

The drive back to the manor was tense. While not a long drive, the two boars found themselves in the back seat while Benson drove, slowly pulling out of the parking lot and towards home. Minutes ticked by as Oswin fidgeted next to Roswell, unsure of what to say or do given the many talks they had ahead of them. Dave was gone along with Tyson and Florencia had given him a stern talking to about what to say to Roswell once they were left to their own devices. If only broaching any of those subjects were easy.

Roswell looked miserable, dejectedly looking out of the window. If anything he looked a mix of confused as well but with everything that had happened in the past few hours the older boar couldn't blame him. Oswin meanwhile had the horrible job of trying to talk to the boy, finding himself trying to start a conversation with it dying before the first syllable left his mouth. On the eighth attempt he just gave up, mirroring the boy and staring out the window as the car ascended the mountain. The car pulled up to the mansion, parked, and no sooner had the break been engaged did Roswell open the door of the car and hopped out.

"What an... eventful morning." The otter in the front seat spoke to the boar still remaining in the car. His eyes was trained on Oswin through the rearview mirror as they made no attempt to get out of the car. "I believe that there's... bound to be some choice conversations to be had over the rest of the day?"

"If I can even manage that much." Oswin rubbed his face with a groan. "The priority is to do damage control."

"On?" Benson's attention shifted from looking at the boar behind him to the one trudging his way towards the front door, half collapsing in front of it waiting for it to be open. "All things considered I believe there's not much in the way damage caused from today's events."

"Meaning?" Oswin quirked a brow.

"Meaning that damage has lasted for many, many years, m'boy." Benson quipped back and eased himself out of the car. Wandering the few steps it took to reach Oswin's door he opened it and stepped back for the boar to exit the vehicle. "The thing I imagine is most vital is figuring out what to do about Roswell's... shall we say, new lease on life."

With a grunt, Oswin flashed his butler a quick frown before averting his gaze, finding the one returned to him was stern and serious. "I'll... talk to him about taking the medicine."

"See that you shall. For now, I'll be preparing afternoon tea." Turning quickly on heel, Benson wandered towards the front of the house and opened the door, Roswell following in slowly behind and disappearing over the threshold.

This left Oswin outside with his thoughts, trying to piece together everything that had led to this moment. Roswell's plan had failed, something that gave Oswin no shortage of relief for how dire the boy's plans had seemingly become over the past couple of years. He didn't have to try and hide away to avert some catastrophe or intervene on his son becoming a senseless murderer even though he'd agreed to go along with whatever was necessary. But what he didn't like was the position that Dave had left them in.

While the hyena's arrival had shocked and surprised everyone, especially having knowledge of things he rightly shouldn't, he'd done the impossible. He'd managed to convince Thanatos and Florencia that the vault should be opened, and the assurance that the elixir had a shot of working. Not a guarantee, but better than it being ruled out entirely. He ran his hands

through his beard, wondering what to do. The risk was still there that upon dosing Roswell it'd be the same as killing him, but hearing that there was a chance, an actual quantifiable chance changed things. Though the fact that it was quantifiable only came from the testimony from someone with a recollection of events that couldn't be verified.

He grumbled and headed inside, looking around the empty foyer before closing the door behind him. In addition to the confrontation with his son, he also had to factor in some sort of timeframe he had before Memphis showed up. If anything Dave said had merit, the confrontation with Memphis was something that was indicative that the dragon was going to come looking for what he was denied multiple times already. When was less important than just knowing it was going to happen, though he cursed his lack of foresight to ask more questions in the excitement of potentially saving Roswell's life.

Heading into the dining room he saw Benson placing out minor finery for afternoon tea already, the pair sharing a few moments of looking at one another and having a whole conversation without words. Though it was Benson who spoke first, turning away to head back towards the kitchen. "No, I will not have the conversation for you. Though if you could go retrieve him from outside that would be appreciated."

"It was worth asking." Oswin huffed, moving to sit down in defiance of Benson's request.

