



Arcturus

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 Unlocked

Novel Preview: Renalt and Loma voice test

Hello, folks. Gosh, look at me, using the Patreon post system. Gasp.

So I have no idea how many people are interested in the to-be-named upcoming novel, but it's been more core project for 2018. Admittedly, I took May off to participate in MerMay, but I have zero regrets there and hope people have been enjoying that bit of ridiculous story.

(Everyone here can see it, right? I assssssume you all have AO3 accounts, but who knows. Lemme know if not.)

But ANYWAY, point being, I recently commissioned Papaya for portraits of the two main leads of the novel, Renalt and Loma. They came out stunningly:





DREAMY SIGH.

But as I alluded to elsewhere, I wanted to share some *writing* from this story. For my own purposes and to share with a few conspirators, I wrote a brief Voice Test scene to get a feel for Ren and Loma's speech patterns and rapport.

So I'll share it with you now!

A note about the scene: It's a non-canon scene from the very start of Act Three. It contains one or two spoilers for the events of the story. If you would like to be entirely unspoiled for the novel, I would suggest skipping it.

But if you **WOULD** like a sneak peek, then **READ ON**:

Tonight, a stormcloud had made itself comfortable, like a great nesting bird settling in about the peaks of Serebris Mountain. It had moved in late in the afternoon, and remained, stretching its welcome to its greatest limits. Thunder had a curious echo down the corridors and almost through the very core of the mountain itself, like the sound was bouncing around in the hidden Wells and reverberating into the stone like struck heavy brass. Rain came heavy against the glass windows, accompaniment to the hollow rumble, weaving into something expansive and sweet.

It could be a lullabye, as it had been for the young twins with their tired eyes and petulant mumbled words as they were firmly sent to sleep.

Loma sat, his back tucked into the corner of the chaise couch, and listened to the sound outside. He'd grown up with intense storms, of course; Nourashel was in the far north of Khaldrada and thus was plagued with brutal seasonal squalls. It was strange how different it felt here in the stone castle, elevated high up into the grey clouds themselves.

The Prince had arranged for a pot of sleep tea over an hour ago; by now, the careful mixture of quicksilver-gleaming liquor and floral steeping would be growing cold. Yet, Loma remained in his habitual seat, listening the fireplace crack and pop, the almost longing moan of wind outside through the eaves.

It was rude to linger so long; Renalt had already excused himself to make ready for sleep. The door to his private chambers was ajar, but the room dark gave no hint to his actions within, and Loma focused on the wind and rain, trying not to strain his hearing to listen to the Prince's movement.

Still, there eventually came a sudden slamming noise, swiftly followed by a few harsh Vermet objections. Loma's Vermet was still pathetically limited, but he knew a blue streak when he heard one. It was more in inflection than verbage anyway.

And it sounded like Old Khalad oaths about the virtue of one's honor, spoken vicious and condescending.

Loma shut the anthology he'd been studiously ignoring and put his feet on the ground before stilling. "Your Majesty? Is everything alright?"

The silence was loud; the absence of even distant, indistinct sounds of movement urged Loma to stand, his book held tight in both his hands. He looked at the half-shut door and cleared his thought. "Sire?" He held his breath, ears straining.

The pause finally broke around Renalt's called response. "It's fine."

It's terse and brief, even for him, and Loma took an anxious step forward, book clasped to his chest like a shield. "Are you sure? It's not oft-- often you let out a curse like that."

Closer, Loma tilted his ear in hope of hearing a little better. From this distance, he could hear the Prince take a deep, thorough breath, enough to fill his lungs, before hissing it out. "A mishap with my hand. I didn't mean to startle you."

Loma lowered his book and glared at the door, a flush taking over his face. "Startle me, never mind that, have you hurt yourself again?"

"No," Renalt said, but it was nearly sullen, and Loma didn't believe him.

"Should I call Kapelle to fetch a mender?" It wouldn't be the first time. Loma hovered on the door's threshold, fingers reaching out the lightly touch the frame.

"Do not call a mender," Renalt said, a little sharply.

"What did you do this time?" he asked, and wished the inner chambers were not so dark.

"Nothing," the Prince said, then muttered something in Vermet. There was a sound of something moving, being set heavily against wood.

"Nothing had you spitting like a tomcat?"

"No. Yes. You should finish your tea."

Loma felt his nose wrinkle in annoyance. "I-- that-- If you'd like me to leave, say so."

