

Might Be Bad (I Always Thought)

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Might Be Bad (I Always Thought)

by [SmashGenesis](#)

Summary

Winter always thought he might be bad. Now that he's been betrayed by the two dragons he loved most, he's sure of it. On a trip to see his family for an important event, he might just realize that nobody has to be good to be loveable.

Notes

I churned most of this out in about three hours, somehow, which is definitely a new record for me in terms of how fast I've written 3.5k words. It's been edited, though, so don't worry about that. Please enjoy!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Winter hasn't slept in twenty-four hours. He keeps telling himself he will – tomorrow's the day, after all; he needs *some* rest – but every time he closes his eyes, he sees them again. Kinkajou, Turtle, Qibli. Moonwatcher.

He shakes his head back and forth, trying to clear it, but the motion makes him dizzy.

Maybe he can just lay down without trying to sleep, he decides.

He's in his room in the house he shares with two older SkyWings in Sanctuary. It's small, and cramped, but he actually kind of likes it. In a way, it feels snug, safe even, like if he were to keep it wrapped around him like a blanket, then perhaps it could shield him from all the myriad things he doesn't want to admit he can't handle.

As he curls up on the floor, he purposefully keeps his eyes open and trained on the window, where the sunset is nearly through and the three moons are glimmering faintly.

Before long, though, his eyes sag closed, and he dreams of them and what they meant to him, and what they did. When he wakes up the next morning, he's shivering, even though he isn't cold.

He's ready to leave before dawn, even though he feels tired as ever. He only has one day for this, and by the moons, he wants to get it over with. As Winter leaves the building, the two older SkyWings are entangled on the floor in the foyer. Apparently, they've had a busy night. Winter wishes they had kept that in one of their rooms, but moreover, he just feels hollow seeing them like that.

Don't be ridiculous, he tells himself.

Winter can tell one of them, the smaller one, is awake by the way he tries and fails to silence his breathing when Winter walks by. He's perfectly is perfectly content to let the SkyWing believe he's pulled the wool over Winter's eyes, but then he speaks, quietly, so as not to wake their third roommate.

"Hey, Winter. Don't tell anyone about this?" It's phrased like a command, but spoken like a question. Winter almost respects that kind of sensitivity, but it also annoys him. Make demands or ask favors. Don't waste time by asking both.

"What you and your new boyfriend do is not my problem," is all Winter says as he fumbles the door open with more force than strictly necessary. It feels good, though, using a little violence on something that can't be hurt. It's something to channel his anger into.

Then, he's off into the great big sky, flying northwest.

He's still cold in the dark blue light of morning, and it's the bad kind of cold, the kind he's been feeling for the past five months. He tries to keep himself focused by scanning the ground, hoping maybe to see some scavengers. He doesn't.

As the morning wears on, his mind starts to drift. *What are Moon and Qibli up to now*, he wonders before he can stop himself. *Actually, wait, I don't care.*

He does care. He misses them. He misses Moon's kindness. Her empathy and her strong will. He misses Qibli's obnoxious jokes. His clever puns and cleverer plans and observations. He misses the way they made his heart skip a beat whenever he saw them together, though he's glad to be rid of the way he always felt like he was intruding, and more glad to be rid of the tantalizing hope he could be included.

Finally, he feels another chill, and this time, it's from outside his body. He looks up to see The Great Ice Cliff looming in the distance. His stomach drops. This is really happening. He wants to run away, to turn back around and go home, but that is not who he'll let himself become. He is Winter, ex-prince of the IceWings, and as much as he hates himself, he knows he is not a coward.

At the base of the wall, he's met by two dragons he's never once seen, and for an instant, the urge to greet them as if he's in a lower Circle almost overtakes him. But he's not in the Circles anymore, and if there's anything he doesn't miss about the IceWing aristocracy, it's that. So he simply explains who he is, what he's here for, and produces from a pouch around his neck a passport, signed by Queen Snowfall. It approves his passage through the Ice Kingdom to the royal cemetery for one day only – today. The guard grunts disapprovingly, but gives him the okay to pass. Winter shoots her a withering glare and she shrinks back for a moment.

Winter feels bad, but does not apologize. *What's done is done*, he tells himself as he flies into the gelid vastness on the other side of The Great Ice Cliff. *Saying 'sorry' fixes nothing.*

For a moment, he wonders if that's why nobody loves him.

The trip through the Ice Kingdom is short and freezing, and though he's tempted to stop at a commoners' village along the way, he refuses to land. After all, he's an IceWing for moons' sake. Emphasis on the "ice." He shouldn't feel this cold, even if he's been away for so long.

