

Precious Affliction

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Precious Affliction

by [branewurms](#)

Summary

Angsty smut. Smutty angst? Smangst?

Sometimes Julian feels like an augur of old, trying to discern the deeper meanings in the flight patterns and calls of birds. An eagle flew west and shat on an old man's head by the marketplace during the third full moon, so clearly that means the kingdom will fall within the year, and Asra will favor Julian with a genuine smile.

Notes

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

Julian quivers, chest heaving, his back a canvas painted in fire. A bead of sweat trickles down the furrow of his spine, stinging through the lines throbbing in symphony across his flesh.

No. Wait. That hasn't happened yet.

He's only just arrived, walking through the front door of the shop. It's not locked up yet even though it's quite late. Julian worries over Asra's absent-mindedness, though most people are too terrified of plague for thieving and looting, at this point. He's wondering if he should lock up for Asra, or would that be presumptuous; he's hoping and hating himself for hoping—

He's bound in rope, helpless and splayed open for Asra's use, mewling with need. Has he always been here? A fly caught in amber, trapped in a single moment of exquisite, agonizing pain/pleasure, riding the edge of a release that will never, ever crest? He can't take this anymore; he never wants it to end. His mind is slipping sideways, his time is slipping—

Is this sleep deprivation? He can't follow the chain of his own time. The links keep rearranging themselves, his place within them sliding around, disconnected. His memory jumbles, future becomes past; but can one remember the future? Nonsense.

"Well done, Ilya." Asra's voice betrays nothing, and Julian wishes he could see his face. But he hasn't been told he can open his eyes, so he keeps slipping through the dark, adrift.

He's not sure when he is.

His timeline is a book he's lost his place in, and he's flipping back and forth, living in the wrong order, never quite finding himself in the pages.

Usually it's the really bad days that jar him loose like this, but this day he spent almost entirely isolated in the library, save for his daily scheduled visit to the Count's chambers. Admittedly, he really isn't sure when he last slept, and shadows keep warping and bending ominously at the corners of his vision, but don't they always? Today—today wasn't bad, all told.

And yet.

Sometimes when everything is all jumbled like this, he fancies he could flip ahead to see what's coming, use the knowledge to change the outcome for the better. Absurd, of course, no less superstitious than those fortune tellers on the streets; but all of his medical training isn't helping him, so why not?

Of course, there's always the possibility he's lived his whole life already, and his memories really are akin to a shuffled stack of papers that a dying mind is attempting to put to order, in which case he *could* remember the future, hypothetically. Only it wouldn't be the future, would it; it would only seem so to his delirious and disordered mind.

There's no changing a future you've already lived. Maybe it's better he doesn't try to flip ahead.

Asra's in a strange mood tonight.

Well. He's been in a strange mood for days, really. (Or maybe longer. It's hard to keep track of time in this unreality of plague-hell punctuated by tea parties and trysts and the count's constant demands for attention.) In fairness, Asra is always in a strange mood. But something's off lately, something's...different. It's as though, looked at from one angle, all Asra's sharp edges have been filed down into something kinder, something that might care; and from another, he's a mosaic of glittering broken glass just waiting to slice all-comers to ribbons.

(Julian being Julian, of course, he has to actively resist the urge to dash himself on the shards.)

He can't think of anything that's happened that might explain it. Although considering that the status quo has been "everyone dying horribly," the very fact that there's been no change might be explanation enough.

Or perhaps the Count has said something to him? If Lucio has threatened Asra, Julian will—

Will what?

Well, it doesn't matter what he'd do. Asra would never tell him about it.

So. Asra's in a strange mood. As always.

Julian finds him in the back room, body folded on cushions in the corner with an open book resting on his knee. One elbow is propped on the shelf next to him, and his head is tipped back against the wall, a hand flung loosely over his eyes. He doesn't even look up at the soft knock against the doorframe, and Julian thinks he might be asleep until he murmurs a wordless greeting.

This is the first time Julian has seen him all day—as far as he knows, Asra never showed up at the palace. He might well have been in this spot the whole day long.

"Asra...?" Julian says uncertainly. "Is... everything all right?"

Asra finally moves his hand from his face, rolling his head so that he can crook a silent, incredulous brow in Julian's direction. Julian clears his throat awkwardly. "Right, silly question. Sorry."

Nothing's all right for anyone in this city. Hasn't been for some time. But Julian sees creases and shadows around Asra's eyes, the sort of deep and semi-permanent marks of exhaustion that he's more used to seeing in a mirror than on Asra's boyish face. "That is, I mean..." Julian tries again. "Do you need anything? Can I help? Have you eaten?"

Asra huffs a soft laugh. “Do I look that pathetic? Your cooking might do us both in. I doubt you’ve had a much better day than I have, anyway. When did you last even sleep?”

