

in bed awake with shadow beings

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in bed awake with shadow beings

by [grieve](#)

Summary

In the small and lonely attic room of the Hound Pits Pub, Corvo is desperate for human touch that does not stem from violence and the Outsider always indulges his favorite of the Marked.

Notes

a little note on the time frame of the fic before diving in: this fic isn't set during any particular time frame, it's just kind of a random night after the first handful of missions in dsh1. that being said, there are slight references to some of the information regarding the outsider and his godhood that we received in dsh2, but as this takes place during dsh1, corvo doesn't know any of that yet so if some things corvo thinks read a little funny wrt to that dsh2 info, that's why.

lastly, the title is from iron moon by chelsea wolfe, who single-handedly provided the soundtrack for writing this fic. <3

[...]

I should
have said to you: "I have no house only
a shadow but whenever you are in need
of a shadow my shadow is yours."

— Agha Shahid Ali, "In Search of Evanescence," *A Nostalgist's Map of America: Poems*

Corvo wakes to the press of invisible fingers trailing down his throat.

When he opens his eyes, he sees that the attic room is empty and bare, save for his presence and the few personal trinkets granted to him after his escape from Coldridge. The room is quiet, as it usually is at this hour, but something feels off in the way the silence settles about the room; the air feels heavy, sluggish in a way that feels familiar but he cannot place the origin of the familiarity. His eyes cut towards the dresser, where the Heart is nestled safely in a makeshift hold of spare clothing and it still grows bright under his gaze, but even that otherworldly light seems dimmer than it normally is.

Corvo sits up on the worn mattress with the intention of examining the Heart closer, but the invisible touches follow his movements and swirl around the jut of his pelvis in such a way that has his mouth parting half heartedly and a breathy noise escaping him, the noise unbidden and loud against the quiet of the room. The fingers seem to morph into two hands that soon grip at his waist and a breath hovers over his lips, as if in a phantom kiss, before it is gone too soon and he is left to chase after its fleeting existence.

The hands dig into the muscle of his hips, holding him down as a light breath tickles down the column of his throat. It is becoming too much too quickly, and the noise he gives low in his throat displays his increasing frustration as his hips buckle against the light restraint of his hips. The invisible fingers tug at the waistband of Corvo's pants and he moves to help shuck the material off, wasting no time in getting the unseen hands to touch his bare skin. He gives another throaty groan, encouraging the hands into skittering down alongside the insides of his thighs, the nails digging into the sensitive skin there so sharply that it has Corvo's breath coming out in shudders. He's becoming increasingly aware of his heartbeat as it pounds in his

ears and the hardness between his legs throbs as the hands encase his thighs firmly, coaxing them apart inch by inch.

His head spins wildly as it tries to make sense of the situation while he spreads his legs for the phantom in his bed. He's almost certain it's a dream (*for what else could it be?*) but this feels more real, more physical than any dream he's had before. Nonetheless, he probably shouldn't encourage any unknown entities into his bed, but he's becoming exceedingly desperate with each touch and *want* churns low in his gut. He is lonely and desperate and has not felt the touch of another that was not coated in violence or persuasion since his arrival in the Hound Pits Pub and that realization alone is enough to have him rutting up against the phantom hands as if he had never felt the touch of another before. He feels a flush of shame, but that is brief as the hands heed to his want, one running along the expanse of his chest, tweaking at a nipple harshly while the other brushes feather-light at the head of his cock.

There's a sudden laugh at his ear and Corvo jerks out of his desire driven stupor, eyes darting around the room in search of the source. It's a distinct sound that he hasn't heard in months, a soft huff of breath that he will never forget, not in this lifetime; not in any.

"*Corvo,*" the voice breathes, the vowels of his name coming off warm and soothing, "*Corvo, Corvo, Corvo, how I've missed you, Corvo,*"

The voice chants his name like a prayer and Corvo is frozen to the spot, legs still spread and eyes darting to every shadowy crevice, searching for someone who is not there, *cannot* be there. His heart stutters at the familiarity of the voice, at the shape of the fingers brushing along the inside of his thighs. He recognizes those fingers, he realizes, recognizes the nails that bite into the soft skin, recognizes the hoarse grasp as it's drawn from his own throat as warm breath curls along the shell of his ear, and he feels like he coming undone at the very seams, not willingly to believe *who* is orchestrating the phantom hands, lest he be wrong and disappointed.

The familiar fingers suddenly encase his cock in a light hold, squeezing, and Corvo gives another gasp, surprised by the sudden sensation and the noise is soon dragged into a low groan as a soft palm slides against him, eyes fluttering shut.

"You always were so sensitive," the voice says from somewhere against his throat, and Corvo tilts his head back to give the ghost (*for it must be a spirit, haunting his dreams and he must be desperate enough for human touch if he is dreaming of — Her, her soft fingers, her warm voice, all encompassing and impossible to deny*) access to the hollow of his throat.

"Open your eyes, Corvo," the voice has gone quiet, as if fading away from existence and Corvo wastes no time in opening his eyes, not wanting to lose *her* again. His breath catches at the sight, and he freezes in place, taking in the vision before him.

Jessamine is here in his room, perched in front of him among the tangled blankets and strewn clothes, and she looks just as beautiful as he remembers. Her black hair tumbles down her back in loose curls and her skin almost glows in the light of the single lamp beside his bed. She is wearing a shirt far too large for her frame, with the buttons undone and nothing underneath, and the ends of the fabric drag along the tops of her thighs invitingly. Her face is bare, lashes long and lips curved in a soft smile as she looks back at him

She is beautiful; untouched by death, solid and ethereal.

And Corvo cannot bare the sight of her.

He quickly closes eyes against the rush of emotion that crawls up his throat, the weight of the guilt heavy as it threatens to choke him. (*He sees blood, so much blood, soaking into material, darkening fabric, blood, so much blood, he wasn't quick enough—*)

Jessamine's hand is suddenly cupped along his jaw, and just as always, all it takes is her softest touch to force him back into the present.

"Corvo," She sighs, and he feels his heart breaking at the seams, "It was just a bad dream." He knows she is lying, can hear the lie coating her tone, but it does not stop the way he leans into her touch, like he is nothing more than a drowning man gasping for air.

When was the last time he experienced such touch?

