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Summary

Day Twenty-Nine: telepathy

Caleb, can you hear me?

He's staring right at Essek, whose lips don't move.

Notes

So here's the deal: I haven't been making great use of my time, and I started what will probably be a 4K-word fic at 10 pm. Not that I haven't done that before several times this month, but I'm tired and riddled with election anxiety. But I'm also so close to the finish, and I don't want to leave you hanging, so today, I'm going to be a terrible tease and post the FIRST HALF of Day 29. Yes, get ready for a SEX CLIFFHANGER.

I would still love to finish by Wednesday, so you may get a fic and a half tomorrow, or you may get a half a fic, or you may get an American with a shattered soul screaming ceaselessly into the abyss. WHO KNOWS. DEMOCRACY.

Chapter 1

“It’s not dunamancy,” Essek says, “but would you like me to show you something else I’ve recently picked up?”

“Of course,” Caleb replies eagerly. If Essek is beginning to volunteer spells to teach him, they have finally achieved a measure of trust.

“It will allow us to exchange thoughts without speaking. Not just thoughts, but images, sounds, and whatever other sensory information we choose. However, neither of us will be able to read thoughts that are not at the forefront of each other’s minds, and we should be able to exert some control over the information we send. It requires your consent, of course.”

“Ah,” Caleb says, trying to think quickly. To grant Essek access to his mind requires quite a lot of trust. The man has yet to lie to him about the effects of any spell he’s shared, but there could hardly be a better first time for it, if Essek is truly seeking information he believes Caleb is hiding. And yet this spell could be of substantial use to Caleb. True, Essek has not yet offered to teach it to him, but this could be a first step, and it would be a substantial show of faith on Caleb’s part.

Essek, seeing him hesitate, says, “If you become uncomfortable, you may dispel it at any time. And please do not let me put pressure on you. I only mention it because it is new to me, and I am still eager to learn the limits of what it allows.”

It’s a motivation that Caleb understands completely, and in the end, it is too tantalizing an opportunity to pass up. “Please show me,” he says.

Essek nods and pulls a pair of linked silver rings from his pocket, spinning them between his fingers as he murmurs the incantation. Caleb feels the slight tickling at the base of his neck that warns him of another’s presence in his mind, and with a deep breath, he nods at Essek and grants access.

If he was expecting some grand, dramatic entrance, he is surprised at the unobtrusiveness of the entrance of Essek’s consciousness within his own. There is perhaps a slight feeling of incorporeal pressure, an added fullness within his mind, but no more than that.

Caleb, can you hear me?

He’s staring right at Essek, whose lips don’t move.

I... can? he ventures back. If he closes his eyes and extends his imagination, he can feel a similar part of his own consciousness that is beyond the confines of his body – presumably, in a corresponding place in Essek’s mind. Still, it takes a little effort to form words, and Caleb finds he needs to close his eyes to concentrate.

Essek seems to be having no such difficulties. *Allow me to send you an image. Please tell me when you receive it.*

The image starts blurry, as though Caleb has just woken up and is still struggling to make his eyes focus. However, it slowly becomes clearer until Caleb can make out first colors, then shapes, then details. While it never becomes perfectly lifelike, Caleb soon recognizes a cupcake frosted with unusual black icing and held out by a blue hand.

Jester is handing you a cupcake, he replies, focusing deliberately on each word. Be careful, I am not sure how long it has been in her bag.

There's a ripple of pleasure that comes through their link, not quite a sound, but still easily identifiable as laughter. Essek is amused. *Wise words indeed. Keep your eyes closed and I will try to conjure up a different sense.*

A scent this time, acrid and unpleasant. Fortunately, it's not quite as sharp as the real thing would be, but Caleb's words are starting to become easier to form in reply. *If you are telling me that we ought to bathe our moorbounders, I confess, I do not know how. Jannik detests water.*

Another ripple like sunlight on water. *Just leave them out of doors, please. Now let me try something a little unorthodox.*

Essek jabs him in the shoulder.

