

mourning dove

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mourning dove

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Summary

She isn't here now, and never will be again, and the thought was once enough to make him waste the mornings and afternoons away, until sleep found him again, right where it left him.

But that was a year ago.

This is one year later.

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Or, passerine, one year later.

Notes

Originally published on Twitter on April 11, 2022, one year after passerine's finale was published. A little epilogue, of sorts, a gift to a kind friend and to everyone who's stuck around this long :')

An old man wakes up alone on a half-empty bed. A year before, he would have spent the rest of the morning staring up at the ceiling, watching the shadows stretch over his room. His hands would ache (from the cold, from his age, from longing) and he would try not to look at the space beside him where she used to lay. She isn't here now, and never will be again, and the thought was once enough to make him waste the mornings and afternoons away, until sleep found him again,

right where it left him.

But that was a year ago.

This is one year later.

The old man stands from his bed, awake before most of the city. He pulls on a heavy coat and makes his slow way down the stairs. His old joints protest at the movement, but he pushes on, one step at a time, because he has a job to do, and he intends to do it well. He walks towards the door, then past it, and then down the road to his neighbor's quaint little flower shop. A sign hangs on its door, but the old man ignores it and makes his way to the garden behind the shop.

A well waits, surrounded by flowers. None of them have wilted. Not on his watch.

The old man picks up a watering can—old and rusty, just like him, he supposes. But it keeps his neighbor's garden alive, and that is enough.

One year later, an axe whistles through the air before splitting a log in two with a sharp *crack*. The sound makes Tubbo flinch, as many things do. He wobbles back with a rattling gasp, shutting his eyes until the moment passes. And it does, because they always do, even when he thinks it'll last forever. But this is a truth he has had to learn in the past year: nothing lasts forever. Everything passes, for better or for worse.

He shakes his head, clearing them of memories. Then he returns to his work. He grabs another log. He swings one more time.

“Tubbo!”

He turns and finds his sister coming up towards him, grinning with a basket tucked under her arm.

“I made sandwiches for lunch,” she says, placing the basket on the ground between them.

“With ham?” Tubbo asks, leaning his axe gently against the pile of firewood he'd made. “And with eggs—”

“—fried to a crisp, just how you like them,” his sister finishes with a roll of her eyes. There is no malice behind the gesture. There is only love. “I know, I know.”

He bites into one. It is still warm from the oven.

His sister watches him quietly as he eats.

“Is it bad?” she asks. “Did I put too much salt?”

“No,” Tubbo says, reaching for another. “It's just enough.”

One year later, two travelers make their way to a valley. To pay their respects, as many before them had done. They pass small monuments as they go, flowers and gifts and mementos left by mourners, but the biggest testament to grief catches their eye. It rises in the middle of the valley, blue morning glories already climbing up its sides: a statue of a rose, made of gold, its petals and leaves and thorns bearing the names of all who had fought and died, or fought and lived, in what historians would come to call the Battle of the Blue Valley.

One of the travelers runs their fingers over the names, whispering each one under their breath. The

other traveler wanders further until she finds a solitary memorial. While others have fresh flowers, this grave only has a sword. She stands over it for a long, long while, until her companion finds her again.

“Who do you think this was?” she asks, not really expecting an answer.

The other traveler passes, and then says, “Someone with no one to remember them.”

“I don’t think that’s true,” she says. “We’re here. We remember.”

“Do you think the two of us are enough?”

The traveler smiles. “I think we are.”

One year later, a guard walks the halls of a castle, pausing under a painting he had never seen before. *Must be a new installation*, he thinks, stepping back to admire it in full. It was a gorgeous painting, the most colorful one he’s seen in the castle so far. In the painting, the late queen—bless her soul—sits with a brilliant smile. Behind her, the previous king stands with a hand on her shoulder. Leaning against the queen’s chair was the late prince, immortalized at fifteen, his blue eyes captured so perfectly in paint that the guard half-expected him to blink at any moment.

On the floor by the queen’s feet, sitting with their backs against each other, heads half-tilted to look at the viewer, are their survivors.

The king and his right-hand man.

At this early hour, they would usually be found in the garden outside, taking their breakfast underneath the willow tree, laughing over things only they would understand. But the guard knows they would not be there today.

The guard leans forward to read the inscription beneath the painting.

Portrait of a Family, it says. *Commissioned by King Wilbur I. Artist anonymous.*

“Huh,” the guard says to himself, turning to return to his rounds, “whoever that artist is, I hope they got paid their weight in gold—it’s not easy to make Technoblade smile like that, let alone for long enough to paint it.”

One year later, Technoblade crouches by a lake, elbow-deep in the freezing water.

“Are you sure it’s here, Techno?” his companion calls out from somewhere behind him.