(*Such soft, human touch—*

He sees flashes of Coldridge and feels rough hands grabbing at his body; feels the firm pat of Havelock's palm on the swell of his shoulder; feels stagnant contact as bumps elbows with those born of high class; feels the clawing fingers as he wraps an arm around a City Watch guard's bared throat; feels the unseen hands as he's pinned in place, left to watch the too quick hands of an assassin as he plunges the sword in deep; feels brief brush of Emily's hand before she is dragged away, away, away—)

"I.." He manages, voice rough from months of disuse, "It felt too real to be a nightmare." He stops himself from saying anything more contradictory, wanting to keep Jessamine's soothing lie alive for however long he can.

I've missed you, Jessamine. I've missed you everyday since your death, and I feel as if I will never be whole again since that day. Is what he does not voice aloud, though every part of him wishes he could pull the words from his mouth. Instead, he keeps the words down, shoving them deep into the recesses of his heart, to ferment into something that he will use to torture himself with later.

He reaches out for her, tentatively, stopping himself short along the tops of her thighs and his fingers stretch out slowly, simply reveling in the feel of her. Jessamine sighs under his touch, nails digging into the curve of his jaw and eyes fluttering as if she were waiting for nothing more than his touch. The guilt that was curling around his heart turns to relief at her reaction, so easily soothed by Jessamine's presence and the familiarity of her soft skin. She whispers his name under her breath, hands moving to cup the back of his neck as she shifts underneath his touch. He takes in the sight of her, unraveling under the lightest touch and he feels lightheaded with the overwhelming *love* he feels for her; it feels like centuries since he touched her last.

Corvo grows bold with her encouraging touch, and slides both hands along her thighs, fingers brushing slowly towards the tails of the shirt (*his shirt*, he realizes with a small, pleased smile), pushing them away. Jessamine gives encouraging noises during his ascent, perfect,

white teeth digging into her lower lip. Soon, Corvo's fingers find their mark as they brush against soft curls and curve inwards towards the warmth he finds beneath.

A shuddering moan sounds from Jessamine and Corvo watches her face all the while, memorizing the way her teeth dig deeper into her lower lip and her eyes slide shut, brows furrowed in pleasure. She shifts to open her legs wider to accommodate Corvo's fingers more so and her breath hitches as Corvo presses deeper into her. Corvo watches her as he curls his fingers, pleased by her reaction and at how well acquainted he still is with Jessamine's body. He leans in to press his lips to hers, overcome by the softness of her mouth under his and gives a content sigh as Jessamine kisses back, arching under Corvo's fingers. Their kisses begin softly, tenderly, before soon turning desperate as Corvo works into Jessamine with deft fingers and Jessamine slides her hands over Corvo's shoulders, nails digging pale half-moons into his back as she moans against his mouth.

They kiss like this for some time before, suddenly, Jessamine places her hands atop Corvo's, halting the pursuit of his fingers and pulls away, kiss-swollen lips curling into a sly smile, one that makes a chill run up the notches of Corvo's spine. It is not a sensation born from the ever present cold of the attic room, but rather from the anticipation of knowing what is going to come next.

(They've played their fair share of this game before, with Jessamine giving Corvo false hope into winning the game of foreplay, only to turn the tables once Corvo was two fingers deep into her and using Corvo's distracted lust to her advantage. Corvo would then put on a show about her 'playing unfairly' and perhaps letting him take the lead this time around, but they both knew that his words were false and this was proven true, time and time again, by the interested twitch of his cock as Jessamine hovered over Corvo on her hands and knees, effectively trapping him.)

At the present moment, Corvo feels the very same as he did all those moments prior, with the same smile that pulls at his mouth and the very same twitch his cock gives. He lays back and stretches along his mattress to give Jessamine better access to his form, to press her weight onto him and trap him beneath slim hands and soft, but muscled thighs. He smiles fully as Jessamine takes his bait and swings one leg over Corvo's hips, settling herself back onto his lap.

Memories flash through his mind of the last time they'd lain together similar to this, just before his departure on his missioned voyage across the Isles.

(They laid stretched out in Jessamine's bed for ages, well into the night and the morning of the next day — just mere hours before Corvo's departure. Jessamine curled against his chest as Corvo traced familiar words into Jessamine's bare shoulder, words he could not speak properly but knew Jessamine would understand all the same. She had hid her head in the curve of Corvo's neck, adorning the flesh with soft kisses as she spoke words only meant for him to hear. The vibrations of her words stayed against his throat for the remainder of the day, serving well to remind him of Jessamine's love for him — as did the bite marks that ran along the expanse of his chest.

They had no time to reunite properly before Jessamine's sudden death. Had only enough time for a shared longing glance, fleeting and not enough to sate the adoration and relief they felt

for each other upon Corvo's safe return. Corvo had daydreams, just hours before, of carefully undoing Jessamine's updo and running his fingers through her long hair as she pressed kisses onto his throat, whispering endearments along his throat until finally, finally reaching his mouth, where they'd kiss for what would feel like millenia.

They were allotted none of that before the sword plunged through Jessamine's gut and she was taken away from this world right before his and their daughter's eyes.)

Corvo swallows thickly as the rush of memories overtakes his mind and he has to close his eyes against the sting of tears. Jessamine's expression softens, though he cannot see it, and she slides one hand free to rub the tears away from Corvo's eyes.

"Corvo," She breathes, and her voice her voice sounds.... *different*, deeper in a way that is familiar to him, "I'm here now and nothing shall ever part us again." Corvo gives a soft noise and curls into Jessamine's hand, desperate for her touch.

She obliges his unspoken request and leans down to brush her lips against Corvo's cheeks, kissing away his fears. She leans back up to look down at Corvo spread underneath her, smiling in that soft way that has Corvo remembering how he fell in love with her, all those years ago.

"Do you feel better now, my love?"

Her voice sounds like her own again; he must have been imagining the deep pitch as cause of the grief buried deep down inside him, emotions that are suddenly digging themselves up in reaction to Jessamine's presence here in his bed. Corvo gives a nod, not trusting his voice and Jessamine's answering smile is *so* soft and so *beautiful* that he feels his heart giving an almost painful twist.

