

As One

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As One

by [ryyves](#)

Summary

With Grant on the verge of leaving for the Country, Asher reaches out to an old friend.

Notes

Written for Transistor Week, to the prompts "Pride" and "Grant"

“Let him go,” says Asher, while Grant locks the wide double doors and paces away. “Let him go.”

Asher studies the diagrams on the blackboard, draws up lists of their targets and how they were integrated beside Royce’s equations. The tip of his stylus scrapes against the board, a quiet sound beneath the screaming wind at the top of the city, beneath the shaking of the Process Cells against their glass confines. From the roof of Bracket Towers, they can see the city skyline vanish, fade to Process-white.

Grant stands by the edge of the roof, an officious figure with hands folded behind his back. An illuminated silhouette, clad the color of the watching eyes. The cold air over the city, over the abandoned construction beams and highrises, raises gooseflesh beneath their thick clothes. The night is still. They both breathe too softly to hear.

“Don’t,” says Asher.

“No.” Grant turns, his silhouette sharp against the city, and he draws a small vial of a thick, smooth liquid, electric blue, from an inner pocket of his suit. Asher’s stylus against the blackboard fumbles, clatters to the floor. Grant tucks the vial back into the pocket. He steps down from the lip of the roof, passing Asher on his way across the floor.

Grant pulls open the heavy door of the liquor cabinet, stocked for his late nights with Royce, or Sybil’s long days with anyone. “Asher. There’s nothing we can do for Cloudbank. No good intentions can bring it back.” He takes out two wide glasses and a full bottle of red wine.

He sets the glasses on a low table, and they chime, light and brilliant. They sound like song, and they sound like breaking glass. Asher steps back as Grant turns toward him. An intangible distance opened between them the moment Royce left for Fairview, but now Grant takes Asher’s hand. “One last evening, my love,” he says, in a low rumble that pulls a shiver through Asher’s chest. “One last drink together.”

“Please,” Asher whispers, and there are dark spots on his cheeks, patches of shadow on skin rendered purple by the shifting outdoor lights. He swallows up a sob with words.

“There’s still hope for Cloudbank – for you. The singer—Red—she’s on her way.”

“The damage has been done.”

“We can rebuild the city,” Asher says, a frantic insistence. He pulls his hand back, tucking it against his chest. “That’s what you wanted. From the beginning.”

Grant’s dark, unreadable eyes stare back at him. After a long silence, he says, “Royce will do it. No matter what happens.”

“Let Royce go,” says Asher, a firmness in his voice that belies the way it breaks. “He left us to our fate – and he chose his. He split from the cause, from us, when he left for Fairview, and if we don’t stop this, soon Cloudbank will be just as lifeless. Royce would love to build

an empty city, so let him go. You know as well as I do that the people are the heart of Cloudbank. Yes, they're fickle, but so are we. And I can't save them on my own."

"I owe this to all the people I've killed. I owe this to the people of Cloudbank who are still living."

"You are not responsible."

"Who will pay?" says Grant, his voice a faint and hollow whisper. "Who will be brought to justice?"

"Who else can lead the city back from the dark?"

"I don't think Cloudbank will survive."

"Grant, I can't—"

"I live for this city, Asher."

"I know. And I live for *you*."

Grant uncorks the bottle of red wine and sets it on the table. He pauses, his face deeply lined, before draining half the vial of blue liquid into his empty glass. "Will you come with me?"

Asher trembles. Across the room, his cat mews in alarm.

"It's your choice," says Grant. "Drink with me."

"This isn't a choice."

"It is. You said yourself, Asher. The woman's on her way. You can still save our city, and when we meet again, I'll be so proud of you."

Asher takes the vial from Grant's hand. Their fingers brush, the invisible barrier shattering so quickly it sends a shock through Asher. "You know I'll follow you," says Asher. And Grant, his beautiful Grant, meets his eyes, so weary and so sad, so disappointed in Asher for giving up as easily as he did.