“Sleep?” Julian grimaces. “Who knows. But I—”

Asra shuts his book with a sharp snap that makes Julian’s voice die in his throat. Rising smoothly from the floor, Asra stretches with a series of pops, then pads toward Julian with heavy lidded eyes and that fey little smile that always makes Julian go weak-kneed and tongue-tied.

It’s more familiar territory, at least, but Julian still has to clamp down on the instinct to take a step back. Even though Asra’s nearly a head shorter, whenever he gets that look on his face, Julian feels like a rabbit staring into the eyes of a wolf.

(No, wait, not a wolf. Something else. Something that plays with its food. A cat, or maybe a fox.)

He hasn’t ever been able to work out the nuances between when that expression means “I’m going to make you come so hard you’ll see stars,” and when it means “I’m about to make a fool out of you and somehow leave you wanting and aching in my wake regardless,” so it makes him nervous.

(And hopeful. Foolishly hopeful.)

He glances down, fidgeting with the mask in his hands. Its baleful red eyes stare back, with nothing helpful to offer. Hesitantly, he ventures, “If you’re not in the mood for company tonight—”

“Never mind,” Asra says mildly, cutting him off. “I think we can probably help each other out, Ilya. Don’t you?” Without waiting for an answer, he slides past and out into the shop, leaving Julian to scramble after that heady brush of scent and warmth.

Sometimes Julian feels like an augur of old, trying to discern the deeper meanings in the flight patterns and calls of birds. An eagle flew west and shat on an old man’s head by the marketplace during the third full moon, so clearly that means the kingdom will fall within the year, and Asra will favor Julian with a genuine smile.

It’s ridiculous, he *knows* it’s ridiculous; Julian knows himself to be a self-centered man but even he can see that most of Asra’s behavior has little-to-nothing to do with him. Even when it does, usually the only meaning behind it is that Asra finds amusement when and where he can. Why speak plainly when obfuscation is so much more fun? Tying Julian into knots is as good a hobby as any.

But he can’t stop himself from trying to decipher Asra. Of course, there’s the hope/terror that if he can just read the signals properly, if he can respond in the right ways at the right times, he’ll—he’ll win the game, whatever the *game* is, and Asra will look at him, *really* look at him, and, and...

(And what?

Julian crushes that delusion for the hundredth time this hour.)

It's not just that, though. He's frightened for Asra, frightened of what's happening to him. And he just—he needs to *know*. He needs to know *everything*. Needs to slip up under Asra's skin and into his skull, read the arcane symbols that must be carved there inside, to feel the grooves under his fingers until they make sense to him, until he can read Asra instinctively in the dark. He needs to wrap himself in Asra, curl up in the warmth of him until it becomes Julian's warmth, too.

(Ugh. He's becoming some ghastly hybrid of a bodice-ripper and a penny dreadful. Crawling around in skulls—a classic graveyard romance. Charming.)

He remembers reading somewhere that many ancient civilizations considered lovesickness to be quite literally that—a sickness. An ailment of the mind and body, a condition that struck without warning and rendered its victims subject to strange impulses and irrational behaviors.

Here's your nice respectable family trying to arrange a sensible match between you and your wealthy neighbor's son, and meanwhile you've run off and gotten your head turned around by the mere sight of a beautiful-but-penniless shepherd boy. No amount of reasoning or cajoling can get through to you. Nor can pointing out that the shepherd boy is well known as a feckless cad and is likely as not to love and leave you—and oh, he smells like wet sheep, to boot.

Worst case, all that wanting and pining eats you from the inside out. Maybe the shepherd boy really does love and leave you, or he never wanted you to begin with, or your parents lock you away from him, up in a tower, like in a fairy tale. With nothing else to latch on to, nowhere else to spread, the disease burns unchecked and ravages your body, and you slowly waste away. Finally, after weeks or months or sometimes years, death comes to claim you—relief at last from that fevered delirium.

All of that, just for want of something that probably wasn't any good for you in the first place.

Julian has always been subject to passions so powerful they render him senseless, to thoughts and feelings and impulses so bewildering that they seem alien, imposed on him from somewhere outside of himself. But this is the first time he's ever truly understood how romantic love might be seen as *unnatural*, a bodily invader that might strike you down at any time. A disease without cure.

Some days, he wonders whether it'll be the plague or *this* that does him in first. But there's nothing to be done. He could try running from the plague, try running from the Count; he doesn't think he would, but he *could*. Running from Asra, though? Even if he wanted to, he's fallen far beyond the capability.

And he doesn't want to, of course he doesn't. Where else could he go? After all, it's the nature of the disease to want proximity to the very cause of your affliction.

This precious affliction.

Asra fiddles with a censer as Julian hovers in the doorway of the little bedroom, as ever uncertain of his welcome.

