

Tenderopen Be Sir Carrion

by meiri/Creaturial

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Rating:

Explicit

Warnings:

N/A

Category:

M/M

Fandom:

Мор. Утопия | Pathologic

Relationship:

Stanislav Rubin/Peter Stamatina

Character:

Peter Stamatina, Stanislav Rubin

Additional Tags:

Established Relationship

Sexual Content

Nonpenetrative Sex

it's penetrative alright. now whether or not the penetration is about the sex... much to consider.

yay o/ strange and unusual kisses.

yay o/ strange and unusual blowjob.

yay o/ strange and unusual frotting.

Peter's duplication glitch (he just does that)

I call it sideways sex because well.

the tense changes are intentional

Summary

"I wanted to get in, you wanted to leave, and both of us are stuck here now," Rubin simply shrugged. "Shall we walk together?"

By the Graces, was he bolder now? Rubin had never been the shy type — being reserved was different. He'd taken when he had wanted. [...] He had never been this bold about wanting (taking) company, but he had so far taken the Architect's when offered.

"Will you have me?" Peter asked.

"You're not any worse company than I have had."

"Oh, you!" Peter barked out one of his glassy laughs. "Flattery won't get you anywhere." [...]

(And maybe he was lying a little, for it probably would get Rubin somewhere, if he meant it hard enough, and if Peter felt he meant it hard enough. Peter had painted him, hadn't he? This was not always flattery — but in that moment, in these hands, between these eyes and these four walls, it had been. Maybe they were even, now.)

They had been staring at each other. Maybe Rubin had read this thought on him as plainly as someone else did on the page.

Men meet. They have little to tell each other that words can convey, speaketh flesh in their steads.

Notes

this fic exists within a Things Have Happened Before peterstakh lore verse, the main fic upon which this one is based being [this one](#) (in french) (sorry for being french you will notice it a lot), but you do not need to (have) read it to enjoy this. it's not like there's a lot of lore considering these characters don't talk to/about each other canonically. other bits of lore are also borrowed from my oneirotect fics, whichever one, it does not matter. they all exist within a same verse and don't. everything is so simple and so complicated.

tldr pretend they've met and kissed already but as far as the rest goes we ball

Peter crawled out of the Broken Heart, out of its stuffy pinkness, its volutes of purple smoke, its sparks of voices that crackled like electricity, its manybodies-in-its-own. He was sick with the sounds that the walls threw at him like the backs of hands across his face, each word a knobby joint that struck his temple, the bridge of his nose, with the too-many alcohols the fragrances and fragments of which climbed to the walls, to the tenants, curled around the exposed throats, and ankles, and wrists, and thighs. Sick with how the low light of the party made it look less intimate than secretive, with how the shadows hid less faces upon which slithered hungry and satiated smiles alike than it did a body, the body, that he felt still somewhere, somewhere still, shivering with a death so fresh it was still hot, as if the pouring blood blurred its silhouette in a chill.

He'd extirpated himself out of a corner where he had been, as was his habit for such events, sitting and mildly unsettling people, clothed of black like an oil spill in a sea of skin, and drinking. This is all he was there to do, all he had ever come here to do. Chained by the liver to this wicked

place until sweat galloped down his spine.

As the fresh night air threw itself to his face, he stumbled backward under the force of its groundswell and almost fell on his ass across the stairs. Holding firm onto the railing he managed to stay up, even as his head was pounding and his mouth dry, for no reason that would have been the very least pleasant. Eventually, he dragged himself to the front of the stairs.

He was really, *really* considering trotting back down to the bar for more booze, pinning his bruise-purple-cradled eyes to the tender, who stayed at his post even during these parties, even when he was called, and hailed, and waved at, possibly because he was afraid, and maybe he had every reason to be. If the bartender refused to yield the liquor, Peter would stare until his gaze hardened to something closer to Andrey's, which the man was more afraid of, and one could wonder why, because surely the man had stolen, or had killed, or had done something worse or at least bad, but maybe not as bad. Were he to have mistreated a woman, Andrey would have gutted him, but he hadn't; so whatever it was he had done it was something else, something that Peter could make yield. Yes, he was considering grabbing a bottle of twyrine and exiting as quickly as he had come, but he had no intention of getting back in there. To Andrey, who Peter had sat far from, wall and screen and fleshred curtains hiding in an alcove all of him and whoever(s) he was with, smothering the sounds like a murder(er) does breath, Peter had gestured "I'm leaving", "I'm fucking leaving", "I'm taking my shit and leaving", and intended on keeping his word. His skull felt to bubble up and spill over with the aftermath of sound, pounding, piercing, scraping and raking and shrieking like a banshee in every corner of his fuzzed mind as if the ghost of noise could tear through the fog of stupefication and alcohol. He sat, cross-legged, in front of the stairs that led down to the entrance, and pitched his chin up, feeling the ebbing of the cold of night over his face. He looked like a guard dog, alone out there, eyes closed like a puppy enjoying the sun out of the window. As much thought Rubin as he approached.

