

Meeting Bear

Drax Guard Short Story

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DEJAN

BESIM AND I HEAD up the walk to the Kalama's house. We're both studying it curiously since we've never been here before. Though it hadn't been much of a surprise to hear that Remy's been over here since we got the news. My hands are in my pockets because I'm unsure of what we're really walking into. So Besim shifts the bag he's got into his off-hand and knocks.

Rem opens the door. Exhaustion rims his eyes. He's in long sleeve t-shirt and athletic shorts, bare feet, and a baby in the crook of his arm.

"Hey." He steps aside for us to come in. And we follow as he heads for the kitchen. Not even the abundance of plants giving off the gentle vibrance of life is reassuring.

"Mom sent some stuff with me." Bes places the bag of diapers and clothes on the counter.

Rem smiles tiredly from the other side of the bar. "Your mom's the best."

Besim chuckles. "She'll take any excuse to look at baby stuff."

I've still got hands in my pockets, watching Remy, glancing at the blanket-wrapped bundle that's started to squirm. He grabs a can and dumps powder into a bottle.

“Hey.” Besim points to the kid and beckons. Remy arches an eyebrow in question.

“I’ve held kids before, Rem. I’ve got a brand-new niece too.”

Remy relents and Besim scoops the baby deftly away. “I think I only dropped Taron once when we were kids.”

Remy jolts a little until Besim snickers, and then he just shakes his head. I crack a slight smile at seeing the giant of a half-troll cradling an infant and looking almost deliriously pleased to be doing so. Remy finishes up with the bottle and shakes it to mix everything.

“Doing okay, Rem?” I ask cautiously. I definitely don’t think he is, but having an ex suddenly reappear a week ago to dump a baby and vanish again is the sort of life altering event you don’t just spring back from.

Remy fiddles with the bottle, not really looking at us. “Yeah, I’m fine.”

Besim hums and Remy lifts his head to glare. But it doesn’t really hold much fire. “Still just trying to wrap my head around everything,” he says.

“Look like you’re doing okay,” Besim says. A gentle coo comes from the blanket.

“Yeah.” Remy huffs, rubbing his forehead. “I’m *firren* living with my parents right now and researching ‘how to be a father’ around learning how to change diapers and asking my mom stupid questions and just...”

There’s something else, but his jaw sets and he’s not going to tell us. At least not yet. Though I’m not mad. We’ve been friends for barely a year. I wouldn’t be spilling secrets either.

“I’m doing *great*.” Remy almost spits it down at the bottle he’s still turning between his hands.

Besim and I exchange a glance. But honestly *this* is way outside of our experience too. Even Besim, who’s got advice for almost anything, seems at a loss. He’s a few years older than Remy’s twenty-three but is

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absolutely comfortable admitting that he hasn't dated anyone since high school and is definitely the kind of guy who doesn't just sleep around. And me?

I clear my throat. "You figure out a name yet?"

Remy sets the bottle down. "Blair." He eases a little as he says it. And I fight another burst of anger at his ex who didn't even name the kid before she dumped him on Remy.

"I like that," Besim says. "Dej, you're up."

I jolt, sliding hands out of pockets as he turns to me. "What? No, I..."

Remy doesn't make a move to intervene, just watching with slight amusement. He'd handed Blair off to Besim without hesitation, and something prods sharply at my heart. He really trusts me. So I let Besim hand over the kid and I try to coordinate holding him correctly. I have paramedic school to thank for knowing *anything* about kids. I'm still cautious around our sergeant's three- and five-year-old kids, much less an infant.

"See? You know what you're doing," Besim says.

I scowl back. "I think the last baby I held was about five years ago on a call for an eight-month-old with febrile seizures," I say and immediately regret it the way Remy stiffens.

"Seizures? What does febrile mean?" he asks.

"Sometimes a really high fever causes seizures," I say. I'm not making it better, but I'm also panicking a little at this tiny human in my arms.

"That can *happen*?"

"It's really rare," I hasten to say. "He'll be fine." I clamp my mouth shut to stop any sort of medical advice from coming out. Hopefully this kid won't have a fever or illness of any sort for months. Unlikely.

Remy just groans softly and leans elbows on the counter, scrubbing his eyes. Besim reaches over and taps his shoulder.

Another sound comes from Blair and tiny hands slide out from the blankets. He's got a thatch of dark hair and the same skin tone as Remy. Unfocused eyes blink open and something in me is relieved to see the absence of a ring of fae purple around the dark brown iris. His round face is making all sorts of uncoordinated baby expressions. He looks fine, but I didn't really trust Maeve Ballagh months ago when I briefly met her and I sure as hell don't now. I touch my index finger to the back of his hand and send out a tendril of magic.