"M'boy, it wasn't worth asking much in the same way me asking if you could go get Roswell wasn't a question but more an instruction." The otter quipped back, flashing a polite smile before settling on his stoic frown. "Now run along, Oswin. I shall have tea ready soon."

Oswin stepped outside, brushing down his lab coat and looking out across the grounds for any sight of the younger boar. He could start calling his name, but he found much like in the car, broaching a conversation with him was still difficult. He checked the pool, but he wasn't there. The same was for the greenhouse, which really only left one spot left to check.

Through the hedge maze he went, trudging his way along the unkept path through it. He'd spent many days traversing it, getting lost, and eventually memorizing the way to the middle so he could pass that on to his son. The center of the maze was a place of comfort for him if only because it existed much like his laboratory in the house: a sheltered pocket from the world. In that pocket, sat Roswell. He wasn't crying, he wasn't doing much of anything shy of just cradling the lifeless form of Thanatos in his lap. Wordlessly he approached and sat down next to the boy, trying to figure out what exactly he should be saying in a moment like this.

"It's not fair." Roswell's voice was sullen, and not directed at anywhere in particular. "I thought... I was ready for... But this is just..."

"Not fair." Oswin finished, Roswell just nodding along to confirm. "I would've thought you'd be..."

Roswell threw Oswin a cautious side-eye, accompanied with a frown. "Happy?" His eyes dipped down to Thanatos again, turning him over. "Happy... Yeah..." The frown went from annoyed to sad in a matter of moments, but Roswell didn't add to it.

"Is... there anything I can do?" Carefully Oswin placed an arm around Roswell's shoulders, leaving it there when the young boar didn't protest. "You do know I'd do anything to help you."

"I think offering to help set up my friend group as potential victims to whatever Thanatos said was going to happen was enough." There wasn't even the telltale smirk from Roswell indicating what he'd said was even the tiniest bit in jest, making Oswin grip his shoulder tighter. "What's there left to do? Dave... he did... something."

"What do you think he did, Roswell?" Roswell just rolled his shoulders in a shrug. "If you didn't tell him to come here, then... the theory was correct, wasn't it? Which in turn means..."

"It means nothing." The reply came back quick, along with him shaking his head. "What we got was Thanatos dying for it. Dave and Tyson are together, and... Well that's how the story goes now."

"If it means nothing, then what was the point of all this?" Oswin pulled his hand away, and the moment he did so, he was given another wary sideways look. "You knew that nothing was certain. Even if Thanatos was convinced, we were always in the position of having to trust what he told us."

"Because I hate not having control anymore, uncle!" Roswell grumbled, balling his fists up. "There's no guarantee anymore! Dave could die tomorrow and I'd have no way of knowing. If he does, then what, everyone else suffers and dies before I do?"

"About that... you might not need to die. Potentially." Oswin flinched as Roswell turned to face him, looking unimpressed. "The thing behind the vault door, it was medicine for... my brother. Originally."

"A lot of help that's going to be, then. I read the case file on what happened." Roswell rolled his eyes, shaking his head. "I wonder what he'd say if he were still alive. If we'd have even gotten to this point."

"I think he'd have wanted to see you grow up, yes. And while it's not a certainty there's a chance you'll survive that medication." Oswin found himself looking away, trembling slightly. "The thought... terrifies me as to what could go wrong, so the choice is yours, but..."

"But what? At this point I may as well." Roswell got up, holding Thanatos close. "If I die to it, it's only a month early. Maybe I'll get to see Thanatos again, and at the very least the nightmares will stop." He gave his uncle a tired glance. "And I might be able to meet dad if there's an afterlife. You never know."

Oswin gulped, brow furrowed. "Roswell, there's... something you should know."

"What?" He shook his head. "Adverse side effects?"

The older boar stood, playing with his hands. He removed his glasses, hooking them in his shirt and found himself unable to stand still. "It's about your father."