Peter had spotted him before he had spotted Peter, possibly; after all, it wasn't hard, with how he towered above the ground and everyone who dwelt it — towering, towering, it was all about towers in this town. Still, Rubin didn't appear shocked when he spotted Peter sitting there. They had met below, in the penumbr'd hollows of the Broken Heart, in the pink and stuffy ventricles of it. Peter had crawled out of one of its atria and spied upon Rubin's face, across it, into it, looking for something, and found a willing model like one finds a mica speck in stone.

The worldliness on Rubin's face was less sophisticated than it was weary and harsh, karstic with hollows in the meat of his cheeks, underneath his brows. In a surge of bravery and bold disinhibition, Peter had asked if he could paint that face, and the man had accepted. They'd kissed. They hadn't seen each other in a while.

"Surprised finding you here and not inside," Rubin spoke, and the tone of a smile rang each syllable out of his mouth.

"Be surprised, old boy," Peter replied in kind, "for I astound myself just as well." Marking a pause to find the words to put on his situation, he then added: "Subterranean circumstances are pushing me out here, to dry the sweat on my brow and drain the red from my face."

“What's going on downstairs?” Rubin gestured at the door.

“Debauchery.”

“Drinks?”

“Among other things.”

“Damn,” he whistled between teeth. He worried the inside of his cheek, not out of shame or coyness but genuine reflection. “No way I could get myself a glass, then?”

“Not without seeing a few bare legs,” Peter hummed. “And some more.”

Peter chuckled as Rubin's face soured; then, he grimaced, as if truly pained: he really wanted in, for once. He wanted his drink and maybe a smoke.

“Goddammit.”

“Why the cursing?” Peter hoisted up a brow. “You can still go. No one will pull you into anything you don't want.”

“Still not my thing.”

Rubin offered a shrug; the sound of leather electrified Peter from tailbone to seventh vertebra with the memory of its shrugging-off, its delicate and deliberate (un)folding.

“Prudish?” he asked, playfully sardonic. Rubin scoffed. “Celibate?”

They had met. They had hung out. Peter had painted him, and they had kissed. He was unsure what that meant. He couldn't do love like Andrey did it, light and fast on its feet like a wild horse; his was closer to an arrow, to a meat hook. He knew that. It saddened him to know he would tear a part of Rubin with it if he was not careful enough. Still, by asking, he thought he could expect the answer, and this comforted(/confronted) him.

“Worse,” Rubin almost-not-quite smiled to himself, bitter and cold like he found himself execrable for it. “Romantic.”

“In this town? You must be out of your mind!” Peter laughed, but his eyes had lit up.

“Must I? Haven't you spoken about love, about people who do?”

“Sounds like something I'd say indeed...” He paused to think, for he did not remember such a thing. (Indeed it was something he would say, or even said, in another time, another place, another story.)

“There must be people who love in this town. At least one.”

By the Graces, was the cold evening air mellowing the man? Peter stared at/into Rubin's face as it became overrun by grey clouds of thoughts rolling over its white planes/plains.

“You, I take it.”

Rubin shrugged once more. “I know myself well enough”

“Oh, how I envy you...”

It might have been a lie, or maybe Rubin had believed it wholeheartedly. Or, maybe *and*? They stared at each other, *chiens de faïence* said the French, and while the dog part felt fitting enough maybe they were closer to green glass, to unfired clay, to bundled hide — which is what leather is, which is what skin is.

“Are you going back inside?” Rubin eventually asked when Peter didn’t.

“No,” he replied. “I wanted to leave. Seeing this much... flesh... in this particular building... unnerves me.”

Had they spoken about the murder, about murder at all? Peter loathed talking about the murder, yet it clung to his back, digging into the (shoulder) blades, whipping clawing tearing bundled shroud of the Eumenides, strangling ghost-white scarf. They’d talked about killing, as the type of men they are does.

A small smile agitated Rubin’s face like a pebble thrown into a pond.

“Torn from your booze,” he mused, amused, not particularly indelicate.

“I didn’t even drink that much. To my greatest despair, frankly,” Peter huffed through flared nostrils.

“Will you stay sitting there, then?”

“Not my wish to, no.” Peter cocked his head to the side. He felt his own face agitated, the thorns of playfulness digging into the inside of his cheeks as a smirk spread across it. “You ask a lot of questions.”

“I wanted to get in, you wanted to leave, and both of us are stuck here now,” Rubin simply shrugged. “Shall we walk together?”

By the Graces, was he bolder now? Rubin had never been the shy type — being reserved was different. He’d taken when he had wanted. This did have the tendency to land him in trouble — he often wanted lives. He had never been this bold about wanting (taking) company, but he had so far taken the Architect’s when offered.

“Will you have me?” Peter asked.

“You’re not any worse company than I have had.”

“Oh, you!” Peter barked out one of his glassy laughs. “Flattery won’t get you anywhere.” He was jesting. He liked this more than he had most things.

