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English 218

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Short Story: One Eternal Round

Seer's Notes #035:

Hello again, dear reader! Xhoen, the Seer of the Sky and Recorder of Tales, is here to bring another excerpt from the world of Brium. I enjoy this tale, not just because I myself am in it, but also because...well, you'll see. On with the show!

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Below the pitch-black night sky, beneath the canopy of a vast forest, and among the low shrubbery, a lone figure sat on a smooth boulder. Stray tiktoks tittered as they ruffled their feathers for the night, and plowff nestled in their underground dens, shielded from the light of the sparkling white dust in the sky.

The brisk wind brushed across the figure's dark gray fur. He drew his cloak tighter around him, tighter against the leather clothing he wore. The scent of pine sap hit his lupine nose, and a low whisper echoed into his pointed ears.

He cringed and ducked his head. *'They're back.'* He shook his head and shut his piercing blue eyes. *'Ever since I left home, they've shown up at night—always saying things to me, things I never wanted.'* He looked up at the sparkling dust surrounding him, taking the place of the stars. *'Great Solus, please help me. Help me to rid these thoughts from my mind.'* He remained still moments after, collecting his thoughts.

A weight settled on his shoulder. He gasped and spun around, coming face-to-face with another wolf-life face, only with light-gray fur. His leather clothing had a similar set of symbols across it, and his eyes were a far deeper blue than his own.

He threw his arms in the air and exclaimed, "I've been looking everywhere for you, Arthus! Why are you so far out from town?"

Arthus stood up on his bare paws and replied, "Matheus, you know that lykai like us need to have time to think for ourselves out in the wild." He scratched the back of his head and added, "That, and...well, I didn't want to be around after I tricked that Mored guy."

Matheus laughed and wrapped an arm around Arthus' shoulders. "You just didn't want to be lifted up and congratulated for kicking out the biggest bully in town."

Arthus lurched away and exclaimed, "Hey, you beat him up a good deal before I did! If I remember right, I had to come in before they broke your face in!"

"Yep. And I knew you'd come in to rescue me."

"That doesn't mean you should've done it! Those thugs could have killed you!"

"But they didn't!"

*"Auugh!"*

Arthus set his hands over his head in frustration; his tail rose in unison. "I don't get how you can just brush off near-death like that!"

Matheus shrugged and turned around. "I don't dwell on it." He blinked and immediately turned back around to shake Arthus by the shoulders. "The town's having a dance in our honor, and I came out

here to find you!” He growled and turned back around, pulling at Arthus’ sleeve. “Come on, we can’t miss it!”

Arthus scowled and held out his hand. The air shimmered around it, and a large, hairy spider appeared on Matheus’ hand. In the brief moment he turned, he noticed the spider and screamed, yanking his hand back and frantically brushing away the spider. His hand passed right through it, and the spider disappeared.

Now Matheus scowled and seethed, “You know I hate it when you use your magic like that.”

Arthus withdrew his hand. “And I hate it when you use yours as a reading light.”

Matheus held up his own hand; blue flame erupted from his palm. “It’s a *great* light, thank you very much!” He groaned and dimmed the flame. “Look, can we get going? They’re going to start the music any moment now!”

Arthus crossed his arms and shook his head. “No. You know I hate parties.”

“You won’t even show up to your own dance?” Matheus asked, staring at Arthus harshly.

Arthus paused, then lowered his head and leered at Matheus. “You’re not going to let me be alone, like every other time there’s been a dance.” A smirk slowly spread across Matheus’ face.

Arthus sighed and slapped a hand on his forehead, allowing it to slide down his face. “I feel like I’m going to regret this.” He pressed forward, walking ahead of Matheus.

The light gray lykai clapped his hands and ran forward, quickly outpacing Arthus. “Race you there!”

Arthus kept pace, advancing toward the low lights and growing clamor from the buildings rising ahead. “Why did I agree to this?”

“Because you know you want to!” Matheus shouted back, laughing.

Amongst the wooden houses, shops, and stables, in the very center of the town, a large hall lay awash with light, with candles, lanterns and torches all allowing the men and women streaming into the hall to see.

Matheus dragged Arthus into the throng, who noticed no other lykai entering with the humans. He came close to Matheus and whispered, “There’s no one else like us here.” Outside of sideways glances from some of the guests, none seemed to care that more wolfish people were joining them.

Matheus whispered back to the dark-gray lykai, “Who cares? The dance is for us after all.” Random beats of a drum and toots of a horn echoed from the hall. Matheus pulled Arthus inside, where at least one hundred people had gathered in front of a small stage. Long tables laden with food of all sorts stood against the walls, with servers bringing out more to fill in the gaps.