“Strip,” Asra says, not even looking up.

Julian startles, caught off guard. The word had been flung so casually and unexpectedly that he’s not sure he heard it right.

Smoke coils up and out into the air from the censer as Asra blows on it gently. It smells expensive, heavy with fine oudh and musk; too expensive for the likes of either of them. A gift from the countess, probably. Julian blinks and stares at the white clouds like a hypnotized rabbit.

“What’s wrong?” Asra’s voice is gently mocking as he grins and drapes himself against the side of the bookshelf, his eyes on Julian now. (The time for flight is past.) “You don’t want to?”

Julian flushes hotly, and he does as he’s told.

He has to sit on the edge of the bed to deal with the boots. His fingers fumble with the buckles. He might be imagining that slight, smug quirk of Asra’s lips; probably not. Asra never moves, never takes his eyes off Julian, and by the time Julian manages to bare himself completely, his ears are burning with self-consciousness.

He’s already half-hard.

“Kneel,” says Asra crisply, motioning with his head. “Hands against the wall.”

Julian’s legs are apparently now made of jelly rather than the usual muscle and bone and sinew—a genuine medical curiosity, he is—and he struggles not to wobble as he crosses the room in a couple of strides, dropping to the floor so quickly that his knees sing a beautiful protest. He kneels as Asra had instructed him to in the past, balanced up on his toes with his haunches resting on his heels. Once his hands are planted on the cracked plaster, he hears Asra moving up behind him, and he turns his head to look; but Asra snaps, “Face forward.”

Heart rate spiking, Julian does.

There’s something—*strange* here, more so than usual. An intensity that feels dangerous, an invisible miasma of tension usually only present when Julian helps Asra with his creepy spells. Julian can’t put his finger on what it is, but it’s alarming.

And arousing. Painfully, *keenly* arousing.

(He ought to make arrangements for his brain to be studied after his death. A real gift to the medical sciences. Surely he’s just one big mass of abnormalities up there.)

“Hmm,” Asra murmurs. “You’re awfully quiet. Usually takes a gag to shut you up.”

“Um. I—”

“Hush. It’s an improvement. Unless you don’t want this tonight?”

“No!” Julian says, entirely too quickly, a bit of a squeak finding its way into his voice. “I mean, yes. I mean. I do. Want this.” Asra’s breath puffs in silent, knowing laughter, and it’s a wonder Julian’s ears aren’t sizzling.

“Let’s see,” Asra muses. “You look good like this. But I need access to your thighs this time, so lift up on your knees. Lean forward a little. Yes, just like that. Spread your legs wider.” Julian feels Asra’s bare foot nudging between his knees, guiding them apart. Why is it suddenly so hard to breathe? “Good. Yes, that’s perfect.”

Julian’s breath stutters, and his cock is now fully at attention. Asra hasn’t even touched him, aside from that nudge; how embarrassingly over-eager.

Asra’s warm chest presses against Julian’s shoulder as he leans down. With the warmth comes a heady waft of that incense, and it makes Julian’s head spin. Asra’s fingers slide up over the back of Julian’s neck, nails scraping gently, sending goosebumps prickling down Julian’s arms.

Jasmine. There’s honeyed jasmine and roses in the incense, drenching the oudh and musk like summer moonlight.

Abruptly, his vision goes dark as Asra’s hand wraps around and covers Julian’s eyes, and now all he seems to smell is Asra. Julian breathes in, filling his lungs with it, drinking deep. How long since he last took a proper breath? He can’t remember.

“Oh? Looks like someone’s *really* eager tonight,” Asra laughs, a deep and satisfied sound that vibrates through Julian’s body.

Julian cringes. “That’s, um.” Local man perishes in his friend’s bedroom, consumed by the flames of his own embarrassment. Died not of plague but of the foibles of his own over-eager prick. “That is, you—”

Asra shushes him, breath trickling behind Julian’s ear, making him shiver. “It’s good. You really do look good like this, Ilya,” Asra says, voice husky. He nips sharply at Julian’s neck, cutting through the hysterical spiraling of his thoughts. “Like a painting.”

Like a painting. Like a painting...? Julian’s head tips back against Asra’s shoulder. It leaves him unbalanced, this unaccustomed praise, even as his chest aches sweetly in response.

A heavy, flat weight slithers over his shoulder and chest, and Asra slowly draws it back again, letting Julian feel its texture. Feels like leather. A leather strap...? Julian bites his lip, his hips shifting. “Asra? What—”

Asra clucks his tongue, gently disapproving. “No questions. You asked if there was something you could do for me.”

“Yes,” says Julian. “Anything.”

“I don’t want you to *do* anything, though. Do you understand?”

“...Um? I, I’m not sure.”

“I just want you to *feel*.” The leather slides teasingly over Julian’s skin. “Can you do that? Can you feel for me?”