(And maybe he was lying a little, for it probably *would* get Rubin somewhere, if he meant it hard enough, and if Peter felt he meant it hard enough. Peter had painted him, hadn’t he? This was not always flattery — but in that moment, in these hands, between these eyes and these four walls, it had been. Maybe they were even, now.)

They had been staring at each other. Maybe Rubin had read this thought on him as plainly as someone else did on the page.

“It was a drink you wanted, wasn’t it?” Peter asked after a pause.

“Sure was.”

Peter thought quickly. He’d been bolder. He’d been less subtle. He’d been less sober.

“Come to my place,” he offered. “I still have twyrine lying around.” He thought, slower this time. The self-awareness felt to burn as it slithered out, but it was self-awareness nonetheless: “... It’s better you have it than I.”

“If you will have me.”

“*Have me*”, “*have me*”, the words sounded extraordinary in the man’s mouth. Oh, how tempting they were. Peter wondered if Stanislav was conscious of it. To be fair, he had started it — he meant it. He got up. Stanislav offered a hand, but Peter waved it away, grateful nonetheless: he was (almost) sober, for once, and intended on acting like it, for once. They began walking. He could ask Stanislav to pose for him again, at his place. He’d gotten him bare-chested previously, maybe he could... Maybe he’d want to... The others’ flesh had pissed him off just some time ago in the same way his own often did; insectoid, parasitic annoyance, crawling, creeping, strangling, hindrance, he’d felt like skin suffocated him, and he had booked it for the exit; but now, oh, now that he could think... Maybe he was the romantic, after all. Maybe they both were. Wouldn't that be nice? A kind of adolescent giddiness coursed through him with each heartbeat. The steady knocking of the blood under his temples made his existing headache swell. His vision blurred with pain, and before he could register that he had started stumbling, Rubin had thrown before him his arm to grab onto.

“Well, ain’t you a gentleman, Stanislav Rubin,” Peter whispered between teeth. “Surprised that you’re more sober than you usually are,” Rubin replied without judgment, “because you sway on your feet just the same.”

They crossed the Tanners into the Skinners, fittingly from the borough of the working of flesh to the borough of it raw, shoulder to shoulder; the wincing of the leather coats like a breath in the dully warm night.

Rubin had come before, he needed not be invited in. He waited at the threshold for Peter to unlock the front door and he pushed it in his stead. They climbed up, walls cold and narrow around the taller-of-the-two’s shoulders — the twins had built the stairways to filter giants out, but that mattered not when the Colossi lay dormant (or d...) under the floorboards. The Architect tensed when the parquet hissed under his step, as if he had woken up something — as if he feared Rubin would notice he had woken up something. Rubin did not budge. He began shrugging off his coat and, as he had done before, Peter took it off him. He didn’t suggest him to discard his gloves — a sensitive, touchy thing, much like Rubin’s hands themselves, no matter how rough the calluses on them.

“Well,” Peter began, gesturing at his shameful stash of liquor, tucked away in a corner like a cowering, lowly animal, “here’s what you came for. Have at it.”

Rubin followed the drowsy command, but his face contorted with the twinge of something like vinegar, of alcohol in a wound, reflecting in his irises a wave of “*don’t insult me. I didn’t come here just for this.*” (“*Have me*”, had they said one and the other, one after the other, like they were dealing cards. Two of blades, I mean of Spades, Joker, Knave.) Most of the bottles were opened, but not drunk the way through — a nasty habit of Peter’s to not finish what he had started. He thought he saw on his guest’s face a forlorn ditch between his brows as Rubin noticed the crooked corks — deep enough in the skin for Peter to bury himself in.

As his guest picked a bottle and assessed its content of a glance, the Architect's spine began itching with a subdued, subterranean anxiety, the scraping of rust.

"Say," he hailed, "that illness everyone fears will befall the town, do we know how it's transmitted?" Rubin lowered the bottle to stare at his host instead. "... Is it touch? Blood? Spit?" The itch dampened, something else pulsed through him in its stead. "Is it sexually transmissible?"

Rubin stayed silent for a second. Peter could see how he was weighing his tones on his tongue — the physician, the friend, the... well—no time for more thinking, he spoke:

"Not as far as we know. But we're not made aware of people's business like that."

"Lucky you," Peter replied, pulling his upper lip over teeth he scraped together like the heads of a match against grout or marble.

Well, Rubin could not say he considered himself a lucky man. But maybe luck was running its course just next to him, in the shadow of him, where it was not seen as luck and just as time.

"I'll finish this one," Rubin eventually said, swirling the bottle around, "and dispose of it afterwards. I'm not afraid of catching something from you. You're healthy. "

Peter gave him a glassy blink.

"Of the plague, at least."

"How do you know?"

"If you weren't, you'd already be dead."

As Rubin drank, he was not unaware the Architect circled him, closer to a curious magpie than a hungry vulture. Or perhaps this was wishful thinking — his nostrils flared, his chine shivered; twyrine called to twyrine like blood called to blood, as it probably still lingered in the hollows between his papillae. (Twyrine, not blood. As far as Rubin knew.)