Standing on top of the stage was a bearded man wielding a polished, wooden horn, and another larger man sat in front of an array of crystals propped up on stands and hanging from strings. Yet another man stood behind a large drum, testing it with two thick sticks.

The crowd chattered amongst themselves until wind rushed above them toward the stage. A bird in the shape of a man descended in front of the human players and bowed, spreading the large wings on his back and holding it with his claw-like hands. He stood straight and smoothed his white feathers and green shirt and pants. He then adjusted the blue scarf around his neck, revealing lines of emerald green feathers. I, Xhoen, always make sure to dress well for special occasions.

I drew back my wings and said, “Thank you, everyone, for coming today!” I held a hand out toward the two young lykai. “On behalf of the mayor of Respit, I also thank the young Matheus Avron and Arthus Zoroan for removing the boisterous Mored Calvin from the premises.”

As the crowd clapped in reply, Arthus whispered to Matheus, "How does that Aeran know our last names? We didn't tell anyone." Matheus shrugged, uncaring.

I held up the violin hanging at my side and took my bow, holding it up. "I am Xhoen, and I will be providing my services as a musician and storyteller tonight." I waved it across the audience. "I'll be coordinating with the rest of the band so there are no interruptions. Get your dancing partner, and we'll begin in just a moment!" I turned back around to speak with the men. As much as I love discussing these matters, it is better for you to see the real action.

As the crowd dispersed and subdivided into pairs, Matheus tried to drag Arthus toward a cluster of women. "Come on, let's grab someone!"

Arthus pushed off Matheus' hand and retreated toward the chairs along the far wall. "No, no, no! I agreed to go to the dance, not be part of it! He sat down and crossed his arms.

Matheus let his arms fall as he said, "Arthus, come on." I began playing the first few notes on my violin, and Matheus rolled his eyes and returned to the group of young women. He offered his hand to one, who giggled and accepted it. The others returned to the walls to wait for the net dance, whispering to themselves about dancing with the strange gray lykai.

I plucked the strings of my violin and quickly tuned them twisting the knobs with my claw. I waited for the couples to gather in formation, then I said, "To start the night, I'll play a simple tune I call 'Hop-Skip of Life'! Ready, set, here we go!" I swiftly scrubbed the bow across the strings, creating a quick, hopping melody. The other members of the band joined in with the horn providing a steady bass, the drum giving the rhythm, and the crystals emanating a tinkling harmony.

The couples on the dance floor moved side-to-side in unison, then circled around and performed moves such as bows, spins, and claps to the rhythm, with whoops of enjoyment coming in time as well. Occasionally, couples would swap partners, continuing in a circle around the floor.

Matheus danced with vigor, emphatically performing the moves almost more than necessary. The young woman he danced with enjoyed it as well, if put off by the number of times she ended up in a spin.

Arthus, however, remained on the sidelines, avoiding the people around him. He had since gotten up to grab a drink from a nearby table, and as he sipped at the juice, he watched Matheus laugh with the rest as I did a little dance around the horn player, much to his muted annoyance.

Arthus leaned back on the wall and sighed, staring down at his drink. *'Matheus is so much better around people than I am.'* He looked over to another group of young women waiting their turn, who whispered to themselves and occasionally pointed at young men standing without a partner.

Arthus took another sip from his cup. *'Besides, they're all human. Matheus might be fine with that, but I'd only dance with another—'* As my song ended, his eyes grew wide as a door swung open and a black-furred lykai walked out, holding a tray of rolls over her shoulder. She wore a white dress with scattered blue symbols across it. The fur on the back of her head grew longer than the rest, leading to it needing to be drawn back with a length of ribbon.

Couples broke away from each other in search of their next partner, and Arthus stood still, transfixed by the female lykai. She set down the tray of rolls and looked about, seemingly checking for other tasks. Her green eyes met Arthus and she fell still as well.

Matheus quickly thanked the young lady he danced with and sped toward Arthus, who he dove in front of and grabbed his shoulders. “This is the best fun I’ve had since we hit the road! Arthus, you *have* to try it!”

Arthus blinked, then pushed Matheus away, searching for the other lykai. “Where’d she go?”

Matheus gave him a curious look. “She?” He looked around as well, then stopped upon seeing the black lykai wander through the crowd toward another table of food. He grinned and pulled Arthus to him. “Well, look at that.” Arthus saw her once more and sagged; his drink nearly slipped out of his grip.