Satisfied with his answer, Jessamine's smile turns sly as she settles back onto Corvo's thighs, grinding none too lightly against Corvo's cock as she does so. She moves her hand down to trail lightly along the expanse of Corvo's chest, brushing briefly by one nipple, the tips of her fingers grazing it just enough to have Corvo letting out a soft groan. Her hand continues its descent, brushing against all the scars and hair that covers the span of his torso, shapes and textures that Corvo knows she is all too acquainted with by the way her nails scrape across particularly sensitive areas. His cock throbs as her fingers graze against his skin, just the softest touch enough to have his hips bucking forward. He would find it embarrassing if it were anyone else but Jessamine touching him like this, dragging forth almost obscene groans and he reaches out to grab at her hips, to feel her skin against his palms again and just — *holds*. His hold is light, almost as if the spell that has been cast upon his attic bedroom for the night will break if he grips her any harder.

It is easy to imagine, with Jessamine seated on his thighs as if she belongs there and Corvo gazing up her while her hands make slow work of trailing down his front, that they are in Jessamine's bedroom back in Dunwall Tower, properly reuniting after his long voyage across the Isles. If he focuses only on the flush that is slowly coating Jessamine's cheeks and chest, looking only at her smile and the light touch of crow's feet that crinkle the corners of her eyes, it is so easy to imagine that a sword did not bring about her untimely demise, dragging her away from his life with one last pained gasp. It was always so easy to shut out the rest of

the world when he was with Jessamine, and this — dream? (Corvo is still unsure of what to make of Jessamine's presence but he does not want to voice his concern and break whatever blessing that brought Jessamine into his bed) was no exception.

"I love you," Corvo says, suddenly, voice as quiet as the nighttime sea just yards away from his window. Jessamine's hands pause, still above the dip of his pelvis and she looks down at him, smiling softly.

"As I do you, Corvo," She murmurs, ducking down to brush her lips against Corvo's own, pressing down against him so that they are chest to chest, her skin warm against his, "I love you more than I can put into words, so physical gestures will have to do for the time being, if you are not opposed to that?"

Corvo gives an amused huff, pressing another kiss to her curved mouth and reaches his hands up to tangle into her long, dark hair, "You know I will never be opposed to a beautiful woman asking if she could fuck me."

Jessamine makes a noise of triumph and kisses Corvo, once, twice, three times before finally letting up and shifting back into a sitting position, looking down at him from atop her perch made of Corvo's muscled thighs, "Then let me show you how deeply I love you, my dear Corvo," The turn of phrase gives Corvo pause, hands still in the ends of her hair, but he is distracted all too soon as Jessamine teases her fingers feather light against the head of his cock. He gives an almost keening noise in response, letting his head fall back against the bed.

Jessamine gives a small laugh as her fingers work, and he lifts his head up to see her mouth curl into a smirk and her eyes flash an inky black. It's a mere second in time, fleeting, but it is enough to give Corvo pause again, burrows furrowed in question. It had to be a trick of the light, as the moment passes and Jessamine is staring back at him with eyes the pale blue he remembers.

Even still, Corvo stares at her, searching her face for any other hints of the oddity he just witnessed. He feels a sharp prickle on the back of his hand, a sign of the Mark burning hot while in the presence of a certain entity; a being he knows all too well. He should have expected that Jessamine's sudden presence was nothing more than a highly realistic dream, a fabrication of his own desperation for human touch, a desperation that was so prominent that it caught the interest of the one whose Mark he wears on the back of his hand like a brand. His mind buzzes with a plethora of questions and demands, but only one spills forth, asked no louder than a whisper

"You're not really her, are you?" The sudden silence of the room is deafening as Corvo stares at her, watching as the emotion slides off her face as if she were nothing more than an oil painting burning under the heat of a bright flame.

Jessamine is silent as she stares back at Corvo, entirely silent with an eerie kind of stillness that looks foreign on her face, one that he is increasingly becoming perturbed by. Jessamine's face always bore emotion, evident in the laugh lines around her mouth, in the crease between her eyebrows, and it is unsettling to see her blank faced, eyes empty as they stare at him. However, a quiet voice in the back of his head reminds him that the stillness is not all that unfamiliar to him; he is just used to it as carved in a different face. That thought only serves

to make him feel even more off-balanced and he has to tear his gaze away from Jessamine's, unable to face the veracity of his own thoughts.

Minutes tick by, with the only sound that of Corvo's shallow breathing and the crash of the waves outside, until Jessamine speaks again, with another voice that has also haunted a countless number of his dreams, "You are always so clever, Corvo, I should have expected nothing less."

He does not sound regretful in the least, even almost amused as Corvo catches onto his true identity, and perhaps, he had wanted to be found out since the very beginning. Corvo frowns at the admission, catching his image as it is reflected back at him in the deep black of Jessamine's eyes as the blue is quickly overtaken. He looks just as shaken as he feels, and he is silent as he stares up at the dark eyes, struggling to find the right words.

"I... why?" Corvo finally asks, words stagnant and throat working, as Jessamine — *no, the Outsider*, his mind supplies — shrugs a lightly freckled shoulder.

"I sought to offer you comfort, and knew Jessamine's would be the face in which you would trust the easiest," He says, much more blunt than Corvo was expecting, and the Outsider lifts one of Jessamine's slender hands, examining the long fingers with an almost reverent expression.

"You've been having quite a number of dreams featuring our dear late Empress as of late," He remarks, looking back towards Corvo, lashes lowered over eyes that seem to turn the liquid dark of the deep depths of the sea as they catch the low lamplight. They are nothing like Jessamine's pale blue of the morning sea, and the stark difference is startling, but not entirely off-putting. The Outsider runs a hand down the curve of Jessamine's form, seemingly delighted in the way Corvo tracks his every move, until finally resting a hand on the swell of her breast, dragging her fingers along the slowly hardening nipple.

"She is very beautiful, is she not? One can easily see how she captured your eyes and heart, my dear Corvo," He hums, easy, as Corvo releases a shuddering breath, and he reaches his free hand towards him, grasping one of Corvo's and allowing it to join the hand upon Jessamine's breast.

Corvo gives a small noise as his hand cups around her breast, a perfect mold. The softness of her breast suddenly feels foreign beneath Corvo's dirtied hand (— *stained with blood that does not wash off no matter how raw he scrubs; his hands must be marred down to the very sinew and marrow*), and a fresh wave of shame crawls up his throat at the sight of his scarred and calloused hand upon the swell of Jessamine's breast, and for the first time in years, before he and Jessamine began their secret affair, he feels that he is unfit to touch Jessamine's body.

