

"Don't worry. I am sure he will come back from the spirit world. You'll see. Now let's get you dried off and dressed." *She said, dumping a bucket of warm clean water over my head to get the soap off. I got out of the tub, feeling a little more refreshed and she handed me a soft towel to dry off with. After I'd dried myself and dressed in the loose tunic and breeches she'd brought from my room, she pulled something out of her pocket and handed it to me. It was a letter and it was addressed to me, but I didn't recognize the writing. There was also a blue rose that wafted a sweet perfume as she handed the bloom over with the letter.*

"What's this?" I asked.

"I don't know, I found them on your bed when I went into your room to get your clothes for you. They must've been placed there after we left yesterday. I figured you would want to read the letter in case it was important." *She said, getting a stool and having me sit. She took a brush and began the laborious task of brushing out my long tresses. I broke the wax seal and began to read.*

Hey Mer,

So here we are. I knew by your reaction to me kissing you in the hall you did not remember what happened the night before. Now don't get yourself in a hissy we didn't have sex or anything, not from a lack of trying on your part by the way, and speaking of which you should really learn to unwind yourself from time to time if you catch my drift. I get ahead of myself though.

When we went for drinks we chatted a bit and you told me some childhood stuff about you and your brother. As you tried to keep pace with me you started talking about more emotion driven things. Like how hard it was for you in Absalom and how it was hard to get out from your brother's shadow. That the reason you took this particular mission was to be somewhere no one had really heard of him, but how once you got here you missed having him here to confide in. the letters were great but they were not the same b/c it would take weeks for a repose. Then after your 8th shot of Dwarven Whiskey, 3rd of Abyssal Tequila (I warned you away from it but you wouldn't listen) and your 5th house ale you got really quiet and kind of watery eyed.

You started crying and blaming yourself for your brother's situation "if only I would have stayed at the hacienda one more day," was the start of it. Then you went deeper and blaming it on you leaving Absalom to begin with. Then there was the whole if you had only been a "girly girl" as you but it none of this ever would have happened. You have a strong self-loathing streak you know that? I mean seriously you seem to insist you should fail even when you succeed.

At that point I had had enough. I grabbed your puffy tear streaked face with my hands and made you look me in the eyes. I'll admit you fought me at first with your swinging and hollering but I pulled you out of your chair and put you on the table and straddled you holding your arms down with my elbows. I told you to look at me and you kept mumbling no and looking off in different directions until I put on my "Inquisitor" voice and said, "Enough Meredith! Look me in the face right now or so help me I will leave."

You got really quiet then. You stopped your struggling. Then nibbled your lower lip and started crying again. I wasn't sure why or what you were so afraid of. I cupped your face, smiled

and said, "Any man that would turn you away is a fool. 'Cousin' or not, you are one of the most beautiful creatures I have ever seen. You're smart, you're strong, and you have a quick wit. You need to stop blaming yourself for other people's problems. Let it go."

Tears began streaming down my face, dropping onto the paper. I used my sleeve to wipe them away. Aria had finished brushing and braiding my hair and slipped out already without my noticing. I continued to read...

Then you sniffed and said, "So are you a fool then Mal?"

At this point most of the bar was looking at us now but you didn't notice and I didn't really give a fuck about it. I was suddenly very aware of your body which I was straddling. You firm tummy, your heaving breasts, soft skin and your full lips.

I don't know why I didn't notice it before. Maybe it was I didn't want to believe it. Not really used to cousins not dismissing me out of hand. Here was one that was starting to harbor something more and I had been blind to it. A lot of things made more sense now. I smiled down at you and said, "Sometimes it seems, but not tonight," then leaned in and kissed you deep and strong. You tried to struggle against me, not to get out but for some more control of the situation. Of course I wouldn't let you. After a minute or so of this I pulled away both of us a little breathless and got myself off of you and the table.

I couldn't hold in my sobs any more. The realization of Mal's feelings for me just made his death that much more painful to bear, especially at the thought that even after everything he may not come back. After the tumult of new raw emotions subsided some I was able to keep reading the letter.

You were a bit woozy so I helped you up and in perfect Meredith fashion the alcohol came up with you. I expect it was too many conflicting emotions, or maybe just the tequila, either way we were done for the night. I tipped the waitress heavily and we started our long trudge back to the hacienda. I say we but it was mostly me carrying you and I say long as we stopped at almost every alley along the way and a few shops for window shopping as everything that shined caught your eye.

When we got back to the hacienda everyone was asleep as I gagged you with a cloth and carried you upstairs to your room. I pulled out the cloth gag and set you down on the bed. You smiled at me and asked "Do you always do that to your girls?" I glanced at you and laughed. You then got up and tried to shake your ass as you took off your pants and ended up falling down.

I shook my head and helped you up and replied, "Only the ones that I really like."

You blushed at that and I helped you up. You tried to kiss me again, but I knew where this was headed and deftly turned my head and nibbled your ear. That set you into a throaty quiet moan that definitely would give me something to think about later. I spun you slowly and laid you down on your bed and propped myself next to you.

You tried to glare at me but it came off more as a pout and then shook your finger at me and said, "No, Mal you can't come in my bed. Unless I invite you."

I raised an eyebrow at this and asked, "So am I invited?"

You thought about it for a second or two and they said, "Yeah sure, why not?" and you leaned in to kiss me and fell forward on your pillow and fell asleep.

"It's better this way," I whispered to you and stripped you out of your clothes and left you in your smalls. I tucked you in and kissed your forehead then headed back to my room.

The next morning your movements and your voice told me you definitely did not remember the night before, but just to be certain I kissed you and your kind of dumbfounded expression told me everything I needed to know.

I had been thinking of how to best approach you on this the last few days but the moment never seemed right and then I was doing what I could to help Iggy come to terms with his crap and getting him and your brother to at least be civil. Time just got away from me. Now here we are about to go into the Crow once more and I have not said anything at all, so you're probably really confused right about now.

So I wrote this letter before I went out to drink with Kain, kind of our thing before a dungeon crawl, and left it here for when you get back so we are both on the same page.

I figure when we get back we can go get dinner at one of Magnimar's Bistro's instead of eating at the hacienda and talk about where we stand and if we want to go any further. Just let me know when and I will pick the spot!

Adoringly,

Malcom Nevar (Goodfellow)

P.S. Hope you like the rose!

My hand clutched the letter as my arm dropped after reading through to the end. I lifted the rose and smelled the bloom, its sweet scent clearing away some of the cobwebs in my mind. As I had read the letter bits and pieces of that night had come back, but not the full memory. It made Mal's letter all the more sweet as he could have just as easily lorded over me the memories of that night forever, but he didn't. His letter bespoke of a man who'd found someone to cherish. I laid the rose in my lap and carefully folded the letter back up and tucked it close to my heart. I then examined the rose and was surprised to find that he'd also trimmed off its thorns, ensuring I wouldn't prick myself when I picked up the flower. My heart thudded in my chest as I tucked the flower in my hair, re-plaiting it so that the rose wouldn't budge. Its weight in my hair was almost as reassuring as the letter. I had made a decision and was only just starting to become conscious of it. I would use the letter to remind Mal why he needed to come back to the land of the living. He and I had unfinished business.