Matheus nudged Arthus’ shoulder, nearly making him lose grip. “Better take the chance while you can, or the next girl you’ll be dancing with is Ma or Little Sis when we get home.”

Arthus’ eyes grew wide, and his cup fell to the floor with a clatter. His tail curled around his leg, and he stepped back burying his face in his hands. “I-I-I—I—n-no, I can’t I can’t.” He hit the wall and slid down onto his haunches.

Matheus gave him a studious look, then turned back to the black lykai. He smirked. “Fine. *I’ll* go.” He strode confidently through the crowd toward her. Arthus’ head snapped back up, and he watched Matheus talk briefly with the black lykai, then offer his hand out to her. She accepted it with her own, but her eyes set on Arthus’.

He tucked his head back into his hands as I spoke to announce the next song, but the title was lost to him. The drum beats began, and a powerful rhythm filled the room, considerably more aggressive than the ‘Hop-Skip of Life’. This did anything but help Arthus’ thoughts:

*‘I have to talk to her, I have to talk to her—but about what? Drawing? No, no, she wouldn’t like that. What about the dance? No, I’m a terrible dancer! She’ll reject me and I’ll feel terrible about myself! Those voices will come back and—and—and—’*

“Arthus!”

He looked up, breathing heavily. Matheus stooped in front him, cocking his head curiously. “You alright?” he asked. Arthus behind him and saw the other lykai exiting the dance floor and toward a table, then she grabbed an empty tray. Arthus, sullen, set his head back onto his folded arms.

Matheus looked back at the lykai, then back to Arthus. “Arthus...I shouldn’t have gone for it. I should’ve just let you take your time, and—”

“I’m not like you, Matheus,” Arthus interrupted, with his head still buried in his arms.

Matheus stared at him for a moment, frowning. He looked up, then a slight smile appeared on his face. “You really want to dance with her, don’t you?” Arthus looked up, his eyes meeting with Matheus’.

Matheus held out a hand. “I’ll introduce you to her. If you’re not feeling it, you can back off. If not, then all’s well.” Arthus stared at his hand, then accepted it, holding onto it tight. Matheus pulled him upright and guided Arthus toward the black lykai.

As she drew closer and closer, Arthus could feel his heart beat faster and faster. When she was mere feet away, Arthus whispered, “I-I can’t do this.” He attempted to pull away, but Matheus kept firm.

He then whispered to him, “Come on, you’re supposed to be the level-headed one. You can’t back out now.”

“That’s what you say. I’m going to pass out.”

“You didn’t even feel tired after getting slugged by Pa during all those fighting lessons.”

*“That’s different!”*



Matheus pushed Arthus forward, and he realized that the girl now stood directly in front him, holding the tray over her chest. He found himself unable to speak.

Matheus patted Arthus on the back and said, "Corrina, this is Arthus, my older brother." He looked up a moment and scratched his neck. "Though he is adopted, so *I'm* technically the oldest..." He shook his head and added, "Anyway, he was wondering..." He nudged Arthus and whispered, "This is where *you* come in."

Arthus swallowed, then stepped forward, his eyes constantly darting to and from Corrina's eyes. "I-I-I was wondering if...if you'd like to...to..." He cringed and lowered his head.

Corrina stood still for a moment, then set the tray down on the nearby table and smiled. "I'd be happy to."

A drawn out note from the violin echoed in the room, and Arthus shot upright, backing away. He held his hand close and said, "No, no, I'm sorry, I—"

Matheus shoved him forward, nearly into Corrina. He pushed through the crowd to the sidelines, while Arthus and Corrina got driven deep in the center of the throng. He held a hand high and shouted, "Make me proud, brother!"

Arthus looked back and seethed, "Matheus, you sly—" He felt a hand hold onto his, and he stopped himself. He faced Corrina, who as a slow drumbeat began, began to move with it side-to-side.

The crystals chimed in, and I, Xhoen, lowered my violin. "Next is a special piece close to my heart, one I played long ago for a very special occasion. I will play it once more and bring back the magic that it once brought me." I held up my violin, and focusing on the lykai couple in the center, I said, "This is called, 'One Eternal Round'. I hope you enjoy it." The horn player joined in, and the crowd began to move rhythmically to the beat.