It was a cruel move; he already knew Renalt would not. There was a twinge of resentment in the quiet, but Renalt wasn't able to see Loma's embarrassed flush, so it didn't matter. "Are you bleeding again?" he asked, reaching for his patience with a stern grip.

"It's fine. Manageable." Curt, clipped.

"Will you just-- just let me see it already?" Loma snapped, and then bit down on his lower lip.

Now would be an excellent time for things to return to their deep silence. Instead, he heard footsteps, and hurried back two steps from the door, out of the way as it swung open.

Renalt stood with one hand curled tight against the door, his other pulled to his chest. The wrappings were not visibly red, but that was just the top layer Loma could see.

There was a slight lift to Renalt's dark brows. "More demands, then?"

Loma put his book down on the shelf nearby and closed the distance between them quickly, aware that his ears were burning. "What'd you do this time?"

"I tried to pick up something and forgot. That's all. Simple."

"A heavy thing? Or just your pen again?"

"Heavier," Renalt admitted. His face tipped down to watch with what Loma considered undue, avid interest as Loma pulled his hand closer and ran fingers over the bandage. "Are you my mender now?"

"In the absence of a pr--proper mender and the presence of your stubbornness, then I suppose so. I may not have magic but I can rewrap gauze with the best of them."

"A man of many talents," he murmured, and Loma briefly looked at his face, gauging for... mirth? Annoyance? Who could tell with Renalt, especially lately. The inscrutability made Loma swallow a nervous lump in his throat. This was, of course, his fault.

Add that to the unsung tapestry that stretched between them.

"Does it feel like it's bleeding? Can you tell?"

"No." Renalt's lips pursed together in an open grimace. "Don't change it, not yet. I intended to visit the bath. No point in redressing it."

"It's rather late for that, I'd think," Loma murmured, but released the Prince's hand, allowing him to tuck it back against his chest. "For the-- the bath, I mean."

He outright grimaced at that. "I'm aware of the hour. I still." He blinked slowly, and exuded a tiredness that seemed more than just the late hour. "It's been a long day. And I want an indulgence right now."

There was a lot woven into that. It had been a long day; it had also been a long few months, between the recovery of Tamlle and the Scourge and the duel. Loma couldn't help but wonder how much of the lines around Renalt's face were his habitual stone facade and how much were... him.

It wasn't enough to keep his mouth sealed; "How will you do that with your hand?"

The stillness in Renalt was despairing.

Loma shook his head. "No. This is ridiculous. I-- I-- I am a grown man of many talents, yes, thank you, and if His Majesty wants the simple pleasure of hot water in cooking his tired bones then I d-daresay he should have it." He stepped forward, enjoying the way Renalt's eyes widened, showing the dark limbal ring around his silver irises. "I think it's a small thing in comparison to the.... the big things that you've put up with lately."

"What?" The Prince frowned.

"I'll help," Loma said, pushing enough cheer into his voice to hopefully drown the tremor. "Yes. I'll help you. Were you grabbing some essentials? I'll carry them. Let's go, before we lose any more midnight oil."

"Oil... I..." Renalt was a little slow, and thus unprepared for Loma to duck into his chambers. It was dark, but the light from the door was enough to see the woven basket that had been half-filled with towel and robe and gleaming salts. The only thing missing was

a heavy carved stone pot of cream, sat to the sit on the dresser. It had enormous heft in Loma's hand, and stretched his fingers wide.

Loma added it to the basket, and gave the Prince a considering look.

Renalt just bowed his head, and pressed his uninjured hand against his bandaged palm. "A misjudgement."

"I'm not judging anything," Loma said as kindly as he could. The basket handle fit over his arm, and he lifted it. "Come on, then."

The royal baths were only a curved corridor and one set of spiral stairs away from the bedrooms, and Loma had never considered them a great distance away. Tonight, the path seemed a longer trial that journey to Vermeil had been.

Renalt's footsteps were so soft, Loma was caught out thrice checking behind him, ensuring that he was still being followed. And each time, Renalt nodded almost solemnly to his attention, like a man being lead to a dire fate.

An apology lodged in Loma's throat. By the time he pushed open one of the grand doors to the baths, it was far too late to reverse this track and gracefully part ways for the night.

The sound of the baths was a delicate rippling noise. The small fountains that moved the water in tireless loops gleamed in the sparse candlelight. It was dark enough that Loma had to wait for his eyes to adjust. Usually, he came earlier in the day, when the setting sun painted the floors in warm colors. Now, in solid, stormy night, he was less sure of this footing.

