

Well fuck. That's another dead end wasted away. I really thought... I mean, not everyone has such a strong love line that it can be felt throughout reality, I knew that going into it, I just... Well, it was wishful thinking on my part. It's been almost a full month in reality time since you first arrived and... And we're no closer to getting you home.

Love lines are some of the most powerful forces in the universe, it really seemed like it could work! I guess maybe you're a wanderer in life as well as on the fringes, huh? Passing through your world, meeting people who matter to you but not making the connections that would lead to a broken love line. I suppose it's also possible that they've just... passed on. If someone you loved and cherished enough to spark a love line had died already, their essence wouldn't be in any reality and they wouldn't have a connection to you.

There are certain things that exist beyond life, though. Magic is one of them. All of reality is made of magic, some just intersect more closely with magic to give people within the reality control over it. But Alexandria needed to use magic to create all the worlds and when people die, Sparrow collects that magic to bring back to her. It's a beautiful thing, honestly, to see how they work together to keep balance in the world. If you couldn't tell, balance is kind of important to the Council. Between my role here bringing balance to reality, which used to be Guillermo's role before... Actually I don't remember why this was switched. But either way, between that and Alasdair's balancing magic and Alexandria and Sparrow's balance of life and death... Balance is key, especially here on the fringes. We have the benefit of seeing where things are out of balance after all.

Oh, you would love Alexandria and Sparrow if you met the two of them, wanderer. I know I've said that about most Council members but it's just true. Their love permeates every imaginable aspect of the universe and you can feel it even more acutely when you're in their presence. It's not like when you see Marigold and feel drawn to her, it's more like a blinding light that emanates from Alexandria and Sparrow so forcefully it can be felt across the universe.

It's kind of funny to me how they're always linked, even in realities that don't know of their existence. It's always life and death— always. They're the constants, the things that are always true, and they're so intrinsically linked that it baffles me that people think of them as opposites. Some realities get it right, creating their own versions of them and calling them lovers or making Death pine after life or what have you but most of them seem to view the two as enemies. Life cannot survive without Death, that's just not how any of it works. And I'm not just talking like this because Alexandria and Sparrow would rather fade than be apart, I'm saying this because life without death doesn't mean anything. People weren't built to be immortal because Alexandria and Sparrow saw their own immortal lives as meaningless without each other.

Well. That's not entirely true.

You up for another story, wanderer? I know you're probably getting sick of them by now, but... Well, it's something to pass the time, isn't it? Since I'm clearly making *no* headway with your case and now it's just a waiting game to see if Guillermo will actually get back to me before— I'm not letting you fade. He *will* get back to me or I will find a way to drag you to reality myself.

...I'm sorry. I know, I know, I say that all the time but still. I hope you know that I mean it, that I genuinely genuinely mean it every time. Because you're... You're strikingly familiar to me even though you can't be and I know I care about you in a way I have never cared for anyone outside of the Council and Minerva before. You're... I'm going to get you home because maybe if I do...

Maybe if I do I'll find out I have a home too.

But enough sadness! Enough drama and *emotion* and- and... and excuses. Let me tell you about Sparrow and Alexandria and how they came to be together.

It starts, as all things do, with Alexandria. Or, if you want to be more direct, it starts with magic. Alexandria created herself from the magic at the center of the universe; she pulled herself together piece by piece, first an emotion then a thought then a consciousness and eventually a body, springing up in the center of a vast plane of magic, the only living soul in an infinite galaxy.

That's not to say that magic isn't living, it *is*, just not in the same way you or I live. Not in the same way Alexandria was living. The thing about magic, and I'm sure I've said something like this before but it can be *used* to create but it's not creation itself. What Alexandria did, how she did it, who she is... It shouldn't have been possible and yet there she was, alone in a field full of magic, the first thing in the universe to be created and the first thing in the universe to *create*.