“...*Oh*. Yes,” Julian says, his voice nearly cracking.

“Are you suuuure?” Asra murmurs, drawing the word out, and Julian can *hear* his smirk as his warm lips brush against the shell of Julian’s ear. “Do you think you can just kneel there, no matter what I do to you? Can you hold still and just—*take* it?”

“Oh, *God*,” Julian gasps. It feels ripped from his chest, guttural. His nails dig in against the wall. “Yes. You—*yes*.”

Julian feels Asra’s lips curl wider. “Good.” Over Julian’s eyes, Asra’s fingers move, carefully pushing down on his eyelids. “Can you keep your eyes closed for me? I thought I might blindfold you, but you don’t need that, do you? You’ll just keep them closed until I tell you that you can open them.”

“Mnh—yes. Yes, I will.”

“Good boy,” said Asra.

Though Julian knows this praise for something one might give a pet, he still can’t stop himself, when Asra lifts his hand to stroke through Julian’s unruly curls, from leaning into the petting like the dog he is. It’s pointless, that faint flare of indignation. If Asra were to tell him to go fetch, Julian would come back on hands and knees with a stick in his mouth, and they both know it.

Asra pulls away, and Julian sways a little, wanting to chase that warmth. But he holds his position, keeps his eyes closed, just as he was told.

“Should I... count?” he asks.

“Hmm. No, I don’t think so,” Asra says. “All I want you to do is take it.” After a breath he adds: “And scream.”

And oh, he *screams*.

It’s heavy, the length of leather, and every strike jolts him, making him brace against the wall. The cracking sound is *glorious*: a smile in the dark, full of danger and wickedly sharp teeth.

Soon he’s clinging to the wall to stay upright, spinning in the dark behind his eyes as Asra stripes him from shoulder to just above the knee. In this, unlike everything else, Asra holds

back nothing; between all of Julian's own shouting and embarrassing grunts and groans, he can hear Asra's breathing growing labored with exertion. At this rate Julian's going to be useless tomorrow; how is he meant to work if he can't walk or sit or—

Crack.

“G-AH...GOD *FUCK!*” It rings in his ears, the strike echoing across his ass like red-hot ripples in a pond, and his spine arches and his toes curl, and he doesn't care, he doesn't care how anything's getting done, the world can burn, just so long as Asra *never stops hitting him*.

(Oh, the sound of it coming, the tightness coiling in his abdomen as he overrides his body's reflex to just *move, move, you idiot, this is going to hurt you—*)

Crack.

“H-AH...mnn... *ASRAAAH!*” A stream of broken curses spill from his lips, all stitched together from a handful of languages into something entirely unintelligible by anyone. His mind crowds in, and then every strike jars all the thoughts loose, scattering them into space, over and over, until they can't coalesce into anything anymore, leaving only a precious, empty quiet behind.

“Oh fuck yes, oh god, oh please—”

Asra's saying something, some amused observation maybe, but Julian can't make sense of it as he claws at the wall and wrenches himself back from the brink of climax. His own mouth is making sounds that he doesn't recognize, that barely sound human—

Crack.

“Oh, fuck, fuck, ff-ffff—*FUCK—*”

It cracks again before he's had time to brace himself, and he *wails*.

He's coming unmoored. He's not even sure where, *when* he is anymore. There are no stars to guide him on this sea, and he sinks below the glassy surface and into the sky.

He finds himself walking through the door again at least a dozen more times—climbing the stairs, standing in the back room, curled up with his head in Asra's lap, bent in supplication as Asra steadily invades him, kneeling here against this wall with his nerves singing alight: always the same.

Only memories, then. It's a slightly seasick sensation, but he wouldn't mind so much being lost in this one forever.

“Well done, Ilya. You took that beautifully.”

Panting, Julian holds onto the floor. No, not the floor. The wall. He's still upright. Somehow. The ache in his knees assures him of it.

Julian wants to see Asra's face, but suspects it wouldn't tell him anything more than his voice. That beating was quite possibly the most severe Asra's ever given him. Just *exquisitely* brutal.

(Which is what Julian wants, what he needs, yes, but...)

Asra kneels down behind him, making a thoughtful noise. His fingertips trail over Julian's back, and Julian jolts weakly at the touch. He can barely hold himself up. *Is* he holding himself up? Maybe the wall is holding onto him, not the other way around.

"Your skin marks so easily," Asra notes, so offhand he might as well be remarking on the color of someone's shawl. "You can open your eyes now, if you like."

Julian blinks them open. His forehead rests on the wall as he sags against it, the cracks in the paint filling up his unfocused gaze. That ecstatic post-pain haze tints his vision soft and rosy, but his cock is still heavy and throbbing, dripping now with need.