Caleb's eyes fly open and he sits back hard in his chair, fully expecting to see Essek right in front of him. But the drow is still halfway across the room, seated in the same chair he's been in this whole time. His finger, however, is pressed into his own shoulder.

Interesting, Essek says without speaking. Shall I assume you felt that as if I were doing it to you?

Yes, indeed, Caleb replies, surprised. And the impression is quite a bit stronger than your memory of the cupcake and the moorbounder.

How fascinating. Close your eyes again, please.

Caleb does, and a moment later, he is seeing the pages of one of his own books through Essek's eyes, almost as clearly as if it were his own. It seems that when Essek is experiencing a stimulus in the moment, it is far easier to transmit with near-perfect clarity. It is exhilarating, the ability to exchange thoughts in this way. At Essek's urging, Caleb learns to send his own thoughts and sensations to Essek. It is clear that he has a bit less control than Essek when it comes to what he sends, but his mastery over it increases as they work.

They continue in this way for nearly another hour until Essek realizes the time. "Ah, Caleb, this has been very enlightening, but I am afraid I am needed elsewhere."

"Oh," Caleb says, realizing he hasn't thought to consult his internal chronometer in some time, and then realizing that Essek spoke to him aloud and he answered in kind. "Yes, of course. You have already been very generous with your time – please do not let me keep you."

There's a flutter of something else, not quite laughter this time. "I assure you, you would not keep me unless I allowed myself to be kept."

With that and a nod, Essek is back on his feet – or rather, in the air. Caleb escorts him politely down the stairs and to the door and bids him farewell.

It's only a few minutes later, when Caleb has returned to his room, that he realizes that the gentle pressure of Essek in his mind has not departed. *Essek?* he thinks suddenly. *Are we still linked?*

We are, comes the reply. *I suppose I should have let you know, but I wanted to test the range. I know the time limit, but not the geographical limit.*

And what is the time limit?

Twenty-four hours. Though you may dispel it at any time before then.

Caleb hesitates a moment before answering. *I may dispel it? Not you?*

Oh, I am perfectly able, but I find myself disinclined to. Although I have not heard any of your thoughts until you specifically directed them at me, I thought it might be... agreeable to have you as a companion for the day. If I run across a tricky bit of transmutation magic in my work, I can call on you easily.

Caleb should probably be suspicious of such an offer. Essek has more experience with the spell than he does, so he has nothing but Essek's word to assure him that none of his thoughts are slipping through unbidden. Still, the presence of a like mind alongside his own is not unpleasant. Not unpleasant at all. *That would be fine, I think. I am curious as well. I will endeavor not to bother you with stray thoughts about cats.*

More laughter, like a warm breeze in his mind. *Stray thoughts about cats do not bother me in the least, my friend.*

&&&

It would be incorrect to say that Caleb forgets about Essek's presence in his mind. Rather, he becomes accustomed to it surprisingly quickly. And apart from a quick question about components for an obscure spell, Essek doesn't contact him through their temporary bond for the rest of the day. It's only after dinner, when the Nein are spread throughout the Xhorhaus amusing themselves or relaxing at will, that Caleb hears anything more.

I may owe you an apology.

Caleb is able to pick up shades of emotion in Essek's mental voice now, and he gets slightly amused exasperation. *For what?*

Abandoning you for much more tedious company. Look.

Caleb's suddenly hit with the world as Essek sees it, and he has to shut his own eyes before the double sight gives him a headache. Essek appears to be in some kind of restaurant or

social club, sitting at a table with two other drow. They are, as all the Kryn seem to be, inhumanly beautiful, with smooth, dark skin and sharp cheekbones. There's a man and a woman engaged in conversation with each other and with Essek, who is doing a remarkable job of transmitting his vision to Caleb and conversing at the same time. It's hard for Caleb to follow, full of names and titles he doesn't recognize, but it's easy enough to tell why Essek's complaining: it sounds like the sort of high society gossip that would put Caleb to sleep, as well. *Friends of yours?* he replies.