Roswell took a step back, looking Oswin over. "What...? Are you going to tell me some dark secret about what he was like, or that he's still alive?" Oswin's gaze shifting ever so slightly gave him away. "Wait, so... If he's alive, then what, he just didn't want me? Is that why we just pretend he's dead?"

"No, Roswell, that's... It's more complicated than that." Oswin stepped forward, trying to keep Roswell calm despite seeing him work himself up. "A lot of things happened at the hospital that day."

"Yeah, I was born with a defective body that no one can cure. No wonder he isn't around anymore." He grunted, kicking the ground. "I love my mom and dad but hearing that my biological one just abandoned me just..."

“He didn’t abandon you.” Oswin’s reply came quickly and curtly. Once he had Roswell’s attention again he realized what exactly he’d said and how he’d said it, repeating it once more but softer. “Just... sit down, please? It’ll be better if you’re sitting for this.” He gestured towards the bench they shared minutes ago and Roswell sat back down, looking uneasy. Oswin remained standing, pacing a little to figure out how best to break the news. “So your... father. Your biological father.”

“Yes...?” Roswell was looking lost and confused, but sat still.

“It’s... Well...” He wanted to say it, but found himself just sighing instead. “He loved... loves you very much.”

“You’ve spoken to him recently? About me?” Roswell didn’t seem overly convinced but continued listening.

With a frustrated grumble, Oswin doubled over and grabbed his beard. “No! Just... Fucking hell, Roswell!”

“...Language, uncle.” The reply came back monotone, without a doubt a quirk he’d picked up from his mother.

Seeing Roswell sitting there, calm and attentive wasn’t helping. If only mimicking him would make this easier. “Roswell. I’m sorry, but the truth his that the man you think is your father is just your uncle.”

Roswell scoffed, that smile returning to his face. But that smile faltered upon seeing his uncle stand there, bug eyed and quivering. He tried to play it off as a joke, that he meant the father he grew up with rather than the one that had supposedly died at the hospital on his birthday. But as the comment remained unanswered, dangling in the air between then Roswell’s face shifted towards confusion, then disbelief, then betrayal. “No... You’re joking.”

Oswin tried to flash him a reassuring smile, as if to tell his son that he was standing right in front of him but the look Roswell was giving him made him withdraw again. His eyes found the ground and Roswell got up from the bench. “I’m sorry, I...”

“You?” Roswell stepped closer. “*You?* If you had told me on any other day I would have been upset that you kept it from me. If you had told me on literally any other day that you were actually my father that I’d... I don’t know, been happy? Felt justified that I liked spending time up here with you rather than alone back home.” The young boar’s nostrils flared as he huffed, setting Thanatos down in a single gentle motion despite the fervor he was working through. “But today? After I find out that not only does my best friend now probably hate me, that against my better judgment I pushed him towards someone I can’t even be sure is safe for him, that I might not actually need to die...”

Oswin stepped up to hug his son, and grab him tight until he stopped thrashing. While he tried, the little boar actively tried to fight him off, slipping out of his grip and stepping back. “What would you have had me do? Just not tell you?”

“Maybe don’t give me up in the first place!” Roswell stomped. “You wanted me, but then you just pushed me off to mom because what, you couldn’t cut it?”

“That’s not fair!” The tone of irritation in his voice was clear. “You know what happened that day! Reginald died, I killed 99 children through negligence, what sort of father would I have been to you like that?” Oswin sighed, clutching his head. “How am I the bad guy here? Would you rather have not known?”

"I don't know!" Roswell, much like his father standing in front of him, clutched his head. "I don't know anything anymore!"

"You're both acting like children." Benson looked between the two of them, the two boars turning to him in kind, freezing on the spot. The otter wandered over to Roswell and dusted off his shoulders, straightening him up and nodding once when satisfied. "Even you have no excuse, Roswell. You're an adult now."

"He started it." Roswell grumbled, looking away. Oswin meanwhile gestured at a loss to Roswell, turning to Benson. "Can we go back inside? I want to take a nap."

