

Report

# On Tattoos & Sibling Bonds

October 20, 2023

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PROMPT: Science Fiction & Fantasy

Writing Competition

☆ 5

2023

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GROUP: Write the World

**B**rava stifles a gasp as Xavia enters the *Prowler's* barracks. Her mourning tattoo, a jagged fang that reaches from her hairline to her chin, completely encases her left eye. Yuko trails in after her, his ink kit in one hand. He climbs up onto the bunk beside Brava, sighing softly.

“I tried to talk her out of it, but she wouldn’t listen,” Brava’s brother says tiredly.

“You did your best,” she returns, eyes still transfixed by the fresh ink staining their sister’s skin. Traditionally, mourning tattoos can be placed anywhere on the body, but rarely on the face. The forearms are the most common, a facial tattoo reserved for instances of most extreme grief.

Yuko nudges her gently. “Want to do yours?”

“Sure,” she mutters absentmindedly. A fresh coil of guilt ties another knot in her stomach as she watches Da scoop Xavia into his arms and cradle her against his chest as she weeps for her twin. *Why hadn’t she been faster?* She could have saved Eyan, but she was too slow, not skilled enough, and now he’s dead, body left to an ignominious end in the Codevian ravines.

He wraps a knuckle on her spaulder. “You’re gonna need to take this off.”

Brava nods slowly, reluctant to remove her shell so soon after the battle. Her mind's still locked in combat state, every emotion forced down so she can do her job. If her armor comes off, she's afraid her emotions will spill over along with it.

Yuko nudges her again. "Want some help?" His eyes are understanding, reading her unspoken protest instantly.

She lets out a shuddering exhale. "Sure."

A few minutes later her armor is off and they're padding through the dim corridors, feet carrying them outdoors on instinct.

The night sky glitters faintly above them and the air is still. There is no faint scuffle of night creatures, all have been driven away by the battle. A deep melancholy settles in Brava's heart. This "victory" has cost them dearly. How many have lost a loved one?

Light pressure on her shoulder brings her back into the present and Yuko withdraws his hand. She realizes he's been trying to get her attention for several moments.

“Brava? Are you ok?”

She smiles tiredly. “Not really.”

They sit cross legged on a flat-topped boulder. Yuko lays out his kit with his typical precision. Sterile wipes, salve, ink cartridges, tattoo gun, tracing pen. “It wasn’t your fault,” he murmurs, deftly slotting a cartridge of black ink into the gun and sterilizing the needle.

Brava shrugs. “You don’t know that.”

Setting the gun down, Yuko cups her chin, forcing her to look at him. “Yes I do.”

She drops her eyes. “I’m the medic. I’m supposed to save people, not let them die. I should have been faster.”

“Bees.” It’s an old nickname, one that she hasn’t heard in years. It conjures up images of a much younger Brava shaking in Yuko’s bunk as the explosion that killed her birth family played on repeat beneath her tightly shut eyelids. Memories of her brother holding her as she cried,

whispering reassurances against her hair.  
*It'll be okay, Bees. I got you, don't be afraid.*

His voice is achingly gentle. “You did everything you could. Eyan was dead the minute that automan went down.”

Brava shakes her head. “You don't know that. I'm the medic, I'm supposed to be able to help!”

“And I'm the sniper,” Yuko retorts.  
“Shouldn't I have warned him over the coms? I could see the automan from my nest, so isn't it my fault?”

She shakes her head. “You couldn't have done anything, you were watching our flank.”

He chuckles sadly. “My point exactly. You can't hold the squad to one standard and yourself to another. It's not healthy.”

“But-” he cuts her off with a finger on her lips.

“We’re at war Bees. People die and you can’t save everyone. Eyan was my brother too.” His gray eyes are sorrowful, but firm. “You could be the best medic in the MAF and you would still lose people. I hate it and you hate it, but we have to accept it. You tried your best and Eyan didn’t die alone. I know he didn’t blame you, so don’t blame yourself.” Yuko smiles sadly, grief evident in his tired expression. “Please. I don’t want to lose another sibling.”

Brava lets out a shuddering breath. “I can try.”

Yuko nods. “Good.” He uncapps the pen and raises an inquisitive eyebrow. “What do you want?”

With deft fingers, she undoes the clasps on the top section of her undersuit, leaving her in a black tank top. She traces a band from her left collarbone to the ridge of her spine. “This.”

He gives her a look. “Are you sure? That’s pretty close to some vital spots.”

“I trust you.”

Yuko acquiesces and begins to sketch out the tattoo on her skin. Diamonds for beloved, triangles for a sibling. Trapezoids for fallen in battle, hexagons for intelligence. She peers over her shoulder once Yuko finishes the outline and nods. Exactly how she'd imagined it. Her older brother somehow always knows how to capture the essence of the person the tattoo represents.

The gun thrums slightly and she holds stock still as Yuko begins to fill in his painstaking outline. It stings and Brava lets her tears fall. She weeps for her little brother and imagines the ache in her chest seeping away each time the needle punctures her skin. By the time Yuko is finished, she feels so much lighter.

She pulls her top back on, wincing slightly as the action stretches the tender skin around her new tattoo. Yuko packs up in silence and she stands listening to the rasp of wind on stone as she waits.

As he stands she wraps him a hug.  
“Thanks Snipe,” Brava whispers hoarsely.

Another old nickname, another memory  
of a time long gone.

Yuko's arms come around her in return.  
"Always Bees. Always."

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### Footnotes

Final draft!!!! 1000 words exactly. Enjoy!

## Message to Readers

Many thanks to Emmi\_B, sasindie, adorning\_the\_dark, and wannabe-writer for your excellent reviews and feedback as well as everyone who commented and gave encouragement!

United Kingdom

Fiction

Fantasy

Science