(How many times prior have these same hands cupped and grasped at her soft skin? How often have these fingers brushed along the light splattering of moles that splash across the tops of her breasts, secret but to the very few who have been privy to her naked body. How — slow were these very hands when the assassins appeared and how slow were they when they could not stop the blade as it plunged into Jessamine's stomach and how slow were his hands when they could not grab Emily away in time. How undeserving were these hands to touch

Jessamine, to brush against the smooth skin of her torso, to cup at her breast, to find comfort and stability in how warm her skin feels under his touch, like a reminder that human touch is not wholly violent.

Corvo feels undone as he stares, and stares at his hands on Jessamine's body, one to her breast and one drifting free from the ends of her hair. He feels the tears as they prickle behind his eyes, feels the sting as his eyes stare unblinkingly at the contrast of his damaged hand against her unmarred body—)

“Corvo,” The Outsider breathes, and his tone is reminiscent of the soothing way in which Jessamine said his name, before, before — everything, and even during the Outsider's pretense at playing Jessamine, “There is no shame to be felt in how you touch the late empress's body, and you are not desecrating her memory by finding pleasure in the familiarity of her body.”

He pauses, gripping tighter at Corvo's hand, “You need not feel guilt either. The circumstances that led to the empress's sudden death were not the direct cause of any of your personal failings. You are not at fault and you are forgiven. Though she is not physically present, her spirit is always near and she still cares for you very deeply and will continue to do so far into the reaches of eternity itself.” He finishes, and from its place on the dresser, the Heart gives a sudden rattle, sounding off gentle beats that echo the Outsider's sentiments.

Corvo finally tears his gaze away from his hand, first looking at the Outsider's eyes in the panes of Jessamine's face, taking in the black eyes paired with the elegant features of his beloved, then towards the Heart, which glows bright under his gaze, brighter than he has ever seen, and he feels a sense of peace wash over him. Here, held in one body, is the combination of his first love and his current infatuation — he would not call what he feels for the Outsider *love*, not now, but the future is unclear — and he feels grounded in a way that he has not felt since witnessing Jessamine's murder, and subsequently breaking out of jail to enact his revenge and meeting a god who granted him supernatural abilities.

“Thank you,” He murmurs, voice quiet as he looks back towards the Outsider, dark eyes meeting even darker ones. He finds that it is suddenly hard to form more words, a causation of his dislike of talking at length, and the heaviness of his heart. He hopes the Outsider cleans his unspoken intentions and it seems that he does by the way the Outsider grips at Corvo's hand tightly once more before pulling away.

Suddenly, the Heart gives a series of pulsating beats from the dresser, as if calling attention to itself. The Outsider looks towards his crafted gift, head tilted and expression curious as he listens. Corvo furrows his brows and strains to understand the beats in turn, but finds that he cannot.

Strange.

The Outsider glances towards Corvo, briefly, and then towards the Heart again. He bows his head just slightly, agreeing to an unheard request. He spares another glance at Corvo, nodding once as the Heart gives another, softer, series of beats.

Corvo watches the display closely, gut churning with indescribable emotions. He looks at the Heart and it glows bright under his gaze, with Jessamine's voice, clear as he remembers, echoing through his mind:

"You are lonely and crave human touch. He wishes to help soothe your pain. Trust in him, Corvo."

Her voice fades off into an incomprehensible whisper and all is silent in his head once more. He does not like the sharp silence and he must make a face because the Outsider gives him an almost consoling look, expression familiar as it is made with Jessamine's soft face but strange when paired with the black emptiness of the Outsider's eyes. He must have heard Jessamine's words too, then.

"How very kind of the late empress to give us her blessing, it is a shame she is not physically here, sharing in the warmth of your bed," The Outsider intones, a tinge of sadness or perhaps even regret to his words, though Corvo is never really sure how much the Outsider conveys emotions in his speech or how true the emotion actually is. He finds himself nodding along to the Outsider's words, even as the painful truth of his words stabs at his heart.

"Her Heart is present, of course, but it does not compare to the whole of her physical form," At this, the Heart gives pulsating beat as if in agreement and the Outsider continues, leaning closer towards Corvo, "But, imagine if she were really here, Corvo," The Outsider brings his black eyes to Corvo's own, and there is something new in those obsidian pools, a sense of desire that has Corvo absentmindedly swallowing as he stares back.

"Imagine, a hand on your throat to hold you down," The Outsider brings a slender, ringed hand to lightly curl around Corvo's throat, as manicured nails bite into the skin. The Outsider continues his pretense, lashes lowered over his black eyes as he takes in the view of his hand on the width of Corvo's throat.

"While a tongue runs up your cock to subdue you," Corvo feels the sensation of a broad tongue as it slides against the underside of his cock, though there is no mouth there and the Outsider squeezes his hand, briefly, as Corvo gives a low groan.

"Then, fingers would press into you until you begged for release," Corvo gives a louder groan, unbidden, at the press of invisible fingers against his entrance, and the Outsider's mouth curves into a smirk at the noise.

"Until finally, a mouth meets yours, with teeth drawing blood," A mouth is pressed against Corvo's, and it is the Outsider himself kissing Corvo, teeth nipping at his bottom lip none too kindly until Corvo tastes the blood as it begins to pool in his mouth.

They kiss slowly at first, as if the Outsider is testing the mechanics of his borrowed body, but soon, he is lapping at the blood on Corvo's lower lip as he bites again and again, tongue sliding against Corvo's. Corvo closes his eyes and kisses back, the slide of the mouth against his comforting as he feels the shape of Jessamine's lips under his. They kiss like this for what feels like hours, the soft slide of their mouths giving way to urgent presses and teasing bites that have Corvo groaning and the Outsider giving slightly breathless but encouraging noises.

The sound of their kisses is loud against the silence of the room, and Corvo is grateful for his isolated room, far from the other residents of the pub.

Finally, almost regretfully, the Outsider pulls back and Corvo is glad to see spots of color high on Jessamine's cheeks, the red flush complimenting the black of the Outsider's eyes well. His borrowed mouth is red and swollen and Corvo knows that his is the same as he runs his tongue over his lower lip. The Outsider reaches a hand out to rub a thumb against the swell of Corvo's bottom lip, the rest of his fingers sliding underneath Corvo's chin to lift his head up.