She started small— or at least that's what she always told me. She said the first thing she tried to make would end up being a flower. It wasn't a flower then— it wasn't anything then because it was new and she was new— but it would go on to be one of the hundreds of different types of flowers scattered across reality. Funnily enough, the first flower she made ended up being the marigold. I don't know if that influenced Marigold in picking her name at all, but it is a fun coincidence. Once Alexandria made a flower, she realized she needed a place to put it. How she jumped from flower to plane of existence and planets will always amaze me, but she did it. I think it's because the magic *wanted* to create and knew that she could do it since she created herself out of magic. It helped her as much as she helped it.

Reality 1 is still out there. You might've been wondering about the decimals and the letters and what not in the reality names, but those were just for fun on Guillermo's part. He took over naming the planes after he came into existence, throwing in more and more elements to make them sound cooler. At the start, it was just numbers. Reality 1 truly was the first and that remains its name even as Guillermo started changing the others.

If you see it– actually I've got some pictures printed out! Here we go, take a look! It's smaller than most of the other realities. Way fewer planets, way fewer people, but it still lives on, whether this is fueled by magic or just by Alexandria's care I couldn't tell you. She created the pocket of reality first, making a space separated from the magic she lived in while also allowing it to flow into the reality as needed. After that she made a moon. This would eventually be the first place that Lady Luna would reside, but not quite yet. No, the first person living in this reality other than Alexandria was Sparrow.

She created a planet, filled it with plants and water and magic, and used that magic to create a person. She pictured herself, pictured who she was, and used the magic to create that again. Sparrow wasn't quite the same as her– as to be expected when trying to create life out of nothing– but they were living. They were breathing. They were looking at Alexandria with fear and reverence in their eyes.

“Who are you?” they asked, finding speech much more easily than others would come to find it when Alexandria made more people.

“I'm Alexandria.”

“Who am I?”

Alexandria studied them for a moment, trying to pull a name for them out of thin air but she didn't know quite what it should be. “I'm not sure just yet. Who do you want to be?”

“Your friend.”

“Well,” Alexandria said with a smile. “That's easy enough. You're already my best friend.”

The thing to understand about Alexandria, wanderer, is that she doesn't love her creations as a parent loves their child. She loves them more like an artist loves their work; they are visions she had in her mind, being created by her thoughts, not children being born to her desires.

That, I think, will make understanding Alexandria's relationship with Sparrow a lot easier.

To her, they were a piece of art, something to covet, something to love, something that could be admired but not owned, not by Alexandria. And yet, what she didn't know was that Sparrow *wanted* to be owned by her. They wanted to mean something more to Alexandria than the other people she created meant to her. They wanted to be more important than the worlds she told Sparrow she was building, more important than the realities she was crafting with the magic that birthed her. They wanted to mean *something* to her.

Sparrow very quickly became Alexandria's closest confidant. Even as she branched out, created new realities, spent more time on the fringes where she could directly interact with the magic that flowed through her entire being, she still found herself coming back to see Sparrow time and time again. By the time they had taken the name Sparrow, they had been Alexandria's friend for the better part of twenty years.

"Like the bird?" Alexandria asked, looking at the bird fluttering past their window. When they nodded, she smiled. "It suits you, Sparrow. I quite like that."

One thing Alexandria was learning as she continued to create new worlds and new realities is that people were, well, a touch boring over time. People didn't age, didn't hurt, didn't die, they just existed in their tiny bubbles of reality, feeling just as listless as Alexandria did. The only difference was they didn't have the possibility to create a new reality to drive away their listlessness.

"I don't know what to do, Sparrow," Alexandria said one day as they had tea together. "It's just... Everything has stagnated. Even *I've* stagnated and I just can't... There's got to be some way to fix this, to make this better for everyone I just..."

Sparrow rubbed Alexandria's arm. They had been thinking about the state of their world for quite some time now and had an idea, though they knew Alexandria would probably be opposed. "You could let us die."

"What?"

"Think about it, Dria. We're stuck because there is nothing that makes life worth living. If life could end... Well, that makes life worth living for, don't you think?"