Associates. We run in the same circles.

If they bore you so, why waste time with them?

Caleb's expecting an answer about the social functions of the Shadowhand position, so it utterly shocks him when the reply he gets is *Because they fuck me so well.*

"Caleb?" Nott asks, poking him gently.

"Was?" Caleb asks, blinking as though he's just woken up. For a moment he'd forgotten that he was sitting in the living room reading while Nott tunes up her crossbow.

"You were just staring out in to space," Nott says. "I was starting to worry something was wrong."

"Oh, no, nothing like that," Caleb says. "I was merely thinking."

"Okay, well, carry on," Nott says, though she's clearly had her suspicions piqued.

Caleb should probably just tell her about the link with Essek. But it's temporary, and it might worry her unnecessarily, so Caleb decides he won't bother her with it. Instead, he hunkers back down on the couch and stares at his book.

A moment later, the familiar voice comes again: *My apologies, Caleb, I seem to have shocked you.*

Ah, yes, Caleb says. A bit. But my silence was not indicative of judgment. I am glad you have... intimate company.

I suppose you could call it that, Essek says wryly. I heard a delightful Common expression once: "fuckbuddies." I think that is surprisingly accurate.

I have heard the term, Caleb replies, trying to inject a little humor into his mental voice. Though I have not had the experience.

Oh, you ought to try it, if such a thing intrigues you. I realize it is not the preferred type of companionship for everyone, but I find it very satisfying. I can have my physical needs met by those most suited to meet them, even if they leave my mental faculties... unstimulated.

Caleb can feel himself blushing. *How remarkably practical.*

For the most part. Of course, good manners demands that I socialize with them from time to time, and these two are not always quite so dull. Only when there's high drama in the Court, like now. Gods, how I wish they would quit talking so we could go somewhere private and—

And then Caleb *feels* a surge of lust not his own rise up in his blood, so powerful it makes him gasp. He turns it into a cough, and when Nott looks concerned, he excuses himself to get a drink of water. As he stumbles to the kitchen, he says, *I suppose 120 years of life does not dull a healthy drow's libido.*

A swell of laughter, undercut with something darker. *Now I really must apologize – it seems my thoughts ceased to be verbal for a moment. When I have lived several lifetimes, then perhaps I will be less motivated by desires of the flesh. For now, I can only say that I wish to explore the pleasures available to me while I want them.*

Caleb makes it to the thankfully-deserted kitchen and clings to the doorframe. He is not immune to his own body's desires, as inconvenient as they often are, but he has not felt a craving of such strength since... since many years in his past, if at all. Luckily, his body had not had time to fully respond to the feeling, as brief as it was, so he's not in a physical state of arousal in the middle of the house's shared living space. Much more of that, however, and he will be. What surprises him is the desire to feel it again.

There is no need to apologize, Caleb says, choosing his words carefully. *You are nothing but honest about your desires. I am, in many ways, jealous.*

The silence that follows is shot through with an intense curiosity, and Caleb honestly can't tell whether it's coming from him or Essek. *Jealous of what, Caleb?* he hears at last. *The desires or the means to satisfy them?*

Caleb holds his breath. *Both, I think.*

Is that so, my clever friend? If the answer is yes, I could always bring you along for the ride.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

As promised

Chapter Notes

Well, what you're getting is half a fic and one tired American who hasn't looked at the news in four hours and probably won't do so until tomorrow so she can get one last night of decent sleep. Enjoy!

It is simple enough to make his excuses to Nott and retire early, though he is compelled to let her check his forehead for signs of fever. She might honestly be less worried if he told her he was simply going up to his room to masturbate, which is almost certainly the truth, but of course he cannot bring himself to speak those words.

With his door closed and locked and the light in his bedroom dimmed down to a single candle by his bed, he reaches out tentatively to Essek. *Hallo? I have my privacy now.*

Excellent. We are preparing to leave for private quarters ourselves. Please make yourself comfortable. I'll contact you again when we are ready to begin.