“We’d have found it by now if you got off your ass to help,” Techno shouts back. “What did I even bring you here for?”

“Moral support,” Wilbur says, leaning against a tree with his arms crossed and his grin playful. “What kind of brother would I be, if I didn’t offer my presence at this difficult time?”

Though his words were light, they both could hear the honesty underneath: neither of them had wanted to be alone today, of all days, and they would keep each other company because both of them needed it.

In the chaos of the aftermath of the war, they’d barely had any time to breathe, much less count the days. Before either of them could process it, a whole year passed them by in the blink of an eye.

And, for the most part, time was a gentle balm. Wounds scarred over into painless silver lines, old hurts grew older, and some days, they could approach their memories without drowning in them.

The grief was still there. It would never be forgettable, but it had become bearable. And it was the best they could do, so they did it. They bore it.

And then, a few months ago, Tommy's sixteenth birthday passed.

And Wilbur and Techno had *suffocated*.

It had taken them weeks to pull themselves out of that pain, and they realized together that milestones would not be kind to either of them. So instead they were kind to each other. One year after Tommy's death, and grief almost knocked them down again, but at least they were not alone. They were each other's lifelines—two drowning boys, clinging to each other against the riptides, knowing they could not afford to fail the other, knowing they had to keep swimming for two.

Now, it was another anniversary to brace against. One year after that final battle, after they lost the last person they had left to lose. Another day they would rather not spend apart. Another day where kindness was their only saving grace.

Techno withdraws his hand from the lake and stands.

He turns to Wilbur, and immediately, Wilbur's mirth turns to worry.

"No?" Wilbur asks, and Techno shakes his head. "I'm sorry," Wilbur replies softly.

"Maybe it's the wrong lake," Techno said. He knows it isn't, but he keeps his voice light.

"We'll keep looking," Wilbur insists, walking up to Techno and grabbing his shoulder. "I'll help this time, I swear."

Techno smiles ruefully. "It doesn't matter. It's just a stupid earring."

Almost on instinct, Wilbur reaches for the twin of that earring, now hanging around his neck. The emerald gleams in the daylight, sparkling between Wilbur's fingers like a captured firefly. It belonged to his father, once, one half of a matching pair that was testament to a friendship between two immortal gods. The other half had been Techno's, before he tossed it into this very lake, years ago now.

In its place is a vibrant blue sapphire, the color of the sky on a summer day.

"It's not stupid," Wilbur says quietly. "You wanted to find it. So we're finding it."

Something warms inside Techno's chest. "It's alright, Wilbur," he replies, and it really is. "I thought I needed it to get through today. I thought I owed it to him to find it, or at least try. But that's stupid. I don't owe him that. I just owe him a life to live. And I don't need some gemstone to remind me to do that."

"What *do* you need, then?"

"To go home," Techno says. "And for you to step away before you cut short the life your father gave me."

Wilbur stumbles back with a scandalized look. "I do *not* have a stench."

"Yes, you do," Techno says. "You've been stinking all morning. A single traipse through the

woods, and you've produced enough sweat to drown a colony of ants."

"So I'm a bit out of shape," Wilbur snaps. "What did you expect from me, when I've spent the past year sitting around writing policies and managing petty squabbles between politicians in ugly powdered wigs. Boo hoo, I don't have a bloody war to fight and now I've grown soft. What a tragedy."

To grow soft was a blessing.

But Techno would rather tease than offer Wilbur that consolation. That is brotherhood, he supposes.

"Speaking of politicians," he says, "don't you have that meeting with that snob that wants to discuss trade routes this afternoon?"

Wilbur winces. "Would it be insensitive to use my dead father's death anniversary as an excuse to get out of that?"

"Probably," Techno says. "But your father isn't actually dead."

Just away. Just waiting, for a safe time to return.

"They don't have to know that," Wilbur says with a grin.

Techno rolls his eyes. "Fine, then. Go get our horses and we can go home and lie to your loyal subjects."

Wilbur disappears into the trees, leaving Techno alone with the lake. It shimmers under the sun, its surface undisturbed by any ripples. Techno and Wilbur must have been its first visitor in years, far as it was from the rest of the world. Anything lost here would take ages to be found again, if ever. It was a perfect place to disappear into.

Techno opens his hand. An emerald earring, still wet from when he grabbed it out of the water, glimmers on the scarred surface of his palm. Techno closes his fingers around it one last time before he tosses it through the air. It arcs over the water and then falls like a green comet into the heart of the lake, sinking to the bottom, where it would stay forevermore.

"Technoblade?" Wilbur calls from the distance. "Are you ready to go?"

"Yes," Techno says quietly, and even that whisper is enough for Wilbur to hear his relief. One year later, and Techno finally lets go. "I'm ready."

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