After another hour of flying, he reaches Queen Snowfall's palace, where he's stopped by three more soldiers. By the way they look at him, he can tell they recognize him.

"Halt," the tallest one says. He has a scar on his chest. "Papers, please."

Winter says nothing – surely if they recognize him, they know he's been granted temporary passage? But as the soldier and his subordinates stare expectantly, he understands they haven't. "Here." He shoves the passport in their snouts and storms past, like a fierce gale whipping through hapless treetops.

"Who does he think he is?" he hears one of the soldiers say, her voice disbelieving and haughty.

"Who cares?" responds another. "He's an ex-prince for a reason."

“Enough, you two,” says the tall one with the scar, and for a second, hope sparks in Winter’s heart that he’s standing up for him. Then, he says more quietly, very clearly hoping not to be heard, “Wait until he’s gone for you to gossip, all right?”

Winter forces himself not to turn around. They’re right, after all. He lost his princehood all on his own, and that’s one of the few things he doesn’t regret.

When he gets to the cemetery, Tundra and Hailstorm are waiting for him, much to his surprise. It’s cold and white and empty and beautiful here and the air is crisp and lovely, just like Winter remembers it. Gravestones stretch out as far as the eye can see.

“Hey,” Hailstorm says. His voice is muted and melancholy, but that’s still the first friendly word Winter has heard all day.

Tundra glowers at Winter before he can respond. He ignores her, and says, “Hello.” Tundra turns her snout up in the air and sniffs like Winter is a rotting fish, but whatever part of Winter would have been once bothered by this is long dead, or so he tells himself. He takes his place beside Hailstorm, Tundra in front of them both. By tradition, Icicle should be here too, but unlike Winter, it seems, she hasn’t been given a reprieve from her punishment.

They’re supposed to all be silent and stare straight ahead, and simply think. Think of all the honorable, brave things Narwhal had done in life, all the shows of strength and acts of heroism he performed, today, on the year anniversary of his death.

All Winter can think of is how much he wishes he’d had a better father. In years past, he might have thought of how much he wished he’d been a better son, but if his time with the Jade Winglet has taught him anything good, it’s that it was Narwhal’s duty to be a good parent, no matter how he might hate his son.

Winter suddenly feels icy, so much more so than before. He’s freezing, he realizes. He’s freezing to death from the inside out, he knows it, and his coldness is leaking out down his snout and for Pyrrhia’s sake, he’s crying, actually crying like a little dragonet.

It’s gentle at first, but the more he thinks about things – all the glares of disapproval, all the promises that he wasn’t good enough and would never be good enough, all the declarations of his worthlessness – the harsher the tears and sobs become.

Tundra swivels around to stare down Winter, her white face tinged red. “Three moons, you sniveling walrus!” she shouts. “What kind of company have you *kept* since you went to Jade Mountain? Has your time away from the palace really turned you into *this*?” She sweeps a wing through the air, gesturing at Winter. “You’re an IceWing, act like it!”

Even Hailstorm seems annoyed. That just makes Winter cry harder, wail more gutturally. What did he even come back for? He knew this was waiting for him. Did he think that if he was good enough, if he somehow managed to please his unpleasable mother that he’d be handed his title back, and maybe, just maybe, hear an “I love you,” somewhere along the way?

“You’re pathetic,” Winter says through the tears before he knows what’s come over him. Tundra looks ready to strike him. *Strike first* – the old mantra rushes through his mind, but that’s not what this is. This isn’t about striking first and protecting himself; this is about finishing things for as close to once and for all things like this get. “I’ve never been enough of an IceWing for you or for Father. I’ve never been the son you wanted, and you’ve never been anything but a miserable shell of a dragon who is incapable of loving anyone but herself, and that’s pathetic. Coming here was a mistake.”

He doesn’t bother to stay and see how she reacts, or Hailstorm. Instead, he takes to the sky, feeling colder and more alone than ever. It’s like someone has tunneled into his belly and gouged out anything and everything they could find.

He must be halfway to the wall by the time he thinks that maybe he’s done something bad again, but this time, there’s no coming back, not from something like this. This time, there is no way his mother will ever talk to him again. Hailstorm won’t want to see him either, not after he’s ruined their mourning rite.