"Allow me." Renalt walked past Loma, towards one of the many sets of shelves built against the wall.

"Hand, watch your hand," Loma said, just in time for Renalt to still mid-reach, and reconsider. He grimaced, and picked up a few candles between his fingers, then a long wickstarter between two undamaged fingers on his other hand.

The frustration on his face was stark as he set out candles around the edge of one of the baths and lit them. The flickering glow caught against the curve of his lips, highlighting them, and creating the illusion of a pout. Or, Loma assumed it was an illusion.

His wrist flicked, the wickstarter dimming.

Loma stood there, across the bath from Ren, his arm still weighed with the basket. As he waited, Renalt blinked at him, nearly catlike.

Then, with the same determination Loma had often seen from him during sparring matches and across the table in the war room, the Prince lifted his hands and began undoing the clasps of his shirt. His mouth twisted as he worked through each one, down his chest.

Face hot, Loma turned, and knelt by the bath, emptying the basket and laying everything out in a neat row. He spared half a thought to Renalt working his fingers through his injury, but... even at his most reckless and stupid, Loma would not offer to *undress* the Prince. Even he had his limits, distant though they often were.

There was no cause to spend so much time arranging the small set of items he carried to the baths. But he did, until he heard the Prince approach. With his gaze studiously on the astringent-smelling salts, he didn't see Renalt descend the shallow steps into the hot water. Only when he drifted close to Loma and seated himself on the submerged ledge nearby did Loma look up.

Renalt's collarbone was visible above the refracting waterline. His dusky skin gleamed wetly as he situated himself. As he settled, he held his arm aloft, his bandages free.

Loma swallowed against the tightness in his throat. "Best to-- to keep your arm out. Maybe lay out over the edge?"

"Yes," Renalt agreed simply, and lifted his arm up further until he could extend it along the ornate stone lip of the bath.

"Right. Good." Loma cleared his throat. "How do... you use these?" He lifted the bowl of salts.

Turning his head to look, Renalt glanced at the bowl, and Loma could see a keen light in his eyes. "Here." He reached out (with his good hand this time, thankfully) and closed his fingers around a hefty handful. Arm moving in an arc, the Prince shook the salt out over the water surrounding him. It fizzed, and the air grew thicker with green smells. Pine and tart pungent citrus, mostly. Renalt inhaled it deeply, and laid his head back over the rim, sighing.

"Oh," Loma said. "Like that then."

Ren's lips quirked. "Yes. Like that."

With Renalt's eyes shut, Loma felt himself relax a little. He shifted off his knees to sit near the edge of the bath. The water was clouded from the salt, which Loma was deeply grateful for. His eyes were less likely to wander off and get caught out in places they ought not to be.

The pleased little hum from the Prince was too much to take sitting still. Pushing up his sleeves, Loma reached for Ren's hand. "Let's take a look here."

There was no hesitation; Renalt turned his hand over for Loma, letting him locate the fine metal clasp that afixed the bandage. Loosening it, the rest came free, spiraling away with an easy pull. The other layers gave no resistance. Eventually, though, the gauze caught, clinging to the skin underneath.

Renalt's fingers twitched, but he otherwise didn't move.

Still, Loma made a quiet shushing sound. A little water liberated from the bath helped loosen things, and Loma plucked the gauze away.

Under it was... healing. Certainly better than anyone could hope to look after catching a heavily swung sword with their palm. There was a deep red line that... hurt to look at. It looked impossible, something more in line with cartography than... skin.

Swallowing, Loma did his best to wash around the wound, cleaning along the too-neat divide in Renalt's hand. It was something to focus on, warming and clearing away the dried blood. Some of it was bright red; he must've broken the wound open again.

Focused on taking care of him, Loma took some time to realize he was being closely watched. The Prince's face was impassive, but his eyes were steady, following Loma's ministrations.

"Does it hurt?" Loma asked quietly.

"It's nothing to worry about," Renalt said quietly, turning his arm into Loma's grip.

"That is certainly not what I asked."

"I'll keep."

Keep being a pain in-- Loma let out a tense sigh.

/JAZZHANDS

 sneak peak, the novel

3 Likes

⋮  

- Arcturus

who is more smoochable, ren or loma, discuss

 

2y
- mims

REN IS MOST SMOOCHABLE. those lips, the lip line, goddamn. loma is most snuggable.

  1

2y



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