

by his hands

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by his hands

by [wytych-lyghts \(flight_on_broken_wings\)](#)

Summary

“Isn’t it something else? Feeling that sort of power humming through your veins?” Essek whispered low in Caleb’s ear. Sinfully low, stoking the interest of that quiet part of him that lingered in the back of Caleb’s skull, that wanted to know more. That wanted him to continue.

It was a gradual journey, and a pleasure, coming to know, intimately, that part of Caleb. The part that begged to be unleashed. Looking at it, like looking in a mirror:

And the difference between you and I, is thinner than a razor.

Caleb hadn’t been wrong. If only he had heard himself from where Essek had been sitting.

Notes

I'm thinking about Essek, abandoned for over a month without a word from the Mighty Nein after that talk on the Ball-Eater, leaning into his resentment and only selectively remembering lessons from that conversation. Essek, who falls back on old habits, but still can't carve Caleb out of the place he made for himself in his chest.

Dark shadowgast in which they lean into their morally worse similarities instead of their better ones is such a good flavor y'all, and after ep122 (no spoilers, only vague) corruption is such a good look on Caleb tbh.

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

“Isn’t it something else? Feeling that sort of power humming through your veins?” Essek whispered low in Caleb’s ear. Sinfully low, stoking the interest of that quiet part of him that lingered in the back of Caleb’s skull, that wanted to know more. That wanted him to continue.

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He studied the tension in Caleb’s jaw, the slight tremble in his hands. Observed the rigid set of his shoulders as Caleb focused, concentrating on the spell he manipulated. Watched him just as closely as Essek studied the condensed dark star suspended in perfect stasis, tearing a rift through the air before them.

One small slip, a fatal distraction, and the loss of that concentration etched so deeply into Caleb’s brow would just as likely allow the churning, ink black void consuming the center of Essek’s study to explode outward—its amplified gravity rending everything within a sixty-foot radius apart—as it would to collapse in on itself harmlessly.

A roll of the dice, that one.

And still Essek found himself tempted.

With Caleb, he was always tempted.

“Doesn’t it feel *good* ,” he continued, his hands settling on Caleb’s hips from behind him, fingers splayed wide, curling into his skin possessively.

Caleb’s exhale stuttered, muscles in his jaw leaping, but his eyes remained ahead, his concentration intact. And the shimmering black edges of the dark star wavered, but held. Of course they held.

“All that potential at your fingertips,” he mused, resting his chin on Caleb’s shoulder, each shallow, measured breath as Caleb labored to ignore him making him all the more tempted. “The ability to raze cities. To merge and tear asunder and bend the very planes of existence to your will. *Our will* ,” he purred, brushing his lips against the soft skin under which Caleb’s pulse raced, pressing a chaste kiss to the column of his throat. “Why ever hold back?”

He felt more than heard Caleb’s breath hitch, the steady rise and fall of his shoulders faltering for just a second.

I know what it means to have other people complicate your desires and wishes.

Caleb had said that to him. To *him* . Caleb.

As if Caleb hadn't known what that sounded like. As if he hadn't known the thoughts, the desires that had crept into Essek's consciousness, into his *life* , with the same slow pace and unassuming grace as Caleb himself had wormed his way into a place here, in his study, by his side. Desires and wishes he had only allowed himself to entertain as fantasy, so long ago had he come to understand that there would be no one else, no one as committed to his goals, no one as convinced of their value and the lengths he would go to in order to achieve them as himself.

And perhaps he hadn't known, at the time.

Perhaps Caleb hadn't known the foreign feeling that had taken root in Essek's chest, its tendrils winding around his ribcage with the intent and the strength to pry the breath from his lungs with the force of how badly he *wanted* .

To not be so alone, the sort of lonely he hadn't recognized until he wasn't any longer.

To be understood by an equal, his peer in almost every respect.

Or perhaps he did. Perhaps coming to know that feeling was just another aspect of how they were so frightfully alike.

Essek pulled his mind back from where it wandered, his teeth teasing over the corded muscle straining at the curve of Caleb's neck, salt and heat and ozone bursting across his tongue, that underlying spark of the arcane.

Caleb swallowed visibly, working his jaw, still standing solidly in place. Determination mixed with that self-satisfied curl at the corner of his mouth, cocky bastard, was a captivating look on him. If Caleb tilted his head just so, welcoming with more of his throat the biting kisses Essek trailed over his skin, worrying dark marks over his humming pulse, Essek would excuse it for the arrogance it was: rightful, and earned.

Still, the spell was new to him, and powerful at that, this bit of practice serving a functional purpose, even if they had forgotten it. He did not want to push him too far...

