

- Derelict Hearts -

Chapter II  
Coffee Drinkers

*Draft 2*



A short rest, a short dream; past cementing itself in memories doomed to fail us eventually. Until then, I would rather not worry of what is to come, and exist, despite the taking.

I wake up in the guest room of Paragoria and Nekrichta's house. As I get up from being already without sheets to cover my sleeping self, chatter somewhere downstairs can be heard. Grabbing my jacket, I dust it off and go to the bathroom, splashing my face with cold water and all the usual one does after they wake up. Obviously, I'm still tired, but not tired enough to not be functional... yet. Naps through the day will be needed, I suppose. Annoying to sleep, but whatever, better this than walking half asleep with hurting shoulders. Before taking the staircase, I open the windows of the room I slept in.

Walking down the stairs to join those already awake, my nose picks up a familiar smell stemming from the kitchen. A light fog makes itself known through the sunrays coming from the small window there with the stairs. It smells homely, and nice... and bittersweet. Nostalgic memories momentarily flood my being, and my spine shivers, swallowing the dim light whole, singing and breaking the heart of love.

Mother, were you to be here, I would have asked you where did father went to this morning. Maybe he was sound asleep from yet another tiresome week, or maybe he went to help prepare another showroom or convention. Reminds me... I never really understood the appeal of these places, but I never felt self-righteous enough to judge either. These events are always packed with folks. There's laughters and smiles; lots of effort and memories seemingly made whenever those are happening. Yet... at the same time, I always felt that something was off. Still to this day I don't know what it could be.

Nevermind that. I finish going down the stairs, and enter the kitchen, standing under the doorway. Here the trio is sitting and shifting around the place:

Oudis has his back against a wall, arms crossed, cup of coffee next to him. Does he really need to pretend he needs all these things? Hm, what am I saying, maybe he likes it.

Nekrichta has her back turned, hunched over, organizing a cabinet full of alcohol bottles. Surprisingly not seeing any glass or bottle outsi... oh nevermind it's right next to the microwave, hidden on the counter between

this appliance and the dish rack.

Paragoria is standing straight, half-sitting on the table in the room, legs straight and foot on the ground, the other wrapping over. One arm is crossed, hand supporting his other arm. He holds a cup up to his chin, smoke rising from it.

The two masculine voices are... or were, rather, talking. They turn to me:

*Oudis* – “Lixi! Hope you slept well, even if just for a little. Were you able to dream?”

*Lixi* – “Unsure, I can’t remember already. Maybe I did dream? But I slept well enough to be bothered by having to wake up.”

Paragoria laughs, and follows:

*Paragoria* – “Glad to hear that, I’ll assume the bed was comforting enough then, and it’s not just because you were tired and could have slept on the floor.”

*Lixi* – “It was pretty nice actually, yes. I would totally go and sleep on the floor still but it’s a bit dirty isn’t it?”

*Paragoria* – “Probably. I guess we don’t clean the place as often as we maybe should. Anyway, Want some coffee, tea, anything to eat?”

*Lixi* – “Thank you for the offer, it’s kind of you. Please, some coffee and...” I look around the kitchen to have an idea of what’s available for satiating my belly. “Actually, just coffee, thank you.” I’ll eat later; want my brain to be fully operational this morning.

*Paragoria* – “Sure thing. Sugar?”

*Lixi* – “One, please.”

Pariah gets off the table and walks to the right of Nekri, grabbing a clean cup from the dish rack, and moving to her left to the coffee pot. As he passes by her the second time, he gently rubs her back, and moves his hand

gently to her left shoulder. As the material ghost entity is still organizing, she frees one hand and grabs the familiar one on her shoulder.

As they deal with their morning duties, to them and to Oudis and I, hand in hand, we us two watch. Looking at little scenes of peaceful love and affection like this, it never gets old. As I observe, I can feel my right earlobe getting a little warmer. I softly pinch it with my cold fingers.

The skeleton moves from his spot, grabbing his cup, hinting at me to come close. I move as well, joining him to be close enough so that we can talk softly if we want, as to not be heard clearly by others. Oudis, left to me, talks:

*Oudis* – “Despite all of their flaws, they do make a magnificent couple, do they not? It’s always lovely to see.”

