruptly, pushing the door open and stepping inside in one motion. Maybe it was exactly what they needed to do, because now that they've done it, it isn't quite so hard to take a few more steps inside, all but falling into the chair near Seph's bedside.

They *almost* regret it, for a moment. Their friend's face is wan, a few shades paler than usual and hollowed in a way they aren't used to seeing it. Seph's never been the most robust-looking person, in spite of the whole 'deity of life' thing; they're thin as a reed and have a perpetual air of both delicacy and exhaustion. But that's never been something Pyri thought about much, because they've always been awake and healthy and obviously okay, even if perhaps not confident or happy. But now it's like... it's like all the doubts and uncertainties they carry around all the time have manifested in the rest of them.

Pyri presses their lips together against the trembling in them. The urge is there, to reach for Seph's hand, to try and impart some of their warmth and life into their friend. But they can't just do that while they're

sleeping. It wouldn't be right. Instead they lean back, resting their head on the edge of the chair back and staring at the ceiling, arms crossed tightly and legs akimbo, their right knee bouncing up and down.

"I don't like this," they say aloud, speaking to the unconscious Seph or perhaps just themselves. "You should be up and doing whatever you want, already." For a brief moment, the agitation fixes on Hekate, on why she hasn't managed to heal them yet, but that fades as quickly as it came, leaving shame behind in its wake. None of this is Hekate's fault; she's explained it already. Waking Seph up with magic could disrupt their healing process, and the delicate mix of magics currently settling in their system.

That makes Pyri feel guilty, too. They hadn't meant to do the... the resonance thing, with Seph. It had just *happened*. What will they think, when they wake up and find out about it? What if they hate it? What if it isn't as easy to fix it as Hekate says? Pyri's not a god the same way the others are gods. What if that messes it up?

Why weren't they strong enough to protect Seph without any of that happening?

Loosening their arms, they bring their hands to their face and scrub them up and down. That's really what's going on here, isn't it? They aren't mad at Hekate, or at Seph for not waking up. They're mad at themselves. The realization clicks into place, but it doesn't make anything any better to know. Of course they're mad they couldn't protect Seph. Seph is...

Seph is important.

Pyri squeezes their eyes shut; a bit of pent-up moisture escapes their lashes when they do. They dig their fingernails into their scars on the way down, just enough to feel a sting, and force themselves to look at their friend.

"I'm sorry," they whisper. "I just—I want you to have only good things and I... I messed it up. Please don't hate me."

Better to get all this stuff out now, while they can't hear. Maybe then, when it comes time for the real conversation, they'll be able to have it without making everything about them. It shouldn't be, not when Seph is the one who has to deal with all these consequences.

The thought of explaining it to them drops a stone in Pyri's stomach. But they're going to have to face it. It wouldn't be right to make anyone else do it, not when it's all their fault. Not when they need to be the one who apologizes. Tries to make it right, somehow. If they can do that, then maybe Seph can still go home, when they want to. Maybe they'll be able to make it up to them, somehow.

All this trouble they've put them through.