It had been a near thing, a couple of times, or maybe more than a couple. With enough intensity and clever application, pain alone is often enough to bring him to climax—(and oh, Asra's hands are so *very* clever)—but Asra hadn't said he could come, so Julian had squirmed and resisted and bit his lip until it bled.

Asra won't fuck him if he comes before Asra tells him to, and Julian *very much* wants to get fucked tonight. For whatever value of 'fucked' Asra pleases, as long as it's Asra's hands, Asra's mouth, Asra's body doing the fucking.

"Asra, I—"

Without warning, Asra's fingernails rake over Julian's abused flesh, down the small of his back and over his ass, lighting up those dully pulsing stripes in molten agony.

"—Gah!" Julian nearly climbs the wall as a high-pitched yelp escapes him. Did he do something wrong? Was he not supposed to speak? Asra says nothing, just cups his palm against the side of Julian's ass and gives it a possessive squeeze as he writhes.

Standing, Asra slips his hand beneath Julian's chin and tilts his head back, forcing him to look at Asra's face from a dizzying upside-down perspective. He really will fall over backward, Julian thinks, panic flickering faintly; but he doesn't, even as the room spins above.

"You didn't think I was done with you, did you?" Asra says. Julian's balls give a deep throb at the promise/threat.

Asra tips a cup to Julian's lips before he can respond: cool water. The musky smell of the incense clings to the surface of the liquid, making it seem to taste of flowers. He swallows—a

little difficult at this angle, and after several mouthfuls he coughs, splutters, but Asra doesn't let go.

"Perish the thought," Julian manages finally, though his grin feels weak and his voice is rasping.

Asra lifts his brows. "Hmm. Maybe I haven't worked you over enough yet. Maybe we should do another set."

Julian shivers. A pathetic whine lodges in his throat, choked off. "Asra, I..." His hips shift helplessly, seeking friction. "If you—any more, and I don't think—I can't—" He isn't making sense. Words seem unwilling to obey him.

"That's more like it," Asra snorts.

"Asra—*please*."

"'Please' what?"

Julian's eyelids flutter. Any more of the strap might be dangerous, judging from the deep quivering in his muscles. Not that that's ever stopped Julian from seeking oblivion before. More importantly—

"I need...need to come. Can I—"

"No," says Asra sharply.

Julian whimpers, his fingers digging against the wall, his hips rocking. "Then, you—can I touch you—"

"*No*. I already told you. You're going to just take whatever I give you. You'll come when—*if*—I want you to. And I'll be doing the touching."

Julian tries not to panic at that 'if', at the thought of not being allowed to come at all. Licks his lips, trying to find the words that will make give Asra give him what he wants. (There are none, that's the problem; he knows perfectly well that there are none. Asra, like any force of nature, will always do just as he pleases.)

Asra sets the water down on the nightstand and pauses, tapping his lips thoughtfully. "Do you need some help, Ilya?"

"H...help?" Julian echoes stupidly.

He sees now that Asra has peeled off all but his trousers, sweat glistening on all that golden skin, and Julian's mouth waters for want of the salt-sweet taste of it. His gaze snags on the glinting of the gold band around Asra's throat, on the moisture collecting in the hollow just beneath it.

It's difficult to hold the whole of Asra in his mind at one time. How? he wonders hazily. How is there a soul in the city not crawling at Asra's feet?

There isn't any helping me, Julian thinks. Not anymore.

Asra cups Julian's cheek, and Julian sways into it unconsciously, fighting to keep his hands on the wall. "Do you want me to fuck you?" says Asra.

"Oh, God, *yes*."

"Well then, you'll have to hold still for me." Asra leans forward with a sharp little smile, brushing his thumb in little circles against Julian's cheekbone. "And you'll have to take it for as long as I want. You absolutely cannot come until I tell you to. Understand?"

All Julian manages is a groan and a shiver.

"If you can't hold back, I'd be happy to help you. So, Ilya: do you want help?"

Julian's impulses are two identical poles facing each other, flying off in opposing directions. He wants, he wants, he *wants* Asra to use him up, to absolutely *ruin* him, to stretch out this suffering into a shining strand that never, ever ends; and he's also pretty sure he'll die, he'll *actually* die of desperation, he'll burn alive in his own skin if Asra doesn't take mercy on him right now. That isn't possible, he knows it isn't possible, but what does he *know*, really? He's not even a legitimate doctor, and *fuck*, his balls ache—

I want I want I want—

He doesn't realize he's speaking aloud until he notices Asra's steadily climbing eyebrows. "What is it you want, Ilya? Do you want me to hurt you more? Say it. I won't do anything if you don't say it."