"If she really were here, touching you in the same way that I am, that would make you truly happy, wouldn't it, Corvo?" The Outsider's voice is soft, and suddenly, it's Jessamine's eyes that he's staring back at. Her eyes paired with the Outsider's low lilt, coated in the vowels of a dead accent, and the truth of his question are almost enough to send Corvo to the edge.

He manages to contain himself, but he is overcome with the need to grab and touch and feel soft skin beneath his hands again. The Outsider looks almost surprised as Corvo reaches out for Jessamine's waist, both hands running up along her body. Such thinly veiled surprise soon turns to pleasure as Corvo touches Jessamine's body as if he were worshipping at an altar, hands caressing her body reverently.

His hands roam the expanse of Jessamine's body, the rough skin of his palms giving way to a particular sensation that has the Outsider groaning aloud. He brings her body closer, hands roaming as if he were a man drowning at sea and Jessamine's body was his buoy; as if he could bring her back just by touch alone. Corvo hears Jessamine's voice in his head, a silent tether spoken for only him, and makes a small, pained noise as her voice echoes through his mind while his hands run along her body.

He abruptly finds that it is almost — *unfair*, to have a fake copy of her here in his bed, here in the bedroom that is not held within Dunwall Tower, on a lumpy and stained mattress, when he knows that she is truly gone. It is almost crude to have the only actual remainder of her sitting atop his dresser, her heart pulled from her chest by the Outsider's own deft hands; brought back to life with magic infused mechanics, and held together with whale bone and barbed wire.

Corvo suddenly thinks it cruel for the Outsider to wear Jessamine as a second skin, to slip into a guise of her body and pretend to be what he is not, pretend to be the first — and what he thought was going to be the last — love of his life. It feels mocking, just another trick by the Outsider for his own personal gain.

(Was it truly for his own personal gain? Corvo knows that he is lonely and desperate for human touch that is not born from ill will, but he did not realize just how much so until the Outsider disguised himself as Jessamine and appeared in his bed, soothing and touching him in ways that he has not been privy to in months.

So, perhaps for that reason, he is not thankless and cannot say that he does not appreciate what the Outsider did for him. But, that does not mean that Corvo is any less upset at the revealed truth or that he is any less ashamed of himself for how willing and close he was to letting the Outsider fuck him while wearing Jessamine's face.)

“She was never really here,” It is not a question and Corvo stares at the Outsider until the other inclines his head in silent agreement.

“Not physically, no. But I thought to prize you with a gift as reward for your hard work.”

“So, you took on the shape of Jessamine and sought to seduce me with the face of my dead lover?” Corvo’s voice sounds harsh even to his own ears, the combination of his unresolved grief and personal guilt making the words sound sharper, the knife edged points only serving well to cut along the inside of his being. He feels unsettled as a slew of emotions shape into complicated knots inside of him, and he wants immediate answers, if only to help ease his own guilt.

The Outsider merely stares at Corvo, expression blank and Corvo realizes that he is looking at a centuries old being, an powerful and omnipresent entity and that he is just a blip in the timeline of the god’s very long life. His outburst suddenly seems embarrassingly human, and Corvo almost regrets the demand. (*Had he spoken out of turn? Would the Outsider revoke his Mark in an act of vengeful punishment?* Corvo shakes his head roughly, angry at himself and angry at the Outsider; he would not bow under the weight of Outsider’s dark gaze.)

Instead, the Outsider blinks himself out his eerie stillness and offers Corvo a small, almost rueful smile, “I have many talents, Corvo, and have taken on many forms and faces for those who catch my favor and you are not the first, but perhaps it was too soon to show you the late Empress’s face again. I can put an end to this game, if it pleases you.”

The Outsider stares unblinkingly at him, head tilted a mere fraction, and Corvo finds that his black eyes do not suit Jessamine’s face at all, they are too dark and only serve to make her complexion sallow and her cheekbones hollow. They remind Corvo that she is well and truly dead, buried in an elaborate grave on Dunwall Tower, like all those before her, and that she will never come back.

This is the price of the Outsider’s favor, a final parting gift between him and Jessamine that he fabricated only because of his interest in Corvo. It may seem cruel, but perhaps that is because Corvo does not understand the full nature of the Outsider nor does he know of all the hidden faucets of his long, long life. He is not human and Corvo is not sure if he ever was to begin with. He does not know the Outsider well enough to brand him in any such way — cruel or even kind — but he cannot deny the favor the god paid him tonight, showing him Jessamine as beautiful and ethereal as she was in life, and giving him a closure that he was certain he would never have after her murder.

Corvo nods, finally, to his request and shifts forward to kiss Jessamine’s lips one last time, lingering on the plump of her lower lip, before he moves down to kiss at her jaw and down the length of her throat. He draws a conclusion to the Outsider’s crafted reunion in the form of light kisses to the curve of her jaw, the column of her throat, and back up to the pale pink of her lips. As if sensing his intentions, the Heart gives a light rattle from the dresser and he hears Jessamine’s voice in his head again, soft and only for him:

“Corvo, whenever you are near, my Heart is at peace. I await the day we are to be reunited once more....”

All too soon, her voice tapers off into various affectionate murmurs before falling silent once more. Corvo blinks away the tears that have gathered at his lashes, and swallows hard, shifting to press his face into the slope between Jessamine's neck and shoulder. For now, he is just content to rest there as he basks in the comfort of her body for the last time.

(As cruel as Corvo may think of the Outsider for wearing the face of his deceased beloved in an act of consolation, Corvo also feels cruel himself for insisting and demanding that the Outsider wear only the face of said beloved, while hiding away his true face. That seems unfair as well, and he is coming to realize that a deep, desperate part of him wants to see the Outsider as he truly is, dark eyes and cropped hair, naked against his bed sheets and groaning under his hands. Perhaps he has always wanted the Outsider in his bed, maybe even since their very first meeting in the Void realm of his dreams, where he was bestowed with a wealth of supernatural powers and placated with the gift of Jessamine's magic infused Heart.

The immensity of the thought threatens to hollow out his core and Corvo does not know what to do with that realization. Instead, he promptly tucks away the thought, conceding to pick at and ruminate on it another day.)