And yet the part of him that revelled in the risk—that revelled in *Caleb* —was sure that he knew his limits. That he was familiar with Caleb's training. That Caleb would hardly have survived as long as he had if a lingering touch or quiet word could shatter his concentration.

Essek shifted closer, his chest flush to Caleb's back, every fiber of the man tense as he focused on wrangling the spell in, on keeping it controlled, dense and harmless where he hung it in the air. He told himself this was a decision, to challenge Caleb's limits. Though in part he knew he was helpless to it.

"Everything you wish to accomplish," Essek murmured, the fingers of one hand digging hard into Caleb's hip, grounding, his other sliding firmly up his front, rucking up his shirt as he went. "The change you want to bring about. The fall of the Assembly. The King. A better Empire. A better world," Essek breathed, nipping at the shell of Caleb's ear, pulling him back

firmly against his chest when he shuddered. “You can have it. We can make it happen. Those less capable than ourselves have achieved more.”

Maybe you and I are both damned. And if that was the case, if they were already lost, why not accept that freedom for what it was? *Together.*

“Do you remember what you told me, Caleb?” Essek continued, backs of his knuckles tracing along the edge of Caleb’s jaw affectionately before his fingers dug sharply into the muscle, tearing Caleb’s eyes away from the rift before them to face him, tendons of his neck straining.

Caleb’s throat bobbed as he swallowed, his pupils dilated, gasping in surprise at the sudden contact as Essek’s other hand dipped beneath his shirt. The circumference of the dark star undulated violently for one *almost* concerning moment before it stabilized, Caleb biting his lip and forcing himself to breathe deeply as Essek’s warm hand trailed up his chest.

“We can choose to do something, choose to leave it better than it was before,” Essek answered for him. “Perhaps a different way of looking at it, but you were not wrong. Improvement was always the goal.”

Caleb’s gaze was distant, fixed on some point beyond him, but he nodded, understanding written across the tension in his expression at least. At most, acceptance.

“It’s not always as easy as excising a cancer though,” Essek explained, enjoying very much how every muscle fiber leapt under his touch, a near wounded sound dying in the back of Caleb’s throat as he dragged his nails over Caleb’s ribs, the warmth spilling off of him a brand against Essek’s chest and under his palm. “Precision has its place. But when a disease has so thoroughly taken root, and spread so far, spread to places where it’s yet to even rear its head, sometimes there have to be sacrifices.”

Releasing his jaw, he felt the shiver that tore down Caleb’s spine as he looked forward again. Essek kept a cautious eye on the spell running its course hovering not twenty feet away as he pressed a gentle kiss to the soft spot behind Caleb’s ear.

“Is there something you want to say, pet?” he whispered, tweaking Caleb’s nipple harshly before dragging his fingernails down Caleb’s chest, leaving stark red lines in their wake.

Caleb’s breath was damn near ragged, jerking in surprise against Essek’s hold on him with a choked curse. He closed his eyes with renewed focus as Essek’s lips brushed the corner of his jaw. “And you decide,” he rasped quietly, hesitantly. He swallowed dryly. “Whose sacrifice is needed.”

Essek’s hands returned to Caleb’s waist, fingertips tracing light, teasing patterns and runes against the cut of his hip bones. “Not necessarily,” he shrugged, another soft kiss to the curve of Caleb’s shoulder. “*We* could decide. But these decisions have always been made. I should think you trust yourself, me even, a great deal more than the ones who currently make them.”

Caleb went silent again. Essek didn’t read it as a bad thing, his mind spinning so clearly behind his eyes, lost to halting thought and sensation as his primary focus remained, as it had

been, on the dunamancy tethering him to the undulating, black mass lofted before them.

“Would you like me to continue?” Essek asked coyly, letting his fingers dip lower, just to the first knuckle beneath the sturdy leather of his belt before withdrawing as Caleb’s knees shook, leaning more heavily against Essek at his back. “Or is my monologuing too much a distraction for you?” he asked, a deadly sharp smirk curling at the corners of his mouth.

A moment passed, enough time for Essek to draw the alchemical signs for gold, silver, and mercury across the thin skin of Caleb’s hips, trembling just so every other breath. Then Caleb finally nodded, a short, terse thing.

Essek hummed to himself in consideration. “Where did I leave off now?” he mused, perfectly aware, but taking the moment to drop his mouth to the top of Caleb’s shoulder, nuzzling past his worn out collar to press a soft kiss to his freckled skin, letting his sharp canines graze lightly. “Remind me, pet?”