As the wickedly bitter spirit, closer to brine, felt to seep through the membrane of his throat, Rubin coughed, turning his host's head, who had cornered himself to a small, paint-splattered sink and taken to purposefully clean his clammy hands, his brittle nails.

"Does your brother keep these bottles just for you?", Rubin asked, the lingering grimace waking as concern creeping itself over his face.

"Why do you ask?" Peter inquired in turn. He swished his spit in his mouth, fighting to imagine the taste of the drink and savoring it in Rubin's stead.

"This twyrine is... worse. It does your head in harder than the usual that's served in his pub."

"... I pick them myself, actually... nose to the neck, I only take the sweetest-smelling ones... they're the most bitter. Feels like drinking liquid mercury."

"Sure does." He almost spat.

The noise/the enmeshment/the puls(at)ing (heart)beat from the atmosphere of the orgy he crawled himself out of washed over Peter, ebbed and flowed with the hammering of martial drums, beating his temples and throat like soldiers' boots batter the earth. He lowered himself to the floor and spread his limbs like a shroud washed ashore, lying flat on his stomach like an animal wounded.

"Lie down with me," he hailed Stanislav of a thin thread of voice, words a hook at the end of the line.

"What, next to you?" his guest asked incredulously, but didn't recoil nor come closer.

"Of course not. Over me. Or under me, depending on your preference." Once again, Stanislav didn't rebuke nor budge. His brown eyes waved themselves across Peter's face, washing of a stare less concerned than curious his ruddy cheeks — his shockingly sober face, for the color it was.

"Yes, obviously. Next to me."

Peter could see Stanislav contemplating. His eyebrows worked themselves in pensive bundles, singular and characteristic of his iron face. He was not one to let hesitation break the steel surface of it — Peter knew this, as well as he knew where skepticism and uncertainty lived in the man's body. In the throat, is the obvious; in the Adam's apple that bobbed up and down as if pushed under stormy waters; in the hands, second; the fingers that twitched like elytra. His tall frame, like these very insect wings, shivered. Under the painful marble of his pounding face, Peter managed to unearth a croaky, cracking smile.

"The self-denial of the dog, don't you have?" he teased and egged Rubin on. "You were wasted as a soldier and a pathologist. You could have been a monk instead."

"I'll have you know this was among the paths I considered."

Peter watched on as Rubin's knees touched the ground before his face.

"The believing kind?"

"Worse. The devoted one."

He lay down, hesitating on the position before flipping himself on his back.

"How interesting," threaded from between Peter's thin lips, and trod valiantly to Stanislav's ears.

How long could they possibly have stayed on this floor, waiting to hear a heartbeat under its boards? Night had darkened, heavy and slick, dense as velvet. The curtains waltzed melancholically in the wind filtering through the poorly boarded-up windows. Eventually, Peter pushed himself up and on his heels. He swayed.

"I should paint you again," he said. He appraised Rubin's face of his sculpting gaze, finding under the thin layer of flesh its familiar underpainting.

"*Should?*" Rubin raised an eyebrow.

"I want to paint you again," Peter corrected himself.

"I prefer to hear it."

“You prefer desire over duty?”

“For you, yes.”

Peter’s gaze on him, inquisitive rather than appraising. This prying beak of a stare, again.

“... And for you?”

“I would rather it was not about me.”

“Would you stop me if I made it so?”

“How so?”

Peter said nothing. In the same way he had looked at Rubin, this one evening at the Broken Heart, crawled out of the shadow to come meet him, to wash at his feet all black foam and mildly-intoxicated breath, he approached. Of his lidded, lead-heavy eyes he baited, he fanned and fueled. Rubin couldn’t say he hadn’t thought about it, he didn’t think about. He couldn’t say either that he hadn’t thought about Peter thinking about it. The man was not quite opaque; indeed, he was almost translucent. One could see the blue of veins through the nacre of his arms, the red of blush below the thin sheet of his face. One could see thoughts running over it, embedding themselves into the flesh like bones stuck in sedimentary rock. In this moment, Rubin knew he had come for this, and Peter had invited him in for it in equal manner.

Peter came forth, and sought a kiss, mellow and mercurial, and found it, and took it with the last caresses of a restraint slipping between his fingers. Rubin took the gentle touch like a beaten dog would; tense, reflexively defensive, coursed through by instincts to pull back and fighting them like a hound.

“You’re tense,” Peter whispered.

“... I’m not really used to this, if I’m being honest.”

“I like that you’re being honest with me.”

Peter pushed himself once more into Rubin’s face, nudging into his cheek, his jaw with the bridge of his nose. Rubin brought his hand to Peter’s pale neck and, without applying even a hint of pressure, ran his palm down the exposed throat with the reverence of one caressing smooth, master-carved marble — but Peter was no marble, he was warm, reddening in the cheeks and on the chest that peeked in the open maw of his shirt, and he swallowed loudly when Stanislav touched him — his Adam’s apple knocked in the hollow between his index and thumb.