Asher holds his eyes and drains the vial into his own glass, letting the last drops fall onto the table, staining the dark wood with electric blue. Grant's eyes widen, his breath catches, and Asher sees it all. He lifts the glass, and Grant takes the backs of his hands around it. Asher hesitates, trembles with his eyes on Grant's.

"Make your final arrangements," says Grant, gently.

There is nothing to leave behind but an admission. There is nothing to repent for, no chance for penance, just answers to give to the desperate, so that the city and all her people might have justice.

Asher steps in, Grant's rough hands on his, holding them cupped around the wineglass between their bodies. He rises on his feet to kiss Grant, soft, pleading, tender. But Grant is a force, unmovable. Lips brushing Grant's skin, Asher whispers, "As one."

Without fuss, he slides his hands out of Grant's, setting the glass back on the low table. He turns his back to Grant. He turns his back to the scene, to the glasses on the low table and the diagrams on the blackboard, to the bright Process and the dark, empty city. He makes his way to the terminal and taps a key to record, to send to every working terminal in the city. This is his only goodbye.

"To the people of Cloudbank," he begins. To the people who remain. "We did this."

Across the bay, in his studio in Fairview, the architect Royce Bracket breathes air thick and still with Process-sickness and the haze of his own cigarettes. Beyond his barricade, the furious and melancholy wind whistles through the empty suburb, overgrown with weeds.

His terminal blinks, an open communication, and in absent curiosity Royce taps it. Asher's voice, desperate and uneven, fills the space. "I need you," Asher says. "Grant needs you."

"He's giving up?" Royce's voice catches an edge of panic, like light on shards of glass. He stands abruptly, paces away from his terminal. "No, no, this isn't right, isn't Grant."

"Please, Royce," begs Asher's voice.

He paces through his Studio, running his hands through his hair, footsteps echoing. He takes his time returning to his terminal. He doesn't let his weakness show as he rests his palms on the terminal and presses the button to record. "You've done all you can. I'll take care of the rest."

A long silence, scratchy through the terminal speakers. A sob. "Tell him," Asher pleads. "Tell him to stay."

Royce contemplates, steeples his fingers, in the dark, against the harsh glow of the terminal screen. He imagines he's speaking to Grant. "The Country will do you good."

"Please."

"It's your choice," says Royce Bracket, hoarse voice flat and closed-off. "We're all going that way."

"You want to take him from me," says Asher, accusatory.

"Let Cloudbank fall," says Royce, and his mouth twists. "And Grant, well. Let him go down with her. With it. How he always wanted."

"I love you," says Asher. "I love you. I love you."

“I know. I know. And I’ll love you forever. Even the Country won’t take that away,” says Grant.

Asher raises his glass and clinks it gently against Grant’s with a muffled chiming. “Don’t leave me.”

“Shh. I’ll wait for you.”

The liquid catches the light. Grant tips the glass, and swallows.

Royce stands before the empty Cradle. In silence, he runs his fingers over its surface, smooth and perfect, but the grounding touch can’t fill the longing in his chest. His life’s work, his city, the only people he loved.

He fills his quiet Studio with smoke.

His terminal sings. He doesn’t look up.

Asher and Grant sit together against the blackboard on the cold tile. Grant’s half-empty glass balances on the work table, on the scattered papers, as though Grant had collapsed in Asher’s arms, and Asher had lowered him to the floor and dragged him across the tile toward something to rest against.

Grant leans against Asher, growing weak, and Asher strokes his hair in steady motions. He holds Asher’s hand tightly. He breathes, hoarse and thin.

“I’m sorry,” Asher murmurs. “I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t save Cloudbank in time to save you.” He takes a trembling breath. “I let you down.”

“You have never let me down, my dear,” says Grant, words slurred, “and you never will.”

Asher shuts his eyes, but his tears squeeze through his eyelids and pool beneath his eyelashes. The world seems to hold its breath, on the roof of Bracket Towers, and for a moment he thinks that the world will be right again if he just keeps his eyes closed.