Caleb let go a slow, measured exhale. “Culling the herd,” he muttered, a carefully neutral tone, either merely the result of straining under the combined weight of the spell and Essek’s many distractions or... resistant. His eyes were fixed resolutely ahead, but still he leaned into Essek’s touch. Still he had *asked* for him to continue.

“Ah,” Essek sighed, curious. “Unenviable and dirty work. One should not relish it. It is not *good*,” he stressed.

“But important,” Caleb finished for him quietly, voice hoarse, mirroring his own words from that conversation which returned more frequently to Essek’s mind that he would admit.

Whether it was a question or a statement, he wasn’t sure, but he approached it positively regardless. “Precisely,” Essek purred, rewarding the answer with a sharp nip to Caleb’s pounding pulse, his fingers sliding down over his abdomen, tensing under each pass. “Someone has to do it, for our grandchildren and our grandchildren’s children if not for ourselves.”

“How selfless,” came Caleb’s next words, quiet and rough but clearly a scoff.

Essek’s hands on him froze, his lips twitching into a smirk. “You’re becoming awfully confident, pet,” he warned, dragging his nails lightly over Caleb’s ribs, circling a sensitive nipple, making him twitch and try to twist away with a swallowed whimper, nowhere to go. “Not that it isn’t attractive on you. Feel you have that spell under control? Perhaps I’m not trying hard enough.”

Caleb opened his mouth to say otherwise, but Essek had already dropped his hands to his belt buckle, making quick work of it.

A suddenly alarmed note caught in Caleb’s throat, one hand going back to fist at Essek’s shirt, the other reaching up to grab blindly at Essek’s shoulder, a desperate anchor to keep himself standing and grounded as the dark star rippled, it’s radius expanding suddenly, pulsing outward a foot, another foot, before it’s expansion slowed and ebbed to a stop.

His eyes darting up to the hissing void immediately, Essek stilled his hands where they were. “Hush,” he calmed him, breathing slow, deep breaths for Caleb to match. “Focus,” he ordered, and waited, watching, as Caleb’s heart rate and ragged breaths steadied, and the spell shrank back down to the safe, specified parameters.

He watched Caleb’s expression carefully, looking for any sign of that sudden panic, any indication he was becoming overwhelmed, that Essek had pushed too far. But he only steadied himself, releasing Essek slowly, his hands shaking slightly as they went back to his sides, but no worse than before.

Caleb swallowed, nodding, his eyes sliding closed.

Essek huffed quietly to himself, his thumbs brushing over Caleb’s hips in slow, calming circles. “See?” he pointed out, mostly teasing, but the warm blush that crept along Caleb’s face was a pretty thing to watch. “You panicked too quickly.”

Caleb nodded again, less sure, squirming slightly in Essek’s hold as his fingertips brushed over the sensitive skin of his lower belly.

Slowly, he let Caleb reacclimate. Slowly, Essek let his fingers wander, brushing over the edges of his belt, already partly undone. He projected each movement, waiting before each for Caleb to protest or that dunamantic tether to fray, but neither came. Not as he plucked the buckle apart, nor pulled the belt, slowly, from around Caleb’s hips. Caleb’s heart rate leapt at the slither of leather, shivering at the solid *thump* as it fell to the study floor, only renewed determination in his expression, and no indication that Essek should stop.

“I think,” he began, tongue flicking against the dark mark he’d worked into Caleb’s pale skin, just above the juncture of his shoulder. “I recall where I left off. Shall I continue?”

Caleb shuddered, rocking back slightly against his chest as he felt Essek hand trail down his flank, over his clothed thigh, nearing but never touching where he was beginning to ache inside his trousers. He nodded again, drawing his lower lip between his teeth, a touch more desperate.

“I’m sure you’ve only told me the half of it. Everything you want,” Essek purred, taking his time, his other hand sliding back beneath Caleb’s shirt, exploring up the front of his chest. “You can have it. *Deserve it* . If you would just let me show you how to take it,” he murmured, breathless himself, with how badly he wanted.

What he offered Caleb was a promise—of power, of *history* , and relevance in it. Of partnership. Of whatever he wanted.

“You just have to let yourself want it. *Lean into it* , all the anger, the resentment. Let it motivate you. I know you feel it just the same as I do. It isn’t fair, to be bound by the same rules. Not when we’re able to do what *we* can do.”

“And,” Caleb choked after a moment, his hips stuttered, torn between pressing into Essek’s barely-there touch teasing over the front of his trousers, half hard already inside the confines of the tight fabric, and pulling away from it, his concentration already tenuous.