Peter didn’t want to think of trying to get Rubin to let himself (be) kiss(ed) back like prying open a nutshell; he didn’t want the violence. He felt it is closer to peeling a fruit with his hands, trying to find the spots where the skin gives way easily, digging fingertips into the tart flesh. Chisel of tongue, sculpting calipers of his long fingers, taking in the planes of Rubin’s face. Lockpicking with the tip of the tongue and the words that teetered on it. Moved tumblers and springs and moving spine. Rubin tensed the whole way down.

Peter picked his shaking hands off him like two ripe apples, red at the knuckles.

“... My dear friend,” he whispered, voice white as seafoam.

“... Is that what we are?” Rubin asked. “Friends?”

“Well, we’re not enemies.”

“If this was how you treated your enemies, I would almost like being one... and would be somewhat afraid of knowing how you do treat your enemies.”

Peter's long, pearlwhite nail brushed around the interstice between two of Rubin's fingers, the sunken fault of skin. His long, pearlwhite nail like a nacre shovel in soil dug in the narrow hollow between knuckle and knuckle; his finger in that hole like a slithering snake followed. The writer's callus the fleshy bump pushed itself between Stanislav's digits, spread them apart as he gave way, opening-palm-way, open-palm-way, palm cupped striated of readable lines when Peter licked it from root of wrist to (finger)tip. A gasp breathless as bruise knocked through Stanislav's teeth, filtering through his restraint like blood through gauze.

“I've killed, you know,” the Architect mused — he mused why? Maybe because he wanted to give Stanislav one last change to back off.

“Who?” Rubin asked, and while this didn't surprise Peter, he felt the hair rise on his nape.

“Mostly people I didn't know.”

“I cannot imagine something more unsatisfying.”

Peter sought into his eyes a gleam, a glimmer of thrill, of shame, or something fragrant and head-turning. He found nothing but placidity; maybe even resolve. The acceptance of the bloodhound coming home full-mouthed, missing a fang. While they stepped back, they didn't push each other away. Peter crossed the room, wading through its thickened air, and perched upon his painter's stool.

“... Do you prefer killing people you know?” Rubin inquired as, without being asked, he made his way to the settee he usually posed in.

“It gives the act more substance.” Peter paused. “Same way for sex, in a way.”

Oh, 'twas bait. 'Twas a meat hook. He waited for Rubin to pull back like a wounded horse. He watched him watch him instead — lowering his throat into the offered blade.

“I know you,” Peter said. “But I have no intent to kill you, if that's any reassurance.”

“Do you have any intent of having sex with me?”

Lightness in the voice, the fogginess of concealment. This was an ambush where both lay in the brier. The playfulness of the words—a delightful thorn—nicked Peter across the cheek. He didn't reply. He crossed his hands on his lap, donning the straight mask of primness, and stared.

(“*Have me*”, had they said, had they not? Men like them measure their words.)

Peter picked paintbrushes out of their jars, and Rubin kicked off his boots.

How foreign it was, for Rubin to see himself through the man's eyes. He laughed to himself that the guy had an eye for the horrific and the horrible, so Stanislav fit right in among all of his canvases. But this wasn't true — and it was uncharitable to the Architect's undeniable talent. Rubin recognized his face in his portrait — his face, beautiful. He looked like himself to the most minute of pores, yet appeared regal, relaxed, recognizable in ways his own face in the mirror was

not. Peter could see, from across the expanse of hanging air between them, that it struck Stakh that Peter loved him — how foreign of a concept could that be? Just foreign enough that Rubin spoke:

“Looks like me.” He listened as Peter approached. “A better me.” He turned to the Architect. “You flatterer.”

“*Tout flatteur vit aux dépens de celui qui l’écoute*, does he not?”

“Что?”

“Shall it get me anywhere?”

Peter closed the gap between them. He bent a knee that he pushed into the mattress on which his model sat.

“It just might.”

What was there to do? What was there to even fucking do? Rubin’s stomach tensed as a pulled bow, his throat sanded itself bare as he coughed. Peter pretexted the warming of the night to shrug off his coat first. It clung to him, jealous thing. Rubin’s ears began to pound.

“I painted myself in a painting of you,” Peter breathed into the dimness of the room, as if that explained his two shadows — and it did.

“You did?”

“Small and ghastly,” Peter nodded, “not unlike how I am really.”

“You’re pretty tall.”

“You’re taller.”

“You painted yourself in a painting of me,” Rubin repeated, as if it would give body to shadow three (his, and Peter’s) — and it did.

“Yes. And this is where I am from.” The Architect seemed to weigh his words, his story, his thoughts; all the same length on a page. “Or maybe I’m from the mirror. Or the floorboards, or the water. Or maybe, I wrote myself into two stories just so I could come to you. I doubt it matters.”

“It’s you.”

“As much as me can be.”

“It is you... right?”