The Outsider is silent as Corvo rests against the shoulder of his borrowed body, but soon, a gentle hand comes to rest between his shoulder blades, a human born comfort. Corvo breathes in the hint of perfume on Jessamine's skin for the last and final time and comes to a decision.

"I want to see *your* body," Corvo murmurs into the nape of Jessamine's neck, mouthing at the smooth curve. The skin is still familiar in guise, but slowly differing in actuality as Corvo realizes that he can no longer taste the tang of Jessamine's bath salts and various perfumes. Instead, as his tongue swipes out to cover a biting kiss, he tastes something entirely new. Sea salt and blood bloom against his tongue, with a touch of something foreign, something that he knows is entirely The Outsider's own, a dark essence that burns itself against his tongue.

The Outsider hums against Corvo's lavishing of his borrowed neck, and curls thin and long fingered hands into Corvo's hair, hands that slowly become stockier, with wider palms and slightly shorter fingers. The newly shortened nails bite into Corvo's scalp and he gives a low hiss, not entirely pained, as the neck beneath his mouth changes, becoming less slender to accommodate wider shoulders. Corvo pulls back to watch the rest of the transformation, noting how different the Outsider's body is from Jessamine's. Where Jessamine was carved soft from palace life, curves underlain with muscles hidden beneath the folds of her clothes, the Outsider is lean and long, skin pulled taut over his wiry form, shoulders broad and waist narrow.

The most obvious difference is the scar that runs around the whole of the Outsider's throat, stark black against the pale of his neck. It is the only scar or imperfection otherwise on the Outsider's pale form and Corvo's eyes stay transfixed for a few extra seconds upon the jagged scar, curious but polite in curving his burning curiosity. The Outsider reaches up a hand to brush his fingers against the slightly raised skin, eyes downcast as he recalls what Corvo must believe is the source of such a wound.

"A memento of my past. Perhaps, one day, I will tell you the story of my creation. But tonight seems hardly the appropriate time, wouldn't you agree, Corvo?"

With that said and nothing more, the Outsider shifts so that he is secured in Corvo's lap again, seating himself upon his thighs, just as he had earlier. He looks almost mortal as he kneels on the mattress to part his thighs on either side of him, form solid and without a hint of all the parlor tricks he uses to coat himself with whenever Corvo pays tribute to any one of his shrines. Corvo studies him for a few moments more before reaching out a hand to cup his jaw, fingers pressing in as he tests the solidity of his form. The Outsider, in turn, reaches out his own hand to brush along Corvo's jaw, touch light and experimental, almost as if he is uncertain of his ability to touch Corvo with his own hands.

His hand soon moves to run down Corvo's throat, the rings snagging lightly on the stubble. Corvo swallows beneath his hand, feeling the light touch of his fingers as they press in response to the movement. Corvo gives a quiet groan, tilting his head back a fraction to give the Outsider access to the whole of his throat. The Outsider gives a quiet, but pleased noise in turn and Corvo is amused by the noise, head canting down to catch eyes with the Outsider's own again.

The Outsider stares at Corvo as if trying to memorize his face, and Corvo cannot do anything but stare back, unable to decipher the emotion in his dark eyes. There are no words passed between them, a natural form of silence that Corvo finds comforting. Outside, the waves crash against the rocks in their constant ebb and through the cracks in the windows, a light breeze carries in the soft, comforting song of farway whales.

"It has been quite some time since I've touched anyone in this form," The Outsider admits after some time, voice hardly any louder than that of the whalesong, "I hope not to disappoint."

Corvo cannot help the sudden laugh he gives then, startled into amusement by the Outsider's confession.

(It is just so... *human* to have your most pressing concern be the uncertainty in your ability to pleasure the man whose bed you've appeared in for the night, where you revealed yourself after appearing to him while wearing the face of his deceased lover. He thinks back to the Outsider's mention of the multitude of various faces he's taken on for the other Marked over centuries and wonders just how many of those Marked asked for the Outsider's own face instead.)

He also wonders just how many of his Marked the Outsider has bedded and if he is truly any more special than all those before. Corvo shakes his head to rid himself of the last thought, unwilling to delve into that particular insecurity that he did not know he had until this very moment.)

The Outsider does not look offended by Corvo's laugh and Corvo feels relieved, not wanting to insult the one who granted him his favor and paid him a kindness — an unusual kindness, but a kindness all the same. He glances at Corvo's cock, which is still visibly erect from their earlier foreplay and holds out one finger to brush along the top of the dark shaft. Corvo gives a small noise in the back of his throat and holds up a hand to pause the Outsider for a moment. He leans off the bed to rummage in the pile of discarded clothes piled on the floor, hastily shucked off earlier to don sleepwear instead. He finds what he's looking for and holds

up his prize — a small bottle of unprocessed whale oil, designed for a specific purpose, that he picked up and pocketed on some mission prior.

“Tell me, Corvo, are you often in the habit of keeping a bottle of this whale oil on your person at all times?” The Outsider lifts a brow as he looks from the bottle and back to Corvo, bemusement obvious in the curve of his smile. Corvo gives only a small, sheepish shrug in response.

“It comes in handy,” Is all he says, before uncapping and collecting a liberal amount in his palm to slide in a loose fist over his cock. The Outsider nods, remnants of amusement still evident in his expression, and holds out a hand for Corvo to pour the oil onto. Once coated, the Outsider brings a hand to Corvo’s cock fully, palming at the head. Corvo hisses through his teeth and shifts to accommodate him better, presenting his cock out to him like a sacrificial offering.

The Outsider’s ringed hand does not look out of place on Corvo’s cock. His broad palm and long fingers are different from Jessamine’s small, slender hand, and the Outsider’s own is much paler than hers, an effect of his time spent in the sunless Void. These differences should be disconcerting but he feels grounded by the contrast in a way he cannot explain.

Corvo brings a hand down to slides against the Outsider’s, physically showing him the ways he likes to be touched — fingers teasing at the head, nails catching at the underside of the shaft, hands cupping at the balls. The Outsider is a quick study, soon curling a hand around Corvo and setting a steady pace, rings cool against the flushed member. Corvo gives a small gasp at the sensation, bucking his hips in an attempt to get the Outsider to move faster. The Outsider complies to his request and increases his pace, allowing Corvo to pull his hands away and run along the curve of shoulders to his back, digging red crescents into the pale skin.