That's all it is, just the simple verbal message without sensations to go with it, but Caleb feels his heart start to beat harder. *That is fine. Should you, ah... inform your companions? I do not wish for my presence, such as it is, to remain unknown to them, and they may not agree if they are aware of our link.*

My dear Caleb, you know that I have scried on you on several occasions. Do you really suppose we have never allowed anyone to observe us before?

Caleb swallows loudly in the quiet of his room. *I... had not thought of that.*

Rest assured, they are aware. They do not know your identity, but they know that you have my trust enough to allow you into my mind, and that is more than sufficient for them.

Ah, then it is sufficient for me, as well.

A flood of warmth suffuses the link, surprising Caleb. *Caleb, when you speak, you are transmitting more of your feelings to me than I believe you realize. I can sense your anxiety.*

Although that does not worry me, it has the flavor of shame about it.

Caleb bites his lip and tries to shore up his resolve. *I apologize. I will attempt to control myself.*

You misunderstand – I am not looking for an apology. I believe human sexual practices are somewhat different from my own, in that non-monogamous couplings are sometimes treated as illicit. Do I have this correct?

I suppose it depends whom you ask.

I am asking you, Caleb.

I do not believe you are engaged in anything shameful, Caleb answers honestly.

But you believe you are?

Caleb finds he cannot answer, not even within the confines of his own head.

Your silence is its own answer. Please know that I share this with you freely, and if you wish me to stop, you have but to ask. If that is too much, you may dispel the link.

Caleb takes a deep breath. *I do not wish you to stop.*

Good. I do not wish to stop.

The feeling that comes along with the words is another rush of hunger, though Caleb cannot tell at whom it is directed. Essek falls silent after that, but he shares the sensation of a hand on the small of his back – perhaps one of his companions ushering him through a doorway. Essek may need full use of his faculties to transport his companions, or to simply float down the street, so Caleb tries to make himself comfortable as he waits. He undresses down to his smallclothes, but it is too warm in his room to get under the blankets, so he lies down on top of them and attempts to slow the beating of his heart. The second taste of Essek's lust has allowed Caleb's body to interpret its anxiety as excitement, and Caleb tries to find the right mindset to appreciate it.

Only a few minutes later, he hears Essek's voice inside his head again. *Caleb, are you ready?*

Yes.

I do not know how coherent my thoughts will be once we begin, though my companions have agreed to start slowly and make allowances if I become distracted.

I suppose that is... fair.

Well then, shall we test the sensory limits of this spell?

Caleb doesn't have time to answer before he feels the warm crush of lips against his – against Essek's really. It's only sensations at first without audio or visual cues, but if Caleb closes his eyes and lays on his side, it feels like he, too, is pressed between two warm bodies: a taller

one in front, kissing him hungrily, and a shorter one in back, slim hands slipping around his waist.

Then the sensory feed switches to sounds, and Caleb hears the soft, wet noises of a passionate kiss, feminine laughter, and, oh, a groan that he recognizes as Essek's. There's a whisper of clothing – perhaps the woman behind him is undressing him.

Then the kiss stops, and Essek must open his eyes, because Caleb's sight is full of the male drow, sliding his own robes off his shoulders. Hands that might well be Caleb's own, save for the blue-gray color of the skin, reach out to the man in front of him, delving through fabric until they reach skin. Sight yields to physical sensation again, and it's smooth under his fingertips until he reaches the collarbone, where there's a slight interruption in the texture.

Before he can stop himself, Caleb thinks, *Does he have a scar?*

Yes indeed, Essek replies without hesitation, and runs his fingers back over the mark. *You can feel it with that level of precision?*

I can, though it seems you are only able to transmit one sense at a time: either sight or sound or touch, but not all at once.