"Not until we've had tea." Benson regarded Oswin, shaking his head, continuing to address Roswell. "Besides, I feel like Oswin should be given a proper chance to explain what happened." Another disgruntled sound from Roswell indicated that he'd conceded the point, but was notably refusing to look towards the older boar. "Shall we?"

Once inside the three sat down at the dining table. Oswin's normal seat at the head of the table was taken by Benson, closest to the kitchen, with the boars sitting opposite one another. Little if anything was said as the three had tea and freshly baked scones, though the mood seemed just as tense as they'd come back inside half an hour prior.

"Pass the jam, Roswell." Oswin grunted, not looking at the boy. His request went ignored, something noted by Benson who fulfilled the request himself.

The otter looked at the two boars, concerned. So alike to one another but that seemed to be doing more harm than good at the moment. "If you two will excuse me, I need to go retrieve something. I will be back in a moment." He stood, and the other two at the table followed him as he left.

Once out of sight they looked at one another, with Roswell looking away first, deep in thought with a frown on his face. Oswin however remained watching for as long as he could before looking away sullen. "Sorry." Oswin looked back up upon hearing Roswell speak, though found that the little boar was still thinking. "That's what I'm meant to say, right? That will make everything better again?" Roswell looked across to Oswin, wearing that same frown. "But I'm not sorry at all. Were you just going to let me die without telling me?"

"...Probably." The shame was clear in the few moments it took for Oswin to reply, but he left it there.

"So what happens now? Even if the medicine doesn't kill me, what happens next?" Roswell's frown softened, keeping his eyes on his uncle. "There wasn't going to be a future for me. I was ready to die. I assumed that I was going to do one last act of evil in the name of good and then die. That's what the past... however many years have been for."

"What... did you want to happen?" The older boar leaned forward slightly, shifting the jam back towards the middle of the table.

"I want to go home. I just... need time to think, and figure out what it is I even get to do." Roswell struggled to reach for the jam now set back in the middle of the table, but couldn't reach. "I have nothing more to lose if I take the medicine too so..."

"So you'll take it?" For the briefest moment, a happy smile crept up onto Oswin's face, excited and relieved but upon seeing his son no happier about it, backed down. "You don't have to given the risks, but... I would like to see you survive."

“What’s there really to survive for, uncle?” Roswell gave up on retrieving the jam and flicked the scone on his plate around idly. “Memphis is going to come looking for something that doesn’t exist, there’s even chances that Dave is not going to tell everyone exactly what was going to happen but I’d have to live with the guilt...”

“Survive for me.” Oswin flashed Roswell a hopeful smile.

“No?” Roswell leaned back in his chair. “That’s not what I mean anyway.”

“But you do know that I love you. That hasn’t changed.” Oswin’s comment earned him a slight glower but he continued. “And because I love you, I’m removing guilt from the equation as much as I can.”

“Explain?” Roswell returned to leaning back, suspicious.

Benson wandered back in, holding in his hand an envelope. “I believe I’m a bit late in delivering this if you’re already discussing that topic, but here.” He strode over to Roswell, landed him the letter and sat back down in his chair. As the boar ripped open the letter, the otter poured himself another cup of tea. “As much as your... uncle has been a bit disastrous in conveying the news, I do hope you not hold it against him.”

“So long as he doesn’t want me calling him dad, I think we’ll manage. Somehow.” He shot Benson a smirk, one that was returned, though one look over to Oswin showed pure heartbreak. “Just... can I think about it? About taking the medicine?”

“I wouldn’t recommend that, m’boy.” The otter shook his head. “I imagine things are going to be moving very quickly over the coming days. Especially with your friend as an unknown factor.”

“What else is there to consider beyond Dave?” Roswell looked from Benson to Oswin, who seemed to be struggling with something new.