Corvo surges forward to catch the Outsider’s mouth against his own, pulling in his lower lip and biting, catching the Outsider’s low groan as it reverberates against his lips. They kiss raw and rough like this as the Outsider sets a steady pace along Corvo’s length. He shifts against Corvo’s lap and Corvo is pleased to feel the squeeze of slender thighs as the Outsider moves against him. The Outsider pulls away from his mouth to kiss along the curve of Corvo’s jaw, shifting down to follow the line of his throat, mimicking the earlier favor Corvo paid to the soft of his throat. Corvo tips his head back to accommodate him, pleased at the Outsider’s attention and the feel of his teeth against his skin.

Corvo gives a low gasp as the Outsider’s catches his skin in a particularly bruising bite and brings a hand down to slide against the Outsider’s, urging him to move faster, faster, *faster*—

When Corvo comes, the Outsider is there to coax him along, as if pulling it out of his cock himself. He moves away from Corvo’s throat to catch Corvo’s face, shifting between watching his face and watching the slide of his hand on Corvo’s cock, as if he doesn’t know where to pinpoint his gaze. Corvo, on the other hand, watches the Outsider’s face all the while, hunting for a hint of unbalanced pleasure in his dark eyes and is rewarded with a minute change in his expression as Corvo finishes spilling over his hand.

Slowly and deliberately, the Outsider brings his coated hand to his mouth and gives an experimental swipe across one finger, maintaining steady eye contact with Corvo the entire time. He swallows with an interested noise and Corvo's spent cock gives a noticeable enough twitch that has the Outsider giving a sly smile and Corvo a tired groan. Typical of the black-eyed bastard to find a new way to throw him off balance.

"You never cease to surprise me, Corvo," He pauses, cleaning off the rest of his fingers with slow swipes of his tongue, "Perhaps next time I will attend to you in a different manner." The implications of hosting the Outsider in his bed again, feeling him press into him has Corvo flushing and his cock twitching once again.

"But not tonight," The Outsider continues, peering down at Corvo's cock, with one finger still pressed to his lips, "I'm afraid our time is almost up, Corvo, the sun is due to rise in a few hours and you still have much to accomplish."

Corvo gives a reluctant nod, well-aware of the scope of his responsibilities, the revenge he needs to secure for himself, and the daughter he needs to hold in his arms again. This reprieve was comforting, though, and Corvo is glad to have caught the Outsider's favor well enough to have him crafting a scenario in which to pay him an intimate visit.

"Next time, you're free to come as yourself," Corvo says, quietly, as if the confession is too much to state any louder than an exhale. The Outsider looks surprised but not too taken off guard, expression soon morphing into one of satisfaction. Something grips tight at Corvo's heart at the change and he finds that he has to look away from the Outsider's all too knowing gaze, lest he say something in the heat of the moment that he knows he'll regret in a few hours time.

Corvo then looks towards the Outsider's cock, the pink of it standing out obvious as it curves against the pale panes of his stomach, and gestures towards it. "Do you need help with that?" He asks, already pouring more oil into his palm, and reaching a hand towards the Outsider's lap. The Outsider regards him for a beat and not a second more before shifting into a more comfortable position on Corvo's lap.

"If you wish," He says, feigning nonchalance, but he is reaching out a hand to meet Corvo's and places them both on his cock. Corvo gives a small smile, pleased at the display of desperation and sets an eager pace along the flushed member. With their roles reserved this time around, the Outsider guides Corvo's hand along his length, showing him the ways in which he likes to be touched – a deft flick of the wrist, fingers probing at the slit, a squeeze against the head. Corvo moves to mouth against the sharpness of the Outsider's jaw, while their hands work in unison, and the Outsider gasps against Corvo's lavishings, breath coming out stuttered and harsh. Corvo smirks as he bites against the soft skin of his throat, pleased at the way the Outsider is quickly unraveling under his intensive attention. There is a sense of pride to be felt in watching as a centuries old being is unfurling at the very seams under the careful attention paid to the hollow of his throat and the length of his cock, a sense of greedy hunger that grows while witnessing a inhuman entity reduced to gasps and moans under your touch. Corvo wonders how long it has been for the Outsider then, if he is acting as such, or if it is just his unique touch that is bringing forth such a wanton display. As if sensing

his hubris, the Outsider suddenly shifts to push Corvo back against the bed effectively trapping him with his thighs as he shrugs off Corvo's hand, replacing it with his own.

"Your arrogance is unbecoming, Corvo, it doesn't suit you," The Outsider is smirking as he looks down at him, working at his cock as he pins Corvo down with his own body weight, "You're not the first gain my favor, and certainly not the first to to sway me into bed. You'll find that I'm not so easily won." If he thought Corvo was oozing any ounce of arrogance, then the Outsider is absolutely *bathed* in it after his brief speech, and Corvo refrains from laughing at the vastness of the god's pride. He doesn't comment on the fact that the Outsider *himself* was the one to first show up in his bed, seeking to pleasure him in an act of consolation, desperate in an unspoken way that was thoroughly evident, however, by his hands upon Corvo's body and the way he reacted when Corvo touched him in turn.

Corvo merely shrugs, and slowly slides his hands along the backs of the Outsider's thighs, fingers soon digging into the soft muscle of his ass, glad to play at his game. The Outsider watches him under lidded eyes, the lightest flush painting the arches of his cheek bones, and Corvo knows he has him in the palm of his hand, just as the Outsider knows well that he has Corvo caught in the very same way.

The Outsider begins to pump himself again, hands soon beginning to shake at Corvo's attention, and he moves his hands deftly over his cock, forcing Corvo to look down and admire the sight. He kneads at the Outsider's ass, as the god brings himself closer to the edge, and impatiently reaches behind to grab at one of Corvo's hands, placing it on his cock again. The Outsider silences him with a brief look and Corvo's mouth twitches into a half-smirk, yielding to the Outsider's unspoken demand. The Outsider's hand guides him over his cock, moving them both fast, faster than he had himself before, groans shuddering out of him.

When the Outsider comes, it is surprisingly... *normal*. At one moment, Corvo is sliding a rough palm against the Outsider's cock, transfixed by the pleasure twisting his features and in the next, the Outsider is spilling over his hand, and painting his torso with long, white stripes, stark against the brown skin. There is no excessive fanfare or the roll of thunder in the distance or any uncontrollable bursts of supernatural power nor whatever else Corvo imagined in the deep recesses of his dreams on a particularly lonely night.