Essek hummed his encouragement of the question that was coming, thumbing over the clasp of Caleb's trousers.

"What is that supposed to accomplish," he rasped, breathless and strung taut as a wire.

"My dear Caleb," Essek chuckled, smiling at the faint whine pulled from the back of Caleb's throat as he withdrew his hand, settling it more firmly on Caleb's hip, rubbing lightly at an already abused nipple with the other. "It's not about thinking. It's about *feeling*, coming to know and accept what that sort of power feels like. Do you not know how phenomenal you are?" he asked, genuinely perplexed. "If only you would embrace how capable, how rare you are, you might shake these bindings that were never meant for us."

Essek slipped his fingers beneath the waistband of Caleb's trousers, nails just grazing sensitive skin before pulling back, watching the dark star shimmer, but hold.

"So," Essek asked, his voice dropping low, "does it?"

Caleb swallowed, inhaling shakily. "Does it what," he managed, before groaning, his head dropping back against his shoulder as Essek finally, *finally* pressed his hand lower, palming at Caleb's neglected cock through the material of his trousers.

"Does it feel good," Essek teased, knowing full well he was being a menace, but the choked sighs and groans that dropped from Caleb's lips were well worth it. "The spell. That type of power. The control, bending rules of nature as old as this plane of existence to your will," he elaborated, emphasizing each point with a light squeeze over Caleb's shaft.

"Don't—" Caleb choked, his hips twitching, sweat beading his temple as he strained to keep his concentration. "Don't feel a lot of control," he admitted, a shaky laugh on his lips, hissing through his teeth as Essek moved, stroking slowly, firmly over his clothes.

"How long is left on the spell, pet?" Essek asked, as much an order as anything, mouthing at the curve of Caleb's neck.

Caleb released his breath in a near sob. "Forty seconds," he panted, grinding his teeth together hard enough to hurt in a desperate bid to *focus*, so nearly finished, if only he could see it though.

"You've done remarkably well," he observed, ensuring he sounded a great deal calmer than he felt, warmth unspooling low down in his belly with every low moan that escaped Caleb's chest, his hips grinding back against Essek as much as he did rock forward in aborted thrusts. He rubbed just a little harder where the head of Caleb's cock was trapped against his thigh, a sharp smile tugging at the corners of his lips as Caleb *yelped*. And as still, the ink black sphere of the dark star held.

Wavered something terrible, but held.

"But you haven't answered my question."

Essek nearly stumbled back as Caleb sagged against him, loose strands of hair sticking to his forehead, his chest rising with short, shallow breaths. “*Bitte*,” he whined, swearing darkly in Zemnian as Essek’s nails dragged teasingly over his hip. “Bitte, I don’t –”

“Does it feel *good*,” Essek repeated, a demand, nibbling at Caleb’s earlobe and rubbing small, tight circles over Caleb’s trapped cock, not enough sensation to shatter his ability to concentrate, but enough to be a relentless tease, hips jerking helplessly toward friction that wasn’t there.

“*Ja*, yes,” Caleb finally gasped, shaking like a leaf, panting open mouthed and needy. “Yes, Essek, *please*.”

With a low hum of approval, Essek leaned into Caleb’s ear, ordered, “Drop the spell, love.”

And with a soft cry, still shaking, Caleb dropped to his knees, Essek slowing his descent with his arms around his waist and going with him. The tension bled out of him and into the floor as, with the roar of white noise, the crushing void hovering in the middle of Essek’s tower shrank in on itself and vanished, gravity righting itself in its place.

Gasping, Caleb leaned back into Essek, still pressed flush to his back, arms wrapped around him tightly, grounding.

“*Please*,” Caleb barely croaked at the same time Essek whispered, “I have you,” brushing Caleb’s fumbling hands out of the way as he loosed the clasp of his trousers, shoving his hand down the front to take his achingly hard cock in hand.

Caleb groaned, low and wanton, his hips rutting weakly into the warmth of Essek’s touch as he wrapped his fingers around his throbbing length and squeezed, pulling him through slow, firm strokes. Dropping his head back against Essek’s shoulder, his eyes glazed over in pleasure and exhaustion both. It was hurried and too dry but *enough*, Caleb too oversensitive and burnt out from maintaining concentration for the extended duration of the spell to do anything but cant his hips, a mess of broken syllables in more languages than Essek could keep straight tumbling from his lips and going straight to the molten tension coiling tightly in Essek’s pelvis.