*Lixi* – “Despite it all, and knowing what they know... They’re beautiful, shining people. Pariah especially, I wonder how he copes with it.”

*Oudis* – “Broken people with other broken people. Maybe he’ll tell you his story one day, but I think he found a lot of hope in Nekri; something and someone to hold onto and keep close to his humanity, while trying to give back as much as he could to his partner. Maybe he feels a little different about it considering the nature of Nekri being Nekri, but I certainly believe they’re a perfect fit for one another.”

As Oudis finishes his sentence, Paragoria and Nekrichta separate their hands. The man brings me a warm cup of coffee. I thank him, and he grabs back his own mug.. He stands in front of us, as to allow Nekri to enter the circle whenever she’s done.

*Paragoria* – “So, you two talking softly like this, was it about us?”

*Lixi* – “Yes. Just, you know. Lovey dovey is always cute to see.”

*Paragoria* – “That why you were blushing?”

*Lixi* – “Was I?” I give a side glance at the entity next to me, and softly hit the him with my elbow. “Oudis, you could have told me...”

*Oudis* – “Haha! I knew he’d notice, and I didn’t want to spoil it to you. Very rare to see you flustered, you know.”

*Lixi* – “Tch. Idiot you.” My eyes slide left to right as to put emphasis on what I’m trying to convey, even if it’s not really that. It’s funny, and I’m joyful that this exchange just happened. They can see; maybe hear it. ‘Every feeling is a wire’, someone would have said.

As we smile with Pariah, and I assume with Oudis as well; we drink from our mugs.

Through the kitchen window, the morning sky radiates of a bright and beautiful cyan blue, following peacefully from the previous night. The astral moon hides behind new hues, and Nekri now shines through the aura of her existence, rather than through the Moon’s reflection.

*Oudis* – “So, I have to ask you. Would you be willing to help us?”

The dreaded question arrives. At least it’s already been asked, no need to wait with a hint of stress running in my mind.

I look down a little, and close my eyes. What should I answer? What should be answered? I thought my mind resting would help to settle things down, but I’m still uncertain.

Opening my eyes, I answer, while ping-ponging between three centers of vision:

*Lixi* – “I’m still uncertain, quite honestly. Although there’s merit to what you said yesternight, I can’t bring myself to take a decision. If you were to obtain what you desire, I would be complicit in ending the human race. And I don’t know if I can bear this sin.”

*Paragoria* – “Just so we’re clear, it would not be \*just\* the end of humanity, but of life as a whole. Do you remember what Nekri said?”

*Lixi* – “Right. I guess I was downplaying the gravity of what is being asked.”

*Paragoria* – “I don’t blame you. Did so as well at first, but even if the reality of it is more grave than what you want it to be, it’s still not the reality

of what's being asked of you."

Oudis seems to be listening intently. He does not interrupt us, which is surprising. I thought he would have wanted to interject, as to try to get me to his side, and not to agree to Pariah's disagreements with him and Nekri.

*Lixi* – "My kneejerk reaction would have to been to say no to this request, but given who asks... or what asks?"

*Oudis* – "Whichever you prefer."

*Lixi* – "Okay. So, given who asks, I feel duty-bound to, at the very least, think about the why of it."

*Paragoria* – "The why of it as in... Empathizing?"

*Lixi* – "That, and also to the why of it all. By this I mean, if life would be deserving of being extinguished."

I feel in the middle of a spotlight on a grand stage, and it's getting a little uncomfortable.

*Paragoria* – "I see. That's the kind of considerations and thoughts I try to avoid."

*Lixi* – "Why?"

*Paragoria* – "I fear the conclusion would go against many things I used to believe in, and that I still hold onto today."

He looks away, towards Nekri, but not quite: Beyond the window, locking in his stare with the horizon, through the trees, as if something was looking at us.

"Still hold onto, even though... even though."

He blinks and sips from his cup, bittersweetly smiling.

Nekrichta closes the cabinet, straighten her back, turns and enters our circle, placing herself right next to the bearded man. She looks tenderly at her partner, and then at me.

*Nekrichta* – “Raw impermanence echoes in the sky.” As she ends her sentence, she grabs the arm of Paragoria, tilts her head, and rests it on his shoulder. The man proceeds to give a soft kiss the top of her head.