Arthus felt compelled to follow, feeling the deep, moving passages of notes rock him to his core. He moved with Corrina to the beat, then I began the violin, introducing a slow, lilting note. I then began to sing:

*"In the light of day,*

*In the dark of night,*

*From the oldest star,*

*To the youngest leaf,*

*A pattern is set,*

*For you and me."*

I grinned, and I sped up the violin, and the others joined me. The crowd did as well, and they all sporadically spun around the room, dancing with their partners across the floor. Arthus did so with Corrina, albeit awkwardly as his inexperience in dance set in. But Corrina steadied his shaking hands and feet.

I stamped my foot and continued to the next verse:

*"From the innocence of youth,*

*To the wisdom of elders,*

*All know they are caught*

*In a pattern of life*

*In the median of years*

*Seeking their start and end."*

The tempo rose once more, and the slower couples had a harder time keeping up. Arthus suffered the same, but Corrina led him along, smiling all the way.

*"The start has been found,*

*The end out of sight.*

*Let us cherish together,*

*Let us never part!*

*Let us join the great pattern,*

*And bring more to join us!"*

The tempo rose to its peak, with all the crowd joining my enchanting melody in a continuous circle, surrounding the couple in the center of the room: Arthus and Corrina. I played my violin voraciously, finally flapping my wings and coming to the conclusion:

*"One Eternal Round,*

*Joining all together.*

*One Eternal Round,*

*Circling 'round you and me.*

*One Eternal Round,*

*Start with love,*

*End with love,*

*What goes around,*

*Comes around,*

*In the Eternal Round!"*

I ground to a halt, and the crowd stops as well, breathing heavily and sweating profusely. The tinkle of the chimes died in the air, and even I wheezed from the speed I moved my bow. Moments after, members of the dance floor began to applaud, slowly at first, but it grew as more and more gathered their wits about them. I bowed, as did my fellow musicians.

I focused on Arthus and Corrina, who had since stood straight and joined the applause, with each standing close to the other. They gave each other a glance and smiled.

An arm suddenly wrapped around Arthus' shoulder. Matheus laughed wildly and shook around his elder brother. "That was *excellent!* You dance even better than I do!"

Arthus turned to his brother and gave a grin of agreement, but upon turning back, he saw Corrina retreating to the tables and taking her tray back outside. The smile slowly disappeared, and Arthus hunched his shoulders, lowering his head.

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Later that night, as ambient music echoed from the hall, Arthus sat on the steps leading to it with a pad of paper in hand. He stared at it, tapping a length of charcoal against the side of his face. He stroked it against the paper, adding to a nighttime scene depicting a forest.

The hall door creaked open, and Arthus lowered his charcoal and sighed. "Matheus, if you're wanting me to go on the floor again—" He turned around and saw Corrina's green eyes and blue dress ascending the steps toward him. He nearly lost his grip on the pad, but recovered.

He hastily turned back around and stammered, "C-Corrina! I wasn't expecting you." He hid his sketchpad under his hands.

Corrina held her hands together and gave a slight smile. "Thank you...for the dance. There aren't many lykai that live around here, so..."

Arthus remained quiet for a moment, then nodded and replied, "Y-You're welcome." He stared at her for a moment longer, then turned toward the forest ahead.

Corrina cocked her head curiously, then pointed at the half-hidden sketchpad. "What's that there?"

Arthus looked down, then sheepishly held up the paper and charcoal. "It's my drawing journal. I like to draw the landscapes Matheus and I come across while we're away from home." He flipped through it, showing vast plains, crystal-filled fields, and other terrains. "Matheus says it's silly when we can just remember them, but he doesn't understand that I want others to see their beauty." He continued staring at one page, showing a cluster of tents in a glade surrounding a campfire. "That way, when I get home, my family can see the journey we went on."

Corrina glanced behind her, then sat down next to Arthus hovering over the pad. Arthus resisted the urge to scoot away in anxiousness. "Would you mind if you told me about some of the places you've been to?" she asked. "I've never been out of town before."

Arthus' eyes widened. "Wait, what? No one's wanted to see them before, outside of Ma and..." He stopped, then took a deep breath. He smiled, then turned back to the first page, showing a great, mountainous landscape. "I'd be happy to."

Until the dance hall eventually emptied for the night, Arthus and Corrina spoke with each other about the world, with Arthus introducing brand new lands for Corrina, and she in exchange asking

questions and learning about his pictures. Laughter occasionally erupted between them, with some petty arguments thrown in.

I looked down from my perch on top of the dance hall and chuckled. *"What goes around, comes around in the Eternal Round."* I turned around and spread the wings on my back, then flew off into the night sky. As the dance hall descended below me, I said, "I don't expect Arthus to suffer his anxiety tonight. Not with a certain someone in mind."