“As much as right can be.” Peter noticed the dimple between Rubin’s brows, this worried notch like a knife nick. “Don’t fret. I keep my doors locked.” He paused. “And Andrey wouldn’t want to touch you. Well, except to h—”

“Except to hit me.”

“He’s needlessly, mindlessly possessive. And a fool. He knows better than anyone else, even than myself, that you’re not fighting for the same honeycomb in me. He just doesn’t want me to get hurt.”

“What are you, his? Won’t he let yourself be you?”

“Less *his* than *he* at all. You already noticed.”

Maybe it was mad of him — but Rubin felt no fear. One of the few things he knew of the older Stamatin was that he'd killed, and that the taste of blood lingered like sugar on his lips, calling to sugar, to blood. The implication of two of him was a threat. Nevertheless, he smirked; emboldened, hunger rising to his tongue like a fever.

“Boddho help me, there would not be enough of me to satisfy the two of you.”

Peter glanced at his cock through the front of his pants. The leather was slowly stretching out.

“Oh, I'd say it looks like they're plenty of you to go around. You could feed four men with this.”

“Silence, you...!” he laughed loud, showing teeth, and Peter showed in return.

He breathed in, put a hand by Rubin's hip. He crept down.

“Tell this fool I wouldn't hurt you,” Rubin hammered. “I don't want to hurt you.”

“He knows.” Peter smiled, this bird-weak little smirk, and he pushed his forehead, warm and clammy, to the scar on Rubin's. “I think that's what's so foreign to him.”

Peter stilled. He stilled as if he had said something so enormous that he needed to still in its presence like in that of a ferocious animal.

“I'd never let my brother this close to you even if he wanted to,” Peter hummed, something low, gauzy, dark and striated as pyrolusite. “It is not in my habits, for we so rarely covet the same things in these matters, but I'd wrestle him away from you if I had to. And wrestle you away from him, as well.” Closer still he came, lowering himself on bent arms, as if leaning into a spring to drink. “I'm very possessive.”

Rubin's breath hitched. He wanted to say something dumb, something really dumb, say “*thank you, thank you*”. And said instead:

“Oh, you're making my heart flutter.”

It struck Rubin that he might have been this ferocious animal, but wasn't. It was not that Peter had de-fanged or tamed him. It was that he met teeth with teeth. Spoke a carnivorous language that made Rubin's chine ache with want.

“Even if he liked you like that, I'm selfish. I don't share.”

“Didn't take you for a romantic,” Rubin whispered, “I thought this was a vice of mine.”

“You joke, I hope. That's all I have left for myself an artist, once the passion has turned to restlessness, when inspiration has soured to frustration and well-dryness, when even muscle memory has faltered like physical degeneration.”

“Good,” he read so plainly on Stanislav's lips as they quivered, as his brow hitched; incapable of reining it in, the want-to-be-wanted plain as day.

To this, Peter angled his face over Stanislav's throat. His eyes scaled the prophery column of his throat. His mouth crept into the hollow under, then over his Adam's apple. He inhaled the smell of sweat, the prickling spice of the drink that seeped through the skin; sniffed like a dog.

Comes upon Rubin the intimate conviction that Peter likes being inside of people. Not in a sexual way — not fully, even if there likely is some of that somewhere; but much more literally, in essence, only held back by the tangible, prehensile realities of flesh. Maybe that doesn't stop him every time, Rubin thinks. Peter hovers above him, legs bent at his sides, knees framing his hips, forehead pressed into his diaphragm like he would attempt to pry his ribcage open with his clammy, pale-canvased skull, maybe with the blunt ridge of his nose. He exhales deeply above Rubin's chest, over the leather covering it, open-mouthed, with a wet, hungry click, part relief, part hunger, part expectant, savoring pleasure. Peter's shirt yawns open over his ribs, white as a sail, wide as a whale's mouth, Rubin's gaze filtering through its baleen.

Peter tentatively sprawls his hands over the lacing, arachnid, webbed and wide; and when Rubin makes no motion to stop him, begins untying the knots. Rubin believes that just thinking about prying him open could probably get Peter off. *Cute*, he finds himself thinking, and *to each their own, after all*, which is a leniency he would have never afforded himself.

Peter crawls down. He descends like one would a wall of ivy. He creeps himself into shadows; a shadow creeps itself on Rubin from behind as he sits up. Hands of tangible flesh palm at his back, at his shoulders. Push a thumb into the scar of his neck as if to prove it knows of it — Rubin looks up, and Peter is leaning over to him again, to springwater, to ambrosia, to the unearthly smoke that rises from sacrifices; his blushing face food for the ethereal, with tangible hands. The hands on Stakh are tender. They four have the same nails.