"Yes, please," Julian rasps, his voice cracking. "I want—*anything*, just—I don't care what, or how, just use me, any way you like, hold me down, pin me, invade me, tear me apart—*please* —"

Desperation pushes him past shame, and once the words start pouring, they won't stop. As Julian babbles, a slow, astonished smile spreads on Asra's face, his eyes brightening with a curiosity Julian suddenly realizes he hasn't seen in a while. (And if that brightness seems strangely sharper than it used to—well, all the better for Julian to heedlessly impale himself upon it.)

Asra's fingers trace over Julian's lips, stilling them. "Shh." His thumb presses inward, and Julian opens to it like a flower, bending to the pressure on his tongue as Asra winds the fingers of his other hand into Julian's sweat-dampened curls. "Shh, it's all right, Ilya. I can give you that much. Come here."

Abruptly, Asra yanks viciously at Julian's hair, pulling him off balance, and Julian falls—

...and he falls—

—deeper inside himself, sliding through time as Asra binds him, splays him open, oil-slicked fingers teasing against his perineum, bespelling, invading the very core of him, those precious fingers—

“*Fuck!*” Julian sobs the vulgarity like an offering. “Oh, fuck, oh please, please, *please...*”

Asra’s got Julian face down, shoulders on the floor and ass in the air, with forearms bound together behind his back so that his spine is forced to arch indecently. As Julian had knelt there in the middle of the room, Asra had wrenched his arms into place and wound the rope around, Julian hissing and grimacing all the while at the fierce complaints of the welts down his back.

“All right?” Asra had said, pulling Julian’s head back to look him in the face.

“Never better,” Julian had replied, meaning it to sound careless and cheeky, but the breathy whine that found its way into his voice betrayed just how genuinely he meant it.

Asra took him at his word and shoved him down, and even proceeded to bind his legs thigh-to-calf so that they were trapped in a partially folded position. His shins barely made contact with the floor, leaving him entirely unable to brace with them. Using his own legs, Asra had shoved Julian’s knees wide apart, leaving him so helplessly exposed that he was rendered speechless and mewling.

Now there’s oil trickling everywhere over his sweat-slick skin. Over his tailbone and into the crease of his groin, over the back of one thigh, tickling maddeningly against the burning welts. There’s the sound of fabric rustling as Asra frees himself, and *fuck*—

Asra positions his cock against Julian’s hole, running his hands down Julian’s flanks as though soothing a nervous beast. He grabs hold of Julian’s hips, jerking them up as he presses forward.

The preparation was perfunctory—it always is when Asra fucks Julian’s ass, as Asra figured out early on that the burn of forceful invasion would set Julian to pleading and babbling like an idiot far quicker than any amount of careful coaxing, so he does the bare minimum necessary for safety. However, he’ll move just as slow or fast as he pleases, and no amount of begging will change that, no matter if he’s decided to punish Julian with a brutal, pounding pace right from the start, or to torment him with agonizingly drawn out strokes.

It seems it’s the latter this time, as Asra angles up Julian’s hips, forcing his way inch by fiery inch as Julian’s body fights it on reflex, muscles tightening and spasming against the invasion stretching him. Then comes the inevitable giving in, his body’s surrender as Asra slides deeper, and the sense of being overcome sets his every nerve aglow.

“Yes,” his mouth is saying mindlessly, “make me, more, give me, h-ha—ah—*fuck*—”

—*invade me, force me open, use me*—

It's too much, he's sobbing for breath, he's begging in his mother tongue, Asra's name is spilling from his lips like a prayer, and he's thrashing against his bonds in mindless search of more, deeper, faster. But he can barely move. Asra's hold on his hips is merciless, his knees bracing Julian's legs obscenely wide, and Julian's just splayed there, helpless to pull away, to push back, to change a single damn thing about any of it.

Finally seated to the hilt, Asra plants a firm hand on Julian's lower back, stilling his squirming. His hips are pressed flush against Julian's ass, thighs wedged between Julian's, so slick, so solid, so inescapable. "Hush," he says, voice husky. "I told you. You'll take it, whatever I give you."

The words twist something in Julian's brain, strike it like lightning, and liquid heat shoots straight up the base of his spine. Shivers of impending climax roll through him. He tries to hold it back—he knows it can't crest, knows that Asra has used that clever magic charm of his on Julian's prick. Far more effective than any cock ring, there's nothing in the world that could make Julian spill before Asra lets him. Julian knows from experience that once orgasm has him in its gravity, he'll just keep skimming its surface over and over like a skipping stone until it's finally allowed to reach its natural conclusion, until it swallows him whole.

He's not sure any kind of pleasure is more agonizing than this. He can't bear it. He wants to be *forced* to bear it. He wants—

A whine wells up and strangles in his throat as he presses his forehead hard against the rug, his spine bowing, calves straining. It shudders through him, the climax, turning inexorably inward and pulling every muscle in his body taut. His cock throbs, weeping profusely, but of course it doesn't spill.