Hmm, I shall have to work on that, Essek says. *Give me a moment.*

If what Caleb interprets is correct, Essek is pressed bodily against the male drow, nuzzling and kissing at the skin of his throat. Then Caleb breathes in, and his nose is flooded with the scent of warm skin, slightly spicy with a hint of sweat. It's not quite human, but it's identifiable for what it is. *He smells good, Essek.*

He does. I'll tell him you said so.

Then that hint of spice is on Caleb's tongue, though without the pressure of touch to go with it. *His taste is satisfactory as well, though I have lost the tactile sense of it.*

Ah, so we have two senses at a time now. Perhaps we can improve as we go. Forgive my impatience, but I am unable to remain the objective academic with such a feast in front of me.

If you could, ah, focus on touch, please. The others lack context without it.

A flutter of amusement, as though Essek hears what Caleb isn't quite saying. *Of course.*

Essek transmits mostly touch and vision as he and his companions arrange themselves on the bed, though Caleb hears flashes of skin sliding against skin or low voices making requests from time to time. Essek ends up on his back with the female drow kneeling over his face, and Caleb's breath catches in his throat. It seems drow anatomy is not so different from human anatomy, and though it has been a long time, Caleb's memory is flawless.

If I'm not mistaken, he hears, *this is a sight that arouses you.*

She is extraordinarily beautiful.

Yes, and she knows what she likes. Luckily, I am able to provide it.

Then Essek's eyes close and Caleb's mouth is flooded with an unfamiliar taste. A drow's cunt, it seems, is slightly sweeter than a human's, but there's no mistaking the undulations of Essek's tongue. Caleb finds himself groaning aloud, his own tongue rolling in his mouth as though it could seek out the flavor of her on its own. Distantly, Caleb remembers this, too: the clenching muscle under his lips, the growing wetness against his face. He feels himself harden in his smallclothes so fast it makes him dizzy.

Essek, yes, your tongue, press it deeper inside.

Giving me advice now?

I just want to feel—

His tongue moves deeper into the heat, and the woman flutters around it as Caleb moans in sympathy.

It seems I should take your advice.

I did not mean—

I do not think either of us care what you meant, Essek says, but there's warmth behind it. If the handsome wizard in my head wants to help me go down on a woman, I intend to let him.

Caleb doesn't know how to respond to that, so he doesn't – he simply allows himself to feel and to taste. Soon, the woman begins to move against Essek's mouth, directing him where she wants him. It's a boldness that Caleb finds himself liking very much, the feeling of phantom hands tugging at the hair on the top of his head making him shiver. It's so diverting that Caleb barely feels the bigger, broader hands that are spreading his legs.

The slick finger that presses between his legs makes Caleb jump, and although Essek himself doesn't seem fazed by it, he doesn't fail to notice. *Everything okay, Caleb?*

Oh, I, ah. I have never... That is to say, no one has—

Never been penetrated before?

No.

There's a pause, and Caleb can tell Essek has called everything to a halt. *I enjoy it a great deal, and my body is highly accustomed to the sensation. You should not feel any pain – quite the opposite, in fact. However, if it would make you uncomfortable—*

Nein, Caleb replies quickly. No, I think, ah, this may be the ideal situation in which to experiment.

The chuckle Caleb feels in reply is low and dark. *I think that is an excellent attitude to have.*

Caleb has made peace with the fact that he is attracted to men as well as women, but he has never had the opportunity to act upon it. Truthfully, he has only once had the opportunity to act upon his attraction to women – *a* woman, in fact – and what he is experiencing now is overwhelming to him in concept as well as execution. It is far, far more than he deserves, but if he remembers that he is only an observer, it makes everything a little easier for his mind to bear.

His body, on the other hand, is bearing it eagerly. His erection had flagged a little at the surprising touch of Essek's male companion, but now that Caleb is prepared for it, he immediately understands what Essek said about enjoying it a great deal. Where Caleb expected a feeling of intrusion, there is only a desirable fullness. Instead of pain, there is an enjoyable stretch that only lightly grazes the limits of Essek's body. Caleb finds he needs to shed his smallclothes in order to remain comfortable, and he cannot help but give his cock a few strokes while he's at it.