Peter-above the Peter of the bent spine, the mellow spire, the sword in the silhouette of a groundswell, curling on himself some more, places a kiss on Rubin's eyelid, then on the other, on his cupid's bow like he is the one drawing the arrow. He seeks lower, on his cheeks, on the pinched corners of his mouth, the hint of the serratedness of chapping that grazes serratedness, chapping; there is a noise akin to a pen-nip on coarse paper. There is ink — translucent as crystal as glass, thin as melted ice, it is spit — it brushes across Rubin's lips, then between as he parts them. Peter hears him gasp so softly he would have missed it, was his hair covering his ears; feels him under his open palms shiver. He swallows the gulp of breath, the bitter aftertaste of the spirit a tingle that rolls down its tail like a thundercloud down the slope of a hill. Peter feels it curl and coil against his palate. Closes his lips. He tilts his head — tilts his head again, some more. The bump of his nose pushes into Rubin's cheek, Rubin's chin; he opens his mouth wide and cartilage clicks as if they fell into place.

He feels sugar. It rampages through him, in the soft tissues, pulsating with thickness and warmth; he feels fleece, it covers his skin, it shrouds him hot, as he wraps his arms around Stakh he begs him to feel it too, from the inside, from where he'd be, sugar and fleece, molasses in taste, aniseed.

The "yes" he hisses slick and sick with want slithers across Stanislav's face to his chest, ribs, sternum stomach pit, bitter-cyanide-pit, slithers some more and shivers, and snakes, amphibian, as it seeps through the skin into the blood, into the marrow. Stakh's hands, blind as birds, reach for his bent arms, the sides of his face, land wherever.

Peter-above relents, retreats, curtains Stanislav's face of his hair to see him better. Peter-above the observing bird puts fingers on Stanislav's chin. Presses, pushes, maybe pulls—his mouth open, wider. Stakh lets him guide him open, agape, ajar, hollowed-out between the parted lips. Lets him, of all of his fingers pressed to his chin, bring one into his mouth, over the crest of the crooked row of lower teeth. Bring two, that's enough, they're long, bony. Stakh lets himself close his mouth around them, Peter flinches. Seeks and finds the wet hint of himself where he just was. Stakh lets himself suck in. Lets himself feel the fingers fucking in. Swallows around them, wetly, tightly. Peter flinches harder, some kind of dewy gasp punching out of him. Peter-above (which is Peter only, Peter fully) lets himself feel the dull-serrated edges of the strong enamel, the velvet of the tongue. Wetness of cavity, of hollows, not unlike those Stanislav is morbidly familiar with. Peter pulls his fingers out — slow, creeping, crawling; hooks out through the tender meat. They slip past the lips with a wet sound and a thin, translucent rope of spit binds mouth and hand; cobweb, cobweb strewn of dew, ribbon, hyphae. Peter licks the saliva off his knuckles like the juice of meat, the remnants of a feast.

Shiver, and what else then, the whip of electricity. Stanislav's hardness is making him dizzy, his head deprived of the blood hoisting it up spins — or maybe that's from holding his breath, maybe that's from the twyrine. The red tart organ of Peter's tongue pokes out, beast crawling out of burrow, and sweeps across Stakh's mouth from corner to corner, opening it lengthwise like one would pry open a peach, an apple, a cherry for the bitter pit. Bitter cyanide pit, Peter keeps searching for it, he finds Stakh's tongue protecting the back of his throat. He hears him swallow thickly. His hands hold onto the back of Peter's thighs like a sailor's on the ropes that would keep him out of the sea.

Peter who is above what could he be?—spire—sky—magpie—prying praying bird hoping and breathing and whining a little bit against Rubin's mouth, baiting his tongue his windpipe his lungs and heart of out him. Peter's nails drag over Rubin's head, ring each follicle of the once-dense hairs like phorminx strings, music as breath — breath as music coils out of Stanislav's mouth and climbs and crawls, delicious tendril that Peter swallows, spider taking back its web; it is not *his*, it is given, gifted, thrown to him hastefully as if Stakh trusts it more in his care/trusts him more with its care. He does, yes, thankfully, horrifically, bleedingheartfully so. His shoulders rise and fall.

Peter who is below what could he be?—same as above praying prying praying again on his knees, scraping and bruised knees, trying still with kisses to lever Rubin's legs open, and it works, and he aims for or misses thigh hip pubis the buried bone of the pelvis, he drags his blunt teeth over his abdomen to the sternum, draws wetly the costal arch of his left side. Rubin's hands blindly flit towards a shoulder, towards the back of the head; they find hair, nape, hair on the nape, Peter-below as if raising an arm from the water grabs it in flight, holds it.