Corvo tries not to let his disappointment show but the Outsider catches it nonetheless, a causation of pinning Corvo beneath an ever watchful gaze for one reason or another. He laughs, and leans back, bringing a hand to trace against Corvo's torso, mixing into the mess on his stomach. "I did not realize you were so... adventurous, Corvo."

Corvo gives a light scoff, but does not make any attempt to deny the truth of his words, which seems to both amuse and delight the Outsider.

"I took on an form that I thought would bring you comfort in its familiarity, but I now know that won't be necessary next time," He presses his fingers into the muscle of Corvo's stomach, spidering them up along his abdomen as he regards him from above. "With each moment we spend together, I find that I still have much to learn about you, and I'm eager to see more, to learn of all the secrets you may have hidden deep in your heart." The Outsider stares down at him with dark eyes, head cocked as if Corvo were a particularly intriguing puzzle he was trying to piece together bit by bit. He may as well be, for all the attention the

Outsider pays him, but Corvo finds himself preening under the attention. He is too spent to dwell on the sudden rush of affection he feels for the Outsider, in that moment, and tucks the feeling away before it can morph itself into specific words. Perhaps it is just the fact that he released a swell of emotions building up inside of him in a rush of euphoric activities, but he feels light in a way that he has not in a long time, almost weightless as he gazes at the Outsider, who is still pinning him in place with his bare thighs. The Outsider regards him in turn, and there is something soft in those eyes, something desperately human that has Corvo leaning forward to brush his mouth against the Outsider's, the softest touch he has given him yet.

It's the Outsider who pulls back first, slowly and regretfully, lingering on the warmth of Corvo's mouth, voice no louder than a sigh, "I'm afraid our time is up, Corvo," He pulls away completely, but regards Corvo with a smile, an almost softness to its curve if Corvo looked at it from exactly the right angle. Corvo nods, and makes to move his hands away from the Outsider's body, but instead grips as him tighter as he has an idea. He catches the Outsider's eyes and forces himself to maintain eye contact, running his fingers in a whorl along the Outsider's back. "Stay for a few hours more, at least until I fall asleep,"

If the Outsider is surprised by the request, it's not evident on his face but he nods and stretches down along the length of Corvo's body, guided by Corvo's hand on his back, curling into the warmth of his body. He shifts his head into the curve of Corvo's neck and shoulder, short hair tickling the column of Corvo's throat, and murmurs into the skin, "You're quite the romantic, Corvo," He gives a huff of laughter, the breath sending goosebumps prickling at Corvo's skin.

Corvo only gives a soft noise in turn, too spent to counter his accusation, and leans one hand off the bed to grab a stray piece of clothing, halfheartedly wiping down their mess before it dries completely. He pulls the Outsider closer, content with the way his form seems to melt against his, the Outsider's shorter and slight frame sliding easily against Corvo's taller and wider one. He rubs circles into the expanse of the Outsider's back, catching the first song of the albatross as they begin their morning rounds. Soon, he'll have to leave the warmth of his bed and the Outsider's embrace, don heavy clothes and a plethora of weaponry, bend and appease to the demands of his self imposed superiors, all in order to enact their plans and see Emily's smiling face once more.

"I'll stay until you fall asleep, and no longer, as we both have matters to attend to that require our utmost attention," The Outsider murmurs into the slope of Corvo's neck, fingers drumming a familiar beat against his chest. "But know that I will be watching with great interest," He finishes, a repeat of an earlier dismissal from shrine visits previous, but under this newfound context, Corvo cannot help but flush, suddenly embarrassed to know that the god would be keeping a close eye on him for reasons other than unbiased entertainment. The Outsider can't possibly see his face from that angle, but he seems to laugh at the blush anyway, causing Corvo to let out his own bemused exhale. He brings the Outsider closer, until it seems there is not inch of space left between their bodies, and rests his head atop the Outsider's, lids drifting shut with the promise of sleep.

With nothing more to say, Corvo falls into an easy, dreamless sleep, then, with the Outsider pressed against his body and heart light for the first night in months.

When Corvo wakes, hours later, he senses that he is alone again.

He opens his eyes to see no one in his tiny room and *nobody* pressed against his on his worn mattress. He is not surprised. No invisible touches follow in his wake as he shifts into a seated position and no whispered invocations sound as he trails a hand along his front, tracing the path of bruises and bitemarks lain just hours before. He is not surprised by those absences either

Instead, he touches his lips to the Mark upon his hand, just a brush of lips upon flesh, and it grows bright under his touch. He feels warmth spreading across the back on his hand until it is encasing his hand entirely, as if a phantom hand was grasping his own. Then, the light fades, the warmth dissipates, and Corvo is truly alone again in his tiny room in the attic of the Hound Pits Pub.

But he does not feel alone.

His eyes find the Heart in the quiet dark of the room, its otherworldly light a beacon of familiarity and hope, just one more reminder that he is never truly alone. He murmurs a quiet, "*I love you,*" to it and smiles as the organ pulsates once, twice, three times, returning his confession as it glows bright for just a moment before snuffing its light out. He knows that somewhere deep in the striated muscle and no longer pumping veins, deep within the Void made core of the Heart, Jessamine heard his message.

Content in a way he hasn't been allowed to feel in a long time, Corvo settles back against the mattress, and stares up at the ceiling, lips twitching with a slight smile. For now, he allows himself a moment's rest before he begins the day anew as he waits for Havelock's voice to summon him for his next mission.

In a few moments, he will tear himself free from his bed, don his long coat and weaponry, become tasked with appeasing the Loyalists' latest grievances, and scale the great ledges and towers of Dunwall to accomplish such tasks, nothing more than a shadow resting in the eaves.

Then, after that, he will pay a visit to a certain god, in a certain shrine, and become tasked with an entirely different mission, one in which hands will push away his coat, pull his weapons free from his belt, as a mouth slides against his, and he is pushed against the wood and billowing curtains and whale bone of a heretic made shrine.

No, Corvo does not feel alone, and realizes that he may never feel so again, not with Jessamine's Heart to accompany him on his missions and her voice to echo in his mind, and a god to visit at his shrines and host in his bed. No, he doubts that he will ever be truly alone ever again, destined to be forever pinned beneath the dark gaze of the Outsider himself.

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