

## New Stories

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# New Stories

by [Macdragon](#)

## Summary

A few moments between Zachary and Dorian after returning from the world of the Starless Sea.

Zachary Ezra Rawlins stands in one of his childhood bedrooms, looking around at the remains of his two year absence.

He thinks of this house mostly as his mother's; he only spent a year or two here, the awkward new kid in senior year, before he moved to Vermont to go to college. Does having his things here make it his room? Kat saved everything—the clothes, none of which are as comfortable and familiar as the sweater from the wardrobe in the starless sea; dishes and chipped mugs that he doesn't even remember using; the video game posters neatly rolled up in the corner. His PS4 is missing but he doesn't know when he'll feel like playing a game again. And there are the books, stacked into a farmhouse style wooden bookshelf and piled up on the floor next to it.

He hears footsteps behind him and then Dorian is there, wrapping his arms around Zachary's waist. "What were you and my mother talking about?" Mama Rawlins has taken to Dorian immediately, almost as if she already knew him.

"She told my fortune," Dorian says.

"Again?"

"With the coat this time."

"What did she say?"

Dorian doesn't answer, which worries Zachary slightly, but he tries to brush it off. They're both used to keeping things close, even now. And Dorian is smiling, which is enough.

"What are you up to?"

"Trying to decide what to do with all of this." Zachary moves over to the bookshelf. "Maybe I'll just read instead."

Dorian follows and plucks the book from the top of the pile. A well-worn copy of *The Golden Compass*. The truth is, Zachary hasn't felt like reading in a while either. It's like if he reads a story he might get stuck and be unable to get out. He has a sudden urge to grab the book out of Dorian's hands and hide it, maybe put them all in storage, but Dorian is already opening to the first page.

"I could read it to you."

Zachary lets out a sigh. Listening sounds safe enough. "Yes."

Dorian sits on the twin bed, moving the smush-faced cat aside to make room. The cat barely wakes up. Dorian should look out of place in a setting this domestic, but Zachary has never seen anything more comfortable. He sits down next to him and Dorian begins to read.

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Sometimes he swears he can still taste honey on Dorian's lips.

Every time they touch each other there's a reverence about it, making sure it's real. Zachary traces the lines of the tattoo on Dorian's back. Dorian kisses the burn scar in the shape of a key and puts his hand over Zachary's beating heart. They can spend hours like that, Dorian whispering sweet new stories in his ear.

How will they ever truly believe this exists?

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Zachary looks out the window and watches Dorian swinging his sword at something invisible in his mother's herb garden.

Dorian seems to fit in here but Zachary knows he misses New York, and he's starting to think that he also misses Dorian's version of the city. Being among brick and stone might be comforting too. Sometimes at night he imagines the darkness in the forest surrounding them and he thinks he can hear things howling in the distance. Neither of them sleep well; half the time Dorian stays up with him and tells him stories until dawn.

He puts on the button coat and walks outside, standing a safe distance away from Dorian's practice. A shiver goes down his spine and he's not sure if it's a reaction to Dorian's athleticism or a memory he doesn't want to think about. There's a flicker of movement to the side and they both turn at the same time and see a rabbit vanish into the underbrush. Dorian looks as startled as the rabbit, maybe chagrined to be found using the sword, Zachary isn't sure, but he closes the distance between them now to prove to both of them that he isn't scared.

"I think it's time for us to go home," he says, hoping that they'll figure out what that means soon enough.

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They find a studio in Queens. It's small but enough for the two of them plus a cat. Zachary finds a job writing technical manuals. He finds comfort in words that are dry and nonthreatening, but lately he can feel a story brushing at the corners of his mind. Dorian finds work as a nighttime security guard at the library, which isn't exactly suiting but it will do for now.

Their first big purchase together is a large wardrobe at an estate sale. They hang both of their coats in it.

Zachary downloads vintage games to his computer, all the classics. He works his way back to slightly more advanced material, spending several weeks addicted to Stardew Valley. He decides that he should try planting something in real life. He makes a window box filled with hyssop and lavender.

Reading comes less easy. He starts with children's books, mostly pictures, and then works his way through childhood favorites. The Golden Compass again first, because now he hears it in

Dorian's voice, and by Spring he's finished the rest of His Dark Materials. Then he rereads all of Madeleine L'Engle, and then all of Ursula K. LeGuin, which isn't for children but it's familiar enough, and as a child he never stuck to his assigned reading anyway.

Come summer the bees start to visit the window box. The studio doesn't have air conditioning, and Zachary spends most of his time in places that do. In their free time he and Dorian spend hours ducking in and out of coffee shops, museums, and galleries. They go to the Strand almost by accident, one sweltering July afternoon, because it's nearby and temperature controlled and the smell of fresh ink is a welcome change from the sweat and warm garbage aroma of the street.

Zachary and Dorian walk the stacks, looking at books and occasionally stealing kisses when no one is looking. Dorian keeps pointing out old favorites, but Zachary finds himself picking up new books, his attention drawn to a pretty color or a nice font or an intriguing title.

"You might like that," Dorian says, following Zachary's gaze to a vibrant black and red paperback. "There's a circus and magic and romance."

Zachary picks it up, testing the weight of the book in his hands. "I think I'll try it." He says, surprising himself. "Do you mind if I sit for a while?"

"I'll come find you." Dorian squeezes his shoulder and then turns and continues down the row of shelves. Zachary finds a comfortable armchair in a quiet corner of the store and takes a deep breath, cracking open the book. The pages make a crisp, exciting sound. For the first time in a long while, Zachary reads words he has never seen before. It's time to begin a new story.

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