Julian sags back down as Asra gasps in shock, his hips grinding against Julian's rear, fingers gripping Julian's hip so hard it's sure to bruise. "Fuck," he says. "*Fuck.*" He laughs hoarsely, and something in Julian's chest squeezes warmly at the breathless sound of it, at the knowledge that Asra is at least not *entirely* unmovable. "You're certainly greedy tonight, aren't you? A dry orgasm already?"

"Please," Julian rasps. "Fuck me."

"Well, don't pretend you didn't ask for it."

With that Asra pulls back until nothing but the head of his cock is still inside, and pauses. Julian whimpers; tries not to squirm; fails. Abruptly, with a powerful snap of his hips, Asra thrusts deep, so deep, the force knocking all the breath from Julian's lungs.

"H-ahh, ah, As-ra-*ahhh!*"

Asra holds his position for an excruciatingly long time, buried deep in Julian's ass. Then he pulls back, so, so slow—and again, he thrusts in hard. He keeps up this pace, slowly pulling back, slamming in, holding still, each stroke somehow feeling like it's reaching deeper and deeper.

Julian sobs and begs and shivers helplessly against the surface of another climax, then another and another, caught suspended on a crescendo without end. Finally, finally, Asra's pace begins to stutter, and he stops, breathing hard. He presses down at the small of Julian's back and removes the magical restriction on Julian's cock; Julian gasps at the strange sense that something deep in his body is unfolding, unclenching.

"All right, Ilya," Asra murmurs, jerking at Julian's hips to angle them back. "All right."

Leaning over Julian, Asra plants a hand just above Julian's bound arms, bracing much of his weight on it while he keeps hold of Julian's hip with his other. It bends Julian's spine even more sharply, and the pressure makes it hard to draw in a full breath.

Julian hears himself whimper again in the sudden stillness.

Asra moves.

He pulls back and snaps his hips forward sharply, cock slamming against that knot of nerves inside, and—*God*—Julian sees stars. Asra begins fucking him in earnest, each thrust jolting another guttural moan from Julian's chest as their bodies smack together. It *burns*, the slam of Asra's hips against his abused ass and thighs, and the burn amplifies every other sensation until it engulfs everything, blots out the whole world.

There's nothing to brace against—his limbs are useless. It's only Asra's grip and his weight holding Julian in place on the floor. Julian's mouth goes slack, his eyes roll back in his head, he—

"*Please!*" Julian shouts, or tries to, though it comes out hoarse and voiceless. His scalp tingles, his abdomen tightens and quivers, his eyes are tearing up. Panic blooms in his chest. "Please, please, God, Asra, *please*, I can't, *I can't*—!"

He's going to come. Asra hasn't told him to come. *He's going to come*. He can't hold back, he can't—

"Go on," Asra growls, voice roughened to near-unrecognizability. "You don't need me to touch you. Just come for me."

Two more shattering thrusts and Julian screams, his vision bleeding to white as he arches, his spend splattering over his own stomach and chest. Asra's grinding against him, spilling hot inside, hissing through his teeth as Julian's inner muscles milk him for every drop.

Julian's eyes screw shut, tears leaking through as he spurts again and again. Sound and space fade away. Perfect silence.

Here all the shattered points of his time seem to meet at a bright spot behind his eyes, and he sinks into it ecstatically.

Julian comes back to the sound of Asra's soft gasping and realizes with a jolt that he'd just lost consciousness, if only for a few seconds. Asra is pulling out of him carefully, his hand

massaging gently against the small of Julian's back when Julian makes a wordless little protest at the ache of the sudden emptiness.

"Well done, Ilya," Asra murmurs. "Beautiful."

Asra never leaves Julian to crash and burn after a fuck, but he rarely gives more than just enough. Help Julian get cleaned up, patch any wounds, dole out a measured bit of kindness—and it's over.

Julian could count on one hand the number of times Asra's let Julian spend the night next to him. There are naps in the library sometimes, or out in the gardens, when Asra will pull Julian down and curl up next to him. Without a word, he'll proceed to use Julian's shoulder or his lap like his personal pillow, often going so far as move Julian around to his liking, to better block the sunlight from his eyes, or to support his neck, or for no apparent reason at all. All the while, that little grin just dares Julian to complain.

Julian often makes half-hearted noises about slacking off and we-have-work-to-do and I-think-I'm-on-to-something, really-this-time, but he can't ever bear to put his foot down and pull away. Not when Asra feels so soft and warm, when he's actually welcoming Julian's touch. (Which, Julian realizes, is probably why Asra does it. The perfect way to prevent Julian from bothering Asra when he's napping: just use Julian as the pillow.)