In fact...

The technique of conveying a sensation through the link is slightly different than that of sending a verbal message in a way Caleb cannot quite describe, but he immediately knows he was successful. *Caleb*, comes a slightly breathless reply, *are you touching yourself?*

I am.

This was meant to be for you to observe, Essek replies, and Caleb can tell that he's speeding up the motions of his tongue. *But I certainly won't dissuade you from allowing me access to your pleasure.*

Caleb grins to himself as he ever so lightly dips his thumbnail into the slit in a way that never fails to make him shiver.

Oh, Caleb, I liked that very much. Exercise restraint, or I may embarrass myself in front of my compatriots.

That makes Caleb shiver even harder, the thought of sending Essek more sensation than he can handle. *I will do my best.*

Essek falls silent again, presumably as he concentrates on his female companion. Her movements become tighter, her thighs flexing beneath Essek's hands, and the taste in Caleb's mouth falls away as Essek allows him to hear her cries of orgasm, and Caleb has to let go of his cock or risk ending things too soon. She shakes in Essek's grip, and Caleb feels him intensify the motions of his tongue until she finally goes limp and pushes him away.

Congratulations, Essek, I think you made her come very hard.

I think I should share credit with you. Having such an intimate audience is very inspiring. And now I have a treat for you. Are you ready?

It takes Caleb off-guard, particularly as the sounds fade away and Caleb sees through Essek's eyes again. The female drow is now lying beside him, her chest heaving with breath, but the

male drow is still between his legs. Caleb looks down and sees – oh, that’s Essek’s cock gripped lightly in his own hand. Caleb feels the soft whisper of sensation over his own erection, and then the movement of lips as Essek says something inaudible to his male companion. The man grins, and Caleb feels the fingers inside him shift, probing a little harder until—

Caleb *yells*.

Well, what do you think? comes a smug voice in his head.

I think I need to cast a silencing spell.

Caleb pauses a moment, his heart in his throat as he waits to hear if any of his friends will come running. But they must all still be downstairs, so Caleb is uninterrupted as he reaches with shaking hands for his spell components. He casts it and then collapses back to the bed. *Essek, what in the name of the gods was that?*

That was the reason I find penetration so enjoyable. I certainly hope humans have a similar capacity.

I have heard rumors, but... I did not think it would feel like that, so... so intense.

I’m so glad to have broadened your horizons, but the best is yet to come, my friend.

Caleb whimpers as the fingers withdraw, but then there’s a flurry of movement as Essek and his companions rearrange their bodies on the bed. With the sudden stab of pleasure still echoing through his body, Caleb takes longer than he should to understand what they’re preparing to do. It’s not until he feels Essek guide one of the woman’s legs around his waist that he realizes what’s going on, and even then, he has only the space of a heartbeat to prepare himself to be fully sheathed inside her in one smooth, wet glide.

Essek, he says, his mental voice sounding like a moan even to himself. *Essek, this may be too much.*

Caleb hears a similar strain in Essek’s voice. *Now comes the time when I may very well lose coherence. You will need to dispel the link yourself, possibly now if you think you may become overwhelmed.*

Caleb rolls over, feeling the need to be in a similar position to what he feels from Essek, and gets his knees under him. *Please, overwhelm me.*

The cock that breaches him feels impossibly large, impossibly thick, but Essek’s body takes it in willingly. As his male companion begins to thrust, Caleb feels the breakdown in Essek’s ability to control what he sends through their link. The physical sensations remain, as they are clearly dominating Essek’s consciousness, but his other senses flicker in and out so rapidly that it leaves Caleb’s head spinning. The taste of the woman’s skin, then the scent of sweat atop perfume, then the sweet, vulgar sounds of three bodies moving together and apart.