*Lixi* – “Sorry to change the subject like this, but I have to say you two look wondrous together.” Can’t help but smile... and hide said smile as I drink some more coffee.

*Paragoria* – “You are kind, it is appreciated.”

*Nekrichta* – “The stars in your head shine within your eyes, and your heart speaks in the place of your spirit. Beautiful, you are, I think.”

I’m a little embarrassed, this wasn’t supposed to end up like this. Compliments? How am I supposed to take them? And why even do they thank me? Whatever... be polite.

*Lixi* – “Thank you, but please don’t make this about me.”

The couple softly smiles in agreement.

*Lixi* – “Look. Oudis, Nekri. I appreciate you trying to enroll me in your end-of-the-world scenario, but before anything, I want to ask. If not me, will you try to find someone else anyway?”

*Oudis* – “What would you want the answer to be? In this world, where eight billions of human souls live and walk, sleep and eat, where memories are incessantly made and forgotten, all of them seek without going to the furthest they could go to. Perhaps due to their mortality, an innate knowledge of distance and time, the difficulty and possibility to end up in a place they did not want to end up in. We do not have these limitations.

What I am trying to say is that we traveled here, we met you, we chose you. Nekrichta chose to live alongside Paragoria, and I chose to exist alongside you, Lixi.”

*Nekrichta* – “Rare beings, your steadfast spirit and kindness is like covering myself with warm sand.”

*Lixi* – “I apologize but I’m no one special. No one.”

*Oudis* – “No one hoping deep within that they’re still someone, and act in regards to their principles and beliefs of a love with no recipient.”

*Paragoria* – “I found my receptacle, I’d say.”

*Oudis* – “In a way, but I would think it because that receptacle is here to represent the world you, too, used to love at one point. Would we agree that Nekri is a manifestation of that hope?”

*Paragoria* – “Of course. It is no secret. I suppose you say this because Lixi knows little of Nekri and I?”

*Oudis* – “Lixi knows less about you, so I try to pull and show some of what you are to her in this way. I hope it is not a bother to you.”

*Paragoria* – “I figured Nekri took a liking to your friend, and as such I trust that we all would get along well. So no, it is not a bother.”

These two talk together in such a way that makes the other two individuals they talk about simply listen, as if we weren’t here, while also still being here, listening. Almost political, but also genuine. Or rather Oudis acts politically, and Paragoria seems to want to find some comfort somewhere in the words exchanged. And now their speech is over.

I glance at Nekri, who has her eyes closed. I wonder if she’s falling asleep? Anyway, might be my turn to talk now.

*Lixi* – “I’ll take you chose us because we were the best fit. Probably confident we’ll eventually cave in. But still, do you not believe there’s a better fit somewhere?”

*Oudis* – “As much as it may be true, I don’t want to go to people who want to help without reservations, without thinking, and with hatred in their hearts. And you’re right, maybe there are better fit, but at the end of the day, you are our friends, first and foremost.”

His way with words is annoying to deal with. How is any of us supposed



to say no?

*Lixi* – “You’re absolutely an idiot, you know that right?”

*Oudis* – “You already did say that a few minutes ago.”

We softly laugh, while my eyes widen with fear and anticipation. Am I ready to take a decision? But... I lock eyes with the man in front of me, his loved one now soundly sleeping comfortably... while standing. How? Anyway...

*Lixi* – “Paragoria, what will you do?”

*Paragoria* – “I’m unsure. Maybe I’ll go along for at least a while. First because that’s what Nekri wants to do, but I’ve also made myself clear of my reservations concerning this. Although not an outright refusal of the matter, I’m still of course on the fence about it. Maybe, by going along, I’ll find an answer to many a question I have, and eventually I’d like to make a decision. To start the end of life, or to refuse to take part in it. I know I can’t necessarily stop it, so I’m not sure it’s even worth trying to. And it’s clear our words and thoughts would not sway our friends away from their self-righteous duty.”

Oudis suddenly jolts slightly. Something that was said got to him.

*Oudis* – “Self-righteous? How so?” He asks, while crossing his skeletal arms.

*Paragoria* – “Am I wrong? I don’t blame you for the things you want to do, but you’re still acting as both judge and executioner upon the whole of everything that is and that is to be alive.”

Pariah looks at Oudis, half worried that his words might have upset him.