With a low keen, hips twitching helplessly as Essek twisted his wrist how Caleb liked and bit down sharply on the meat of his shoulder, Caleb was spilling into Essek’s hand, making a mess of his clothes. Gentling his grip, Essek stroked him once, twice through the aftershocks, but Caleb was already squirming uncomfortably, shaking apart in his arms.

“Alright,” Essek sighed, carefully extricating his hand and cleaning it with a flick of prestidigitation. He rested it over Caleb’s sternum, heart pounding beneath it. “I have you. Easy,” he murmured, coaxing Caleb to lean back against his chest, to breathe, slow, deep breaths.

Caleb complied slowly, clumsily getting his legs out from under him to sit more comfortably, practically half in Essek’s lap and draped over him, head pillowed on his shoulder. His clothing in disarray, skin flushed and littered with bruises and fine red lines where Essek had

gotten his mouth and hands on him, he looked an utter, terribly tempting mess, reminding Essek of his own simmering need.

He could ignore it though, for the time being. Essek pressed a comparably chaste kiss to Caleb's sweat-darkened temple, petting over his flank soothingly. "Very good," he murmured against his overheated skin. "That is no easy spell to master. And I'd like to think myself rather distracting," he preened. "Very good."

"That was stupid," Caleb almost slurred, breaths gradually coming more evenly, a final shudder dragging down his spine. "Dangerous," he mumbled, shaking his head.

Essek laughed lightly, a far thing from disagreement. "I asked you numerous times if you wanted me to continue," he reminded him needlessly. "You knew the risks."

Caleb sucked in a deep breath, in the long process of collecting himself. "Then we are both at fault," he decided, grinning to himself, even despite himself.

"I was prepared to counterspell the entire time," Essek said dismissively, "I assure you."

Caleb rolled his head to the side to give Essek an incredulous look, squinting endearingly. "As you say, that was no easy spell. I watched you cast it once today to show me, and you teleported us here besides. Are you saying you reserved a counterspell powerful enough to *ensure* its success," Caleb asked, dubious, "or that it would have been a gamble?"

Essek was, considering how it has all worked out—his study in one piece, pleasure humming softly through his veins, and a very beautiful, intelligent man in his lap who had *not* rejected his offer of more in so many ways—a little too pleased with himself to try for an apology. Not when, as Caleb admitted, they both shared the blame.

"I thought you enjoyed calculated risks," he said with a conceited grin, tapping Caleb's chest.

"Was it not you who said, always mitigate the risk," Caleb responded, but he was fighting back a lazy grin of his own.

"Did I say that?" Essek laughed, cupping the side of Caleb's neck gently, his thumb stroking over the edge of his jaw absently.

Caleb swallowed, his eyes drifting closed. "You said a great many things," he rasped a moment later, his tone with that careful way about it again.

Essek's heart leapt, anxiety and anticipation both sparking across his skin. "I did," he agreed simply.

"I think..." a slight furrow forming between Caleb's brows, his eyes fluttered open, pupils blown wide in the low light, finding Essek's gaze above him. "I'm not sure I agree with you in everything, but I think I would like to hear more."

Essek swallowed, heartbeat in his ears. He wet his lips, watching Caleb carefully, startlingly blue eyes shining back at him as he watched. "I would like to tell you. To show you," he

amended, brushing his fingers gently through Caleb's hair, tucking a loose lock behind his ear.

Caleb nodded, slow, but confident, a wicked sharp grin tucked into the corner of his mouth. "I look forward to it."

"I imagine it will be... enlightening," Essek decided on, dragging his thumb over Caleb's lower lip, bitten red and spit slick. The impulse to kiss him, to pull the abused flesh between his teeth, curled warm with want inside his ribcage, a relatively new feeling in a relatively long life. And he would be a hypocrite to deny himself that so needlessly.

Caleb tilted his face up, tongue flicking quick and filthy against the pad of his thumb, already pushing up to meet him as Essek bent to capture his mouth in a punishing kiss. He relished the low moan of pleasure and pain indecipherable that resonated in Caleb's chest as his canines caught the thin skin.

"First," Caleb breathed, tearing away just far enough to shift in Essek's lap, predatory grin curling at the corners of his lips threatening to rob Essek of his breath.

Turning over to hold himself up on his elbows on either side of his waist, Caleb let his weight pin Essek's hips to the floor, his thin robes doing a poor job of hiding his arousal. Essek tried and failed to choke down the moan that caught in his throat, the pressure and the heat rolling off of Caleb unbearable. He tipped his head back as though watching as Caleb pawed at the clasps of his robes, seeking out bare skin, would be too much. For all he knew, it would be.

"First, I want to taste you."

End Notes

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