Winter feels tears starting to sting his eyes again, but he blinks them away and shoves them down. The day must be halfway over by now, but he isn’t sure he can wait until sundown for it to end. Below him in the bright noontime sun, he sees the commoners’ villages and is once more tempted to stop in, but one second more in the Ice Kingdom than necessary would be enough to make him claw off his own tail spikes. He just wants to go home and sleep and get back to managing the scavenger preserve tomorrow. They’re all afraid of him still, but at the very least, they can’t tell him how bad he is.

The Great Ice Cliff passes by him as he flies, and for a second, he’s relieved to be out of the frigid prison he once loved as a home. And then something smacks into his face. He’s dazed for a split second, but he peels it off his face and looks down to find something he never wanted to see again: his skyfire armband, complete with the stone.

Oh no. He looks around the empty sky for them, because he knows they’re here, or at least that she’s here, and this is *not* what he needs right now. “I gave you this back for a reason,” he calls out when he can’t find them. “Take it from me so I can go.”

Two pairs of wingsbeats approach him from below. They’re familiar, achingly so, and that ache fills him with rage.

“Winter,” Moon says as she levels out to be face-to-face with him.

“Heya,” Qibli adds in. He seems hesitant, perhaps uncharacteristically so.

Seeing them both for the first time in five months fills him with a longing he could never describe. He wants to hug them, touch them, nuzzle with and embrace them, but also, he wants to hurt them, call them names, tell them off the way he told off his mother.

Instead, he just holds out the skyfire. “This is yours. Give it to someone who actually wants to be your friend.”

But Moon shakes her head emphatically. “We need to talk to you, Winter, and we want it to be on equal ground.”

“We’re in the sky.”

“Figurative ground,” Qibli declares.

“I have nothing to say to you. Take your stupid armband and leave.”

This time, it’s Qibli who shakes his head. “Throw it away if you like, but we aren’t taking it.”

The urge to do what he says nearly wins out, but for some reason, Winter finds himself clutching the armband like a dragonet’s security blanket, like it’s the only thing that can protect him. In a way, it is. “How did you even find me?”

“We had a feeling you’d be coming here today,” Qibli answers. “We took a gamble.”

Winter wants to refute this, to say they’re fibbing, but that’s exactly the kind of hunch these two would have. He repeats, “I have nothing to say to you,” and starts to fly off. Annoyingly, they follow.

“Then please, just listen,” Moon begs. Winter knows he could outfly them, but for whatever reason, he doesn’t speed up. “We’re sorry we never told you about Peacemaker. We’re sorry we thought keeping the truth from you would make you happy.”

“We were wrong,” Qibli says. “We were coconut-brained idiots and we betrayed your trust. We’ll never lie to you again, but Winter, we miss you so much. Everyone does.”

His stomach flips like someone’s churning butter inside him and he wants to shiver more. “Enough with the shivering already,” he wants to shout, but that would just confuse his former friends.

“Really? Everyone misses me?” he asks instead, skeptical. “Then where are they?”

Without missing a beat, Moon says, “They thought we’d have the best chance of getting through to you.”

“Getting through to me?” Winter half snorts, half barks. He can’t believe their stupidity, their sheer nerve. “You two hurt me most of all.”

“We know. And we’re”-

“You’re sorry, I know. I don’t care. You lied to me. You transformed Darkstalker with magic against his will, the very thing he was doing that was so awful, and then *chose not to tell me*. I hate you both.”

Qibli looks stung, and Winter feels a perverse satisfaction in that. Moon, though, is unfazed. “You don’t mean that,” she says confidently. “I know you’re angry at us – furious, even. But I know you don’t hate us.”

Winter stops midair and swings around to face them. A dam has been torn down, and all the water is rushing out like blood from a wound. "I DO!" he roars. He might have cried had this happened earlier, but after before, he's too tired. "If my hate were a lake then I could dive into it and never reach the bottom! My hate is unending and complete, and it's never going to go away so STOP TRYING!"

"No," they both say unflinchingly.

Now it's Winter's turn to be stunned. "Excuse me?"

"We said we won't stop trying," Qibli announces. His face is strong and confident and bold, and it hurts like a burn to look at how handsomely caring it seems. "You can say you hate us all you want, but we will never stop trying to include you in our lives."

Everything about Moon, too, from her teardrop scales to her gentle posture, to her beautiful, resolute eyes say she won't back down.

"So you think that's that, huh? Do you think you can just say you're sorry and everything will be okay again? Newsflash, you slush-brained ninnies: 'sorry' fixes nothing! What do you possibly think you can do to make me want you both back in my life?"