“You see... As an insurance against what might happen, to me or you or even Benson, I’m going to take what chances I can in prison.” Roswell’s expression was a combination of unimpressed and completely lost. “With me behind bars, under a charge for conspiracy to murder among other things, you should be able to freely live the rest of your life without worry of Memphis coming after you.”

“Explain to me how exactly that works?” Roswell turned to Benson, hoping for a clearer explanation.

“Memphis will be expending resources in getting Oswin out of prison, Oswin presumably will be expending them to stay in.” A quick look to Oswin got Benson a quick nod to confirm, and he continued. “Which in turn, leaves me free to retire, and you to do... whatever it is you wish with near unlimited financial backing.”

Roswell slumped in his chair, unsatisfied. “Sounds like you have it all figured out.” He huffed, looking between the other two at the table. “When were you planning on turning yourself in?” The question was posed to the boar opposite him, uncertain.

“Soon. Today, potentially. Not before I knew you were properly seen to at least.” Oswin was calm, having resigned himself to accepting how things were playing out.

The rest of their time at the table, while fleeting, was spent in silence. Roswell excused himself and sat outside, sitting beside the carefully placed remains of Thanatos. He’d struggled for so long with having things under control, that he even had control, but in the span of a few hours he’d lost it all. Years of planning down the drain, revelations and experiences now unable to be

lived, and it all boiled down to a choice. The one choice afforded to him when the adults in his life had for once put their foot down and decided things without him.

In a way, it felt nice. It felt like he was a kid again actually having the adults make the plans and move things along without doting on him for being terminal. Not that he was out of the woods yet. Looking to the motionless rat beside him, he wondered what Thanatos would say, or if this was all his plan from so long ago. Was this all just to see him survive beyond what was his expected life? Had he planned to die from the very beginning, whenever things had finished looping? Carefully stroking the fur on his back, Roswell wondered if they'd ever meet again, what that would be like, or even what he was going to do with a potential life ahead of him.

It was like this for the rest of the day, just Roswell thinking and the other two in the mansion preparing for their own plans. Dinner was quiet, and come the next morning Florencia and William had arrived to retrieve their son. Roswell and Oswin stood facing one another beside the car as Florencia and her husband conversed with Benson. The younger boar cradled in his arms a cylinder, a green liquid visible through the reinforced glass of its new container.

"Listen, uncle, I..." Roswell's eyes were fixed to the ground, unsure of what to say. The decision had been made that he'd take the medicine at home should anything happen. If the worst did come to pass, he'd at least be beside his mother and father, or at least the ones that raised him in the comfort of his own home.

"This could be the last time we speak. I know." Oswin had his glasses off, squinting in the morning light to look upon his son. "And you're sure this is what you want?"

"I get the impression that there is no choice here to be made. Just... this is how things need to be." The look Roswell gave the other boar was tinged with unease, but within was a resignation to where he found himself. "We'll just need to see what happens."

Oswin stepped forward and pulled Roswell gently into a hug. It wasn't fought, though it wasn't returned either. "You've made me proud, my boy. No father could ask for a better son." He stepped back, only to find Roswell shaking his head. "What's wrong?"

"I haven't forgiven you yet for keeping that from me all these years." He stepped towards the car, opened the door, and placed the medicine inside. "Maybe someday, if I survive, you'll hear me call you that. But for now you're just uncle." He turned back to his uncle, giving him a stern look. "And *only* uncle."

With a sigh, Oswin nodded and watched as Roswell got in the car. His sister and her husband wasn't far behind, and with a minimal farewell, they departed leaving the mountain behind. As the car disappeared among the trees and down the driveway, Benson came to stand next to his pseudo son and looked up at his sunken face. "It's not so bad, m'boy. It's out of our control now."

"I made a mistake letting that boy go again. I just know it." Oswin kept his eyes trained on the driveway, in small part hoping Roswell would appear again. "But we can't rest just yet, can we?"

"Not if you still want to try and keep him safe, no." Benson offered, turning to head back towards the house. "Get yourself ready. It's a fair drive ahead and a long day waiting for us once we get there."