Blair squawks, but I get healthy readings all over. Well, except for him starting to get hungry but Rem's already on that.

"He good?" Remy asks. He still leans on the counter, expression borderline amused but there's something akin to worry not very far underneath.

"Clean bill," I reply. "But he's gonna want that soon." I tip my chin at the bottle. On cue, Blair starts fussing. I circle around Besim to hand Remy his kid. And it's a little relieving to see Remy settle him in one arm and pick up the bottle with the other, each movement close to natural.

"You're looking pretty good with that," Besim says.

Remy huffs slightly. "Getting there." The look he turns down to Blair is soft and a faint smile creases his face as one tiny hand settles against the back of his. And some more worry leaves me.

We haven't seen, or heard, from Remy in almost a week. Not since he'd come into the tower looking hollow-eyed as he did the paperwork for leave time. Besim had just given a hushed "I hope so," after I'd blurted a "you think he's okay?" a few days ago.

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The ride over had been quiet, fraught with shared tension between us at what we were going to find. But no matter what happened, Remy already loves this kid.

“Anything we can do to help?” Besim asks. I’m glad he’s asking because, once again, I’m well past outside my depth here.

Remy lifts a shoulder. “Just don’t leave without me.” It’s wry. He took two month’s paternity leave and might have given us two months free of missions too. It’s unlikely we’ll be sent out without a key member of our squad. And Besim tells him as much.

Rem heaves a breath. “Yeah.” He glances around. “My parents and I talked the other night. I think I’m moving back in. I just...don’t know what to do with him when my leave’s up and...” his features crease and he looks back to Blair. “Shit, I’m just absolutely lost,” he admits quietly.

“You know that’s okay, right?” Besim responds.

Remy just gives him a long-suffering look and I laugh softly. Besim is almost always right, but sometimes it’s annoying when he is.

The back door clicks and his parents come into the kitchen laden with grocery bags. Rebecca Kalama smiles when she sees us even though we’ve only really met once or twice. She moves around Remy and places bags on the back counters, then comes to rest a hand on his shoulder and check on Blair still eating.

“We got more burp rags.” She smiles and pats Remy’s shoulder.

“Thanks,” he responds. “Dinah and Sarge will be over later. She found some baby stuff she wanted to bring over.”

Hopefully that means Sarge and his wife are talking again after their last argument. Remy just gives a slight lift of his shoulder when he meets our look. He has no idea either. But I’ve really got no moral high ground

to stand on when it comes to talking—or not talking—to a significant other. And I shove the thought away.

“That’s so kind of them!” Rebecca says and unpacks the bag Besim brought, her face creasing in delight at some of the, admittedly pretty cute, clothes Marie Antilles picked out.

“We’ll get out of your hair,” Besim says as Remy sets the empty bottle down and shifts Blair against his shoulder. The kid burps and rubs his face against Remy’s shirt.

“I was gonna make hot pot, but sure you can leave.” Remy shrugs.

“Well sh-oot,” I barely catch myself in front of his parents.

Besim chuckles. “As long as we really won’t be in the way?”

I express the same in the look I shoot Rem. This isn’t his apartment where we’ve hung out before.

But his mom cuts in. “You won’t be. Stay as long as you want.”

Keahi affirms where he’s putting groceries away. And the look in Remy’s face settles it for us. He wants us to stay, give some semblance of normalcy again even if it’s not going to be anything like before.

So we do. Rebecca takes the sleeping Blair to put him in the crib and leaves the monitor in the kitchen as Remy starts cooking. Besim and I find chairs, alternating sitting with helping as Rem directs us, and talking about nothing. And for a second when his phone lights up on the counter, I see that he’s already got a picture of Blair as his background. It sends another burst of relief. Rem’s going to be okay. He’ll adjust and we’ll be around to support however he needs it.

And later when I’m somehow holding Blair again while Remy and Besim wash up, and the sleeping infant offers a slight smile that’s already a small version of Remy’s, I’m hit with some new feeling that cracks some of the defensive walls I’ve held since I was young.

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Rem trusts me with his *kid*.

Barely a year ago I was too busy being an asshole to realize that they're both just *good* people. And now I trust them, and they trust me enough to bring me into their families. I can't help but briefly think they might not if they really knew De'janick Kostic. But then again...I haven't really been him in years and neither they nor this kid is going to know that side of me.

Remy made enough to send us both home with leftovers like normal. We stay a bit longer as Pothos and his wife show up. And then we're back in Besim's truck. I give a sharp exhale and Besim agrees with a relieved "yeah."

We don't talk about how worried we'd been for Remy because it's understood. Just like the unspoken agreement that we'll be there as soon as he needs something.