Even though it must look ridiculous, Caleb finds himself rolling his hips along with Essek's. He slides a pillow beneath himself and grinds into it to match the feeling of Essek burying himself in the woman's tight, slick cunt. It's a poor analogue, to be sure, but it's the only thing that allows his mind to make sense of what he's feeling. His hips judder along with Essek's as strong hands pull him back firmly onto a thick cock, and he wails into another pillow as it hammers hard against that spot inside. Caleb can feel his own cock leaking thick beads of precum despite the paltry stimulation of the pillowcase.

Caleb. Oh, my beautiful, brilliant Caleb, can you hear me?

Yes, Caleb tries to say, but even in his head the word barely has any shape to it. He is being assaulted by pleasure, drowned in it, and no one's even touching him.

Touch yourself, please. I am holding back as hard as I can because I want to wait for you. Please, Caleb, make us come.

Caleb finds he can't hold himself up on only one arm, but that hardly matters. He falls on his side, wrapping a shaking hand around his cock and tugging. As much as he was feeling before, it doubles, and he howls as his body succumbs to it. With his last conscious thought, he tries to open the floodgates of his mind, to let Essek feel what he feels, doubled and quadrupled and more, a feedback loop of unimaginable pleasure, and it carries him away from himself entirely. He resonates with it, his whole body throbbing with a feeling too big for it to contain, and everything else falls away except the pure physical sensation and the humming connection with Essek.

When he finally comes back to himself, he's a little surprised to see that he still has a body left, that it hasn't simply been demolished by what he just experienced. And he's surprised to find himself alone.

He shouldn't be, of course, but given what he just shared, it seems implausible that he's the only one in the room, that his gasps are the only ones echoing off the walls. It even takes him a moment to realize that the link with Essek is closed. It's still present, and Caleb can tell the spell is still in effect, but Essek is no longer projecting anything through it.

Half of him is relieved, to be honest. Even the aftershocks of what he just felt are overpowering, and he has to lie on his back with his hands on his chest just to remember to breathe. Having his head to himself again gives him the space he needs to come back to his body, but after that...

...he's just alone.

Well, he supposes that should not come as a shock. Essek had agreed to share the physical experience, but if he wants privacy with his lovers now, that is his business. Soon, Caleb will be glad that Essek has given him time to collect himself. Soon. Yes.

Caleb wipes at his cheeks.

Caleb?

He sits up entirely too fast. *Yes?*

Please forgive the sudden silence. You succeeded in overwhelming me quite handily, and I needed to close the link. I believe my companions were beginning to worry about me. I am not certain whether it would be possible to reduce the intensity of the shared sensations while remaining— Oh, this is frustrating. Caleb, give me just a moment to wrap things up here, and then would you object to seeing me in person?

Caleb looks around the room for his clothes. *You want me to meet you somewhere? Now?*

The ripple of laughter feels comforting in its familiarity. *I will take it as a compliment that I seem to have fucked the thoughts right out of your head. I can arrive in your very room in seconds.*

Oh, of course. Then... yes.

Just a few minutes, please.

At least it gives Caleb time to clean up, light a few more candles, and throw on some clothes. He's just tugging on some socks when he hears a soft *pop* and looks up to see that Essek has materialized in his room.

Essek, who has not seen fit to put on more than a loose bathrobe. Essek, who is still glistening softly with sweat. Essek, who is standing on his own two feet.

Caleb, too, climbs to his feet, but when he opens his mouth to speak, nothing comes out.

"I cannot imagine what that must have been like to experience alone," Essek says softly, the sound traveling from his mouth to Caleb's ears.

"It was... intense," Caleb says, his voice rusty and slightly hoarse.

Essek nods. "Caleb, you have spent the last eight hours in my mind and very possibly in my body, and I feel I have shared more with you in that time than I ever have with another person, and" *I very badly want to kiss you right now.*

Caleb blinks, startled. *I think... I think that would be...* "Yes."

The remaining sixteen hours of the spell are indisputably illuminating, even if none of the discoveries are ever committed to paper.

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