Despite the napping habit, actually spending the night together apparently connotes a level of intimacy Asra will rarely allow. But this time, Asra hasn't made any moves to indicate he wants Julian gone. (Just as well, since Julian probably wouldn't even make it out of the room. He's pretty sure if he tried to stand his legs would just wobble like rubbery, overcooked carrots and deposit him face-first on the floor.)

Asra's propped up on pillows against the wall in a half-recline with Julian's head pulled into his lap, and he's just absently running his fingers through Julian's hair as he stares out the open window in silence. There's a breeze, cool and fresh, blessedly blowing out to sea. One could almost imagine it to be a normal summer night when the wind clears out the stench of ash like this.

Julian is rendered down, blissed out and boneless, curled on his side with his feet hanging half-off the bed. His heartbeat thuds heavily through the welts on his back, and the earthy smelling salve Asra smeared on Julian's back tingles, magnifying his awareness of the sting even as it soothes. If he weren't so sleep-deprived and worn out, it'd probably be enough to get him going again.

This is even better than fucking, anyway.

Julian wonders if this is real. Possibly he was right; he actually is dying or dead, and this piercing gentleness—the entire night, even—is just the last hallucination of an air-starved and plague-fevered brain. Or maybe he's just let himself grow so sleep-deprived that he's dreaming while awake, creating the world he wants to see. Hallucinating the most intense sex of his life?

Well. Wouldn't be the first time.

"...Asra?" he murmurs, and a small corner of Julian's mind screams in frustration that he would speak even now, that he would risk breaking this spell.

"Mm?"

"I meant it, um. When I asked if there was something I could do to help. Can I help?"

Julian feels movement, and tilts his head back to find Asra looking down at him, the corner of his mouth lifted provocatively. "You want to go again already?" Asra says. "Hmm... That's some impressive stamina. Not sure I can keep up."

"No, that's not—" Julian huffs. Teasing to deflect, and Julian always falls for it. The warm, hazy glow of an earth-shatteringly good fuck coupled with Asra's hand petting his hair is enough to quiet the trapped whirlwind of extraneous thought, though, so he pushes through: "I mean. I can see something's...wrong. More wrong than even usual, I mean. You don't have to tell me what it is. I just—anything. Truly. You know I don't have compunctions over legality, or—anything, really, so."

Asra tilts his head to the side, brows knitting in something close to pity. He shakes his head. "I don't need anything from you, Ilya."

Julian is too raw, too defenseless to even try to hide his flinch. Asra must see it, because he sighs, adding, "From *anyone*. Some things can't be helped. You should know that."

"I..." Julian swallows, thinking of the ever-ballooning number of people he's failed to save. Of that one person Asra most needed him to save. "Yes, I suppose I do. Still, if you need help with—any of those spells of yours, or, or anything."

"I'm sure I will. I'm...glad you're here." Asra gives a little smile, strained, though not unkind, and goes back to staring out the window. Under his breath, almost as if to himself, he adds: "Things will be better soon. After the Masquerade."

Inexplicably, the words fill Julian with dread.

He knows better than to push any more. There's something going on here, he's sure, and he wishes he could just—lift the top of Asra's skull off like a box lid and peek inside, coax the secrets there out into the open. (Ugh. Skulls again.) But Asra only ever responds to pushing by nimbly stepping aside, letting whoever's doing the pushing (Julian, it's always Julian) stumble and flail, so it's pointless to try. And selfishly, he doesn't want to risk Asra pushing back, to risk him slipping away, or sending Julian home to his own cold bed. Not now, not tonight. Not when his head is cradled in Asra's lap, and this all so closely resembles everything Julian wants.

(It isn't, of course, what he wants. He knows, he knows, he *knows* that it will never be what he truly wants. It hurts, that difference, the space between this and that distant reality that will never be—it feels like it might tear his lungs inside out. But he can't help himself, this

ridiculous, precious disease won't let him. He'll cling for as long as he can to this wisp of closeness.)

He curls his body against Asra's, allows that hand stroking his hair to lull him into something approximating peace. Soon sleep claws him down into the dark.

For once, he doesn't dream, at least nothing coherent enough to recall. A rare blessing. Or maybe he does dream, maybe he relives the night out of order a hundred more times—maybe he eventually got it right.

Maybe if he hadn't, he'd still be there, still be then.

When he wakes, he's unsurprised to find himself alone.

End Notes

i originally intended this to be just a short pwp but julian made me word vomit more navel-gazey angst than actual porn. hey he got wrecked this time at least ͇_('ʘ)_/͇

i kept pouring out this slightly hallucinatory non-linear brain slurry which is a perpetual problem for me but i thought it kinda worked for a chronically sleep deprived lush living in a plague infested hellscape so i went with it. this is also as self-indulgently purple as julian's dick but considering this is from the pov of julian "Death Cast Her Gaze on this Wretch and Turned Away" devorak, i'll do what i want, don't @ me

(...jk pls do @ me ilu all)

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