*Oudis* – “I suppose that’s true.” He sighs, and goes back to a relaxed stance.

“You do have to have passed one final judgment upon everything to

even consider doing the things we want to do. Even if we veil it under the guise of ‘woe is us, eternity is torture’, the truth of the matter is as you say. At least for me. And note that, we still do believe all that was said last night, but still... it has to be said.”

A moment of consideration under silence comes by, inviting us to think. Not on what to say, but on what decision to take. This time, Paragoria has been waved in to enter as well; again, in his case. What to do..

Minutes later, Pariah slowly wakes up Nekri, and starts to speak, chest puffed up, ready to give a speech:

*Paragoria* – “Oudis, I met and fell for Nekrichta many a year back now. I thought that perhaps I could find her find a way back to what she once was – or at least to be again the idea of what she once was – because I needed to selfishly hope for a bright future. I don’t exactly know what a bright future means, but if it’s about not having the things I saw during wartime in another continent, ever exist again, then I guess that’s that. And I wanted to figure things out; figure life out, to help and get help from someone in the same trajectory.

Perhaps in my case it was out of guilt for being selfish towards a wish of what Nekri should be. Perhaps in some way I dehumanized her because she is technically not human. And still I have this feeling to repent towards you and her. Because of it, even though I may not agree with what you’re doing, I have a duty towards you two. Therefore, I will follow you and make sure you succeed in your mission.

You’ve told me a while back now, that even if you fail, it doesn’t matter because the end of life will still happen. And as much as I want to hope, I understand that you both react to the passage of time differently. I didn’t want to believe it, but I understand it nonetheless: that Nekrichta grows weaker after each passing year, that her state worsens bit by bit. I can only be there for her to lessen her pain. I don’t want to believe it entirely still, I want to hope that she can still be hope. But... It is what must be done.”

Nekri is still latched on to his arm, but she’s intently looking at his face. Her eyes are glowing, I wonder if she’s on the verge of crying, or if it’s just the sun reflecting.

Oudis, as usual, is almost immobile, and is considering carefully his words. Not that there seems to be a lot of consideration to be had here. The

man you wanted to help you out finally is willing to, and even admitted to some things. Which, I would hope, helped Pariah feel a little lighter.

*Oudis* – “We are deeply thankful. I am glad that Nekri chose you, and vice-versa. Your flaws and your willingness to accept them and eventually grow from them, I would believe is why Nekri chose you. If anything, and I think she would agree, you are her champion: a herald of hope.”

*Nekrichta* – “My kind champion, his beautiful soul radiates, he warms mine!”

Hm... Not the kind of man I would assume would be one to blush, but here we are. Cute.

*Oudis* – “And you, Lixi?”

Fuck. Okay. Guess I’m a bit curious.

*Lixi* – “I’m not sure if I agree or disagree. Maybe it’s not my place to tell, to be a voice for the many billions of existing things on this planet. But... like Pariah, I suppose, if it’s meant to all disappear anyway, I guess what I will do is at least follow you three for a bit. I hope you will not mind my intrusion.”

*Oudis* – “That is fine. We hope to convince you to stay. In the meantime, are you willing to drive?”

*Lixi* – “I’m not your taxi dri... wait, I am.” I sigh. “Okay, fine, whatever. As long as Pariah pays for gas.” I look at the older man in this room, expecting others to look at him too. But they’re all looking at me still.

*Paragoria* – “Of course.”

Now I can’t move away from this situation.

*Lixi* – “Honestly, I would have preferred to stay at home discussing meaningful meaningless things with you, Oudis, but I guess a change of pace and scenery might be a funny thing to do. Alright, I’ll stop trying to make

excuses.”

*Oudis* – “Happy to hear that. Then, let us lazily spend this day, and tomorrow we will go to a place near the sea.”

*Lixi & Paragoria* – “The sea?”

*Nekrichta* – “Memories of a person that used to be.”

*Oudis* – “Indeed. The final years of this person that chemist that used to help us. There are some things we need to check with his descendants. They still live around there. We need you two as well, in case they are not able to see us.”

*Nekrichta* – “And also... walk on beach.”

Very important, actually. What’s a trip near the sea if you don’t go walk on the beach, hearing the waves and smelling the sea?

Might be an interesting trip, just hope there’s no regret or wasted time once the journey’s over.