The only reason Sparrow knew about death at all was because Alexandria had let the word slip from her lips once while talking about the creation of a reality. She had been thinking about aging, but didn't want people to age out of reality entirely and pass on, so she scrapped the idea. Sparrow, however, had never quite let go of that idea, holding it close to their chest. It wasn't that they wanted to die, of course they didn't, it was just...

They loved Alexandria. Loved her more than life itself. Perhaps if they passed on, they could find a way to be with her. And if not, well, they wouldn't be around anymore to wonder what being with her would be like.

“Spare, I... Wouldn't they hate me? For letting them die? For letting them age and feel sorrow and pain and loss? Wouldn't they despise me for it?”

“I wouldn't.”

“Sparrow—”

“No, Dria, seriously, I wouldn't. It's... Life has to be about more than just wandering around, wondering when you'll find a purpose. If we know our time is finite from the start...”

Alexandria sighed. “Then maybe a purpose finds you?”

“Exactly.”

She was hesitant to give in, if only because this could mean losing Sparrow, her closest friend, her only confidant, the love of her infinite life.

Because she did love them, wanderer. She still does. Alexandria and Sparrow have been together since the beginning, will be together long after the end. And that's why Alexandria was able to come to the decision to allow people to pass on.

It might seem cruel of her, like she's taking people's lives from them, but she's not. People weren't meant to live forever, no one is. Even the Council, who are as infinite as the magic flowing through reality, sometimes feel the weight of eternity pressing down upon them. The only reason they don't pass on themselves is because of us. They won't leave, won't abandon us like the myths of gods leaving their people to suffer found in so many realities. They're not gods, after all, they're much more than that. Much more benevolent than that.

Alexandria only agreed to allow people to age, to face harm, to die, with the promise of help from Sparrow. That's why they still exist today. She loved them so much she couldn't face the prospect of existing without them, but she would, if that's what they wanted.

“I have loved you for my entire lifetime, Dria. I will love you for a million more if you let me.”

“A million more, huh. I think I can work with that.”

When she kissed them she was breaking every rule she had set for herself as she started to craft the universe, but she didn't care. She could feel all of the magic in the cosmos flowing through her into Sparrow, making it possible for them to exist on the fringes with her, to leave reality and survive and thrive. Alexandria brought life, she created and governed and built and loved. Sparrow, as her counterpart, would help people ease out of life. Help return their essence to the pool of magic at the center of the universe, so Alexandria could either bring them back as someone new or let them rest in the magic, becoming *more* even if they weren't a person anymore.

It's the system that has governed over the universe for... Time is a bit odd on the fringes. I know we've talked about this before, but it really doesn't exist. I guess the easiest way to understand it would be to say that Alexandria and Sparrow have always existed and yet have never existed. They'll be here from beginning to end, but it's always the beginning and always the end.

If you look throughout reality, time and time again, they're always together. Life and Death, creating a never ending circle as Life passes her creations to Death and Death gives them new life.

I suppose that's enough sentimentality about Alexandria and Sparrow for one day, though, isn't it? Back when I started working here, they would visit a lot more often, to the point where they were basically like parents to me. They're not, by the way. My parents that is. I...

I'm doing a lot of forgetting lately it seems, because I know for sure I have to have parents and yet I can't seem to picture anyone in my mind. For as long as I can remember it's just been me, here, with Minerva and the occasional Council member visitor. But that can't possibly be right, I mean, everyone comes from *somewhere* and...

What's that look? Oh, Minerva. Right. Minerva and I... We're having a little cool down time after the thing with the dragons. She's resting right now, won't hear me say this, but yeah. It was rough and... I'm sure it'll be fine, I'm just doing everything on my own for a couple days while she goes offline. We've... never fought like that before. It'll be a little while until tensions cool down but in the meantime... I'm glad you're here, wanderer. Of course I want to get you home but it's nice to have company after all of that. Thank you for sticking around and standing by my side, it means a lot.

I... If you wouldn't mind, wanderer, I think I need to go and lay down. I've suddenly got quite the headache and... Tomorrow. We'll continue the search for where you belong tomorrow, okay? I promise. I just... need to rest for a moment. Something about today has taken quite the toll on me.