He feels a wide, warm thumb brush beneath his eye, Grant’s soft touch, and he looks down. He hiccups. Vision blurry, he meets Grant’s eyes. Grant is crying, too, and Asher can’t bring himself to wipe away his tears.

Grant slumps against Asher’s shoulder, and it takes all of Asher’s strength to keep him there. Asher holds him tightly, pressing kisses against his cheeks and his hair.

“I want an end to this,” says Grant, his voice foggy. “To changing the world, if all it brings is tragedy. I want to rest. I just want to watch the sun rise in the Country. Is that too much to ask?”

“No. You deserve to rest, after all the good you’ve done.”

Grant just nods, and Asher knows then just how tired he is. How worn out, how little time he has left.

“I’ll find you,” Asher promises. “I will find you.”

Grant’s hazy eyes don’t move from Asher’s, as though he wants Asher’s face to be the last thing he sees, the last memory he brings with him to the Country. Grant slides down against Asher’s chest, and Asher doesn’t have the strength to hold him up. He looks up from Asher’s lap, and for a moment Asher sees an echo of Grant’s fire in the fear and frustration in his stare. Within seconds it passes, and Asher is left with a sense of grief, of terror, in the pit of his stomach.

Asher is not crying now, though his cheeks are stained with it. He is hollow and shaking. He continues to stroke Grant’s hair, in movements far less steady than before.

“You’ll come after me?” Desperation rises in Grant’s voice, frenetic, and he reaches for Asher, seeking confirmation.

“Of course. Of course,” Asher says.

“I love you... more than anything.”

But not more than Cloudbank.

“Grant. Stay with me. Please.”

“Asher.”

“Just keep looking at me. Don’t close your eyes.”

Grant doesn’t take his eyes from Asher’s. “Asher.”

Asher’s voice cracks. “What is it? I’ll do anything.”

“You’ve done... everything you can. I’m so proud. So proud. You were... the best part of my life.”

Asher lifts Grant’s hand and presses it to his cheek, so soft and warm and familiar. “Please, Grant. Please. I love you. Please.”

Grant sighs. His eyes fall closed. He breathes, thin and shallow, a few more times. In a small voice, Asher says, “Grant?”

For a moment, the wind seems to stop, the only sound in the world a tiny exhale. Grant’s hand in Asher’s sags under the city’s gravity.

Time stretches out. Asher doesn’t breathe. Then the wind crashes back, and painful, ugly sobs force their way out of Asher as he collapses over Grant.

Asher lays Grant's still body on the tile. He kisses Grant's eyelids, his forehead, his lips. Asher lays down beside Grant, and rests his head on Grant's chest, and begs, and screams, and sobs.

As the sobs subside into exhaustion, Asher pulls Grant's arm around him, closing his eyes, and listens to Grant's awful, silent heart. The Process slam against their glass cage, and the wind wails around the highrises, but otherwise all the world is quiet. Asher is alone with the body of the man he loves.

When his body is too wracked and tired to go on, Asher pushes himself up on shaking arms. He crawls to the terminal, terribly slow, and collapses against it. In a hollow voice on the verge of breaking, he tells the singer this:

"We knew that if we were to fail, we would do so together. As one.

"See you in the Country."

He opens communications with Royce one last time. The terminal rings and rings.

"I'm going to follow him," he tells Royce in a fragile voice, and Royce doesn't object. Asher takes the half-full glass from the work table and holds it up, so that the light of the frantic Process and the dim glow of his damaged city catch on the liquid, turning it the brilliant colors of a jewel, or mirror shards, or stained glass.

Holding the glass carefully, as carefully as he can, Asher crawls back to Grant, still warm but fading, and curls up beside him.

"Asher," Royce says from far away, and his voice through the terminal drifts into the sky and out over the city. "Keep him safe. Safe trip."

Asher tips back the glass.

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