Now, for the first time, they look unsure. They exchanged a glance with each other before Qibli says, "We can be your friends. We know you're lonely, Winter. We want you to feel anything but that."

And that's the final straw, and suddenly, Winter is crying and yelling again, his voice thundering like a storm. "YOU HAD THAT CHANCE! You hurt me so much and now you're telling me I can let you in to hurt me all over again?" He sobs. Then, more quietly, he speaks what's been on his mind all this time as the SandWing and NightWing look on sadly.

"I know I'm unpleasant. I know I get angry and lash out and I know I'm not worth loving. When I was at the mourning ceremony before, I thought that maybe I'd made peace with that. That maybe, I could be okay with myself if I let go of wanting my parents to love me. And now you two are just going to... just going to barge in and tell me you'll be my friend, as if that makes up for what you did? ...Even if you are serious, I don't know if I can put myself through that again."

Qibli and Moon say nothing at first. Then, Qibli flies over and wraps Winter in a big bear hug, his wings embracing Winter like a cocoon. It's warm and strange and uncomfortable and wonderful, but Winter can't make himself resist. "You hate yourself more than you could ever hate anyone else."

"Gee, really?" Winter says through his still-flowing tears. It's a half-choke, half a spit of disgust. "And you're supposed to be the clever one." He realizes he's grasping the skyfire again once Moon wraps her wings around them both, and for a moment, Winter has everything he ever wanted. Then they pull away.

They look at him expectantly.

Am I really doing this? Winter wonders. Is he really going to let these dragons hurt him again?

Can I really shut them out again?

“There’s something I need to tell you both, if we’re going to be friends again.”

“Yeah?” Qibli asks.

Winter swallows hard and opens his mouth, but the words won’t come out.

“Uh, Winter?” It’s Moon this time.

The sun is starting to hang low in the sky now, not quite a sunset, but getting there, and just like the sunset signals the end of the day, Winter realizes that if he doesn’t tell them what he has to now, he never will. But he can’t say it out loud because he’s a coward.

Winter flings the skyfire at Qibli, who catches it on reflex, and he thinks as hard as he can.

I love you both. I love you both. I love you both! I wanted you both for months before I shut you out! I can’t go back to just being a third wheel in your relationship or else I’ll go mad! I know I’m no good, but if we’re going to be friends again, please say you want me back! Please tell me you’ll be my family!

Moon’s eyes go wide as she hears his thoughts, as she hears everything. She seems woozy for a second, and in that second, Winter is sure he’s said too much.

“What, what’s going on?” Qibli asks, confusion written all over his face. “Fill me in here!”

“I want to go out with you guys.” The words leave Winter’s mouth easily this time, gliding off his tongue like a dewdrop falling from a leaf now that they’re out there in someone else’s mind. “I wanted to for a long time.”

Moon and Qibli look at each other. Then back to Winter. And then each other again, and Winter can tell they’re having some sort of conversation with their eyes alone. He isn’t sure he could ever be a part of that.

They nod at each other.

“Let’s go for it,” Qibli says, nonchalantly, like this is the only logical outcome.

“I want to try this, too,” Moon says, but adds in, “but let’s be careful, okay? I’ve never had a boyfriend before Qibli, let alone two at once. I… I’m not sure what to do here.”

“I think I know exactly what to do,” Qibli says with a devilish smile and a wink.

Winter isn’t sure how to respond. Tears are brewing in his eyes again, but this time, they’re happy. Then, they’re embracing him again, and they’re warm, and he’s warm and he

hopes he's making them as warm as he is.

They land in a nearby mountain cave to rest and embrace some more, and as the three do so, unspoken words pass between them, words they know they'll have to say out loud later. They have a lot to talk about and figure out and Winter especially has a lot of sorting out his feelings to do. Even as Moon hands him back his skyfire, he knows they're all wondering if this is a good idea. Winter knows he's still raw from seeing his family before, cathartic as that might have been. He knows this might even be an awful idea, one that could tank all three of them forever.

Winter decides he knows one thing more, bad as he's sure he is.

He never wants to feel cold again.

End Notes

I was pretty unsatisfied with the way they wrapped up Winter's storyline in the second arc. I'd had ideas for a much longer fic about the same concepts as what you saw here, but it involved time travel and would have been way too long for me to justify writing when I have #adulting to do. But, when I realized that I didn't NEED all that to write about what I wanted to write about, this fic was born! Please leave a comment and a kudos and maybe recommend this story to your friends and have THEM leave a comment and a kudos. Thanks!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!