Peter-above lures out of Stakh's throat a whimper a whine like a sword-swallower would a blade; Peter-below Peter-under chthonic subterranean on his knees closes his teeth on the flesh of the thigh, higher, the groin, into the muscle that tenses like a bow; presses his tongue to it like gauze to a wound. The papillae feel permeable, penetrable; warmth seeps from tongue to taunt skin and from skin to hot tongue; so does the saltiness of sweat, so does the searing of want. Peter swallows

him and closes his hands around what his mouth can't reach; Stakh keenly bucks; Peter holds him back, and Peter crosses his arms over his chest, and kisses him again, and keeps going. His hands caress the front of Stanislav's throat from the hollow of his jaw to the ripples of upper ribs. He cups, pets, palpates, appreciates the powerful pulse down the windpipe. Fantasizes of long(ing)ly and fondly snaking down the tight burrows of Stakh's throat, of slithering and settling in the warmth of his tart wet stomach, of seeping through the velvety lining of it and permeating his pale muscles and hot blood alike... of Stakh long(ing)ly and fondly snaking down the burrow of his own. His jaw grows slack and he presses on, feeling the tender head across his tongue, so vulnerable against the ridges of his palate. Squeezed like the flesh of a fruit, distilling a syrup thickened and salty just the same. He purrs around Stakh, wetly, sloppily. When a choked gasp escapes him Stakh tenses all the way down, and tries to wring his hand out of Peter's to pet his hair better, or something a little stupid but very sweet like that. Peter squeezes it instead and doesn't-let-go even harder. Spit spilleth over, foamy, seminal.

Peter-above cunningly relents, retreats once more. A choke creeps itself out of his throat as Stanislav presses his back to Peter's front. His hands seek, chase, gallop up a knee, reach for the back of Peter's thighs to pull him into his back, to align his erection with the dip of his spine, the nervous groove of the sacrospinalis.

Peter thinks—Peter has thought for a while about pressing his cock into the furrow of that hot flesh, that gully kissed of the rocks of vertebrae, banked of wound muscle. Peter sees it, sighs it gracelessly. He shakes the whole way down and Stakh presses himself harder against him.

Peter fathoms—Peter phantoms himself climbing Stanislav's back by the ladder of his ribs, or maybe climbing the stringy wall of muscles and fasciae wound tight(ly) like hemp rope(s) Peter phantasms himself balancing upon the tightrope of Stanislav's spine; he imagines himself climbing crawling creeping through the inviting hollows and warm-wrapped whale-shaped vertebrae, swimming up the black waters of his chine. He figures — or maybe he abstracts — a layer under the skin, between dermis and epidermis, this layer that no one sees and no one has a name for, the layer of soul that lingers and that lurks waiting to be stripped, a shroud of meticulous hiding, the so-easily molten skin of reserve and preservation, the damp flesh of autotomy. He'd beg Stakh to let him slither let him shiver he'd beg Stakh to let him enter let him in but he feels he won't have to ask, he doesn't ask and yet/still Stakh gives (in, or out, buckling).

"Petya," Rubin calls all hoarse and hurried, and Peter's spine tingles at the nickname, "I'm gonna need to lie down."

"Are you holding up okay, old boy? Are you in pain?"

"No pain," Stanislav replies. "My head is spinning."

"Hunger?"

"No. This damn boner." The bluntness of it snags a laugh out of Peter, croaky and clear, and he can see Stanislav's lips shiver in a smile. "You don't seem to get how much blood I need to keep it up. And I don't have that much blood in me."

"Poor thing. You should be thankful I'm not a vampire."

"You do sucking plenty fine."

Peter laughs again and, grazing his lower lip of his one peculiar fang as he stops, he hums in

thought: “I should have you on your back... or on your stomach...”

“Have me however,” Stakh’s answer, this again, these two words! “But have me.” Then, slurred and mellow, as if his mouth had gone numb from kissing: “Let me have you.”

Sugar and fleece—thunder and flesh same thing(s) sing and snag and sharpen and shudder; and Peter feels their strike through all of his bones at once; he purrs in pleasure. His hands-below dig into the sensitive skin of Stanislav’s thighs, his hands-above cup his face like a precious thing — which it is, which it is. He drags his tongue up the perpetually-worried cliff of Stanislav’s face, catches its stubble and scars, the shiver of an eyelash; he tastes the red of flush, underneath it its earthy, coppery fire.

Peter-below subterranean in the flesh, in the cold-fog-fragrant silkiness of his transparency, crawls up on his knees, then on Stanislav’s — hoists himself up like wind from the blue sea into a white sail and dives, and digs, and burrows and buries himself into Stakh’s open chest where he was expecting Peter with open arms — crashes groundswell all against him whole with a kiss — wet and unmistakably Peter, as would have done the Peter-above, for as they say as below, so above.

Peter-above ensouled of four hands once more, half a spider amorously hails down kisses over Stanislav’s face, traces of his fingers white as mellowed chalk his browbone, the lines and hollows of his cheeks, the dimple of his chin, the tip of his nose. One knee on the bed by Stanislav’s hip, he presses him on, and soon Stakh rolls over and lets himself stomach-first on the bed. “Yeowch,” he grunts as he graceless falls on his dick, and immediately Peter apologizes for the push with a kiss on his nape, on his shoulder, on his clavicle, crawls all over him.

Come-above, crawl-over, cover — Peter covers Stanislav of his whole body, fits with him like two halves of a seashell, a pearl of sweat a pearl of semen this irised nacreous thing maybe both at once having melded wouldn’t that be romantic? close in shape to a teardrop between them, the two halves of them. Peter hooks a leg around one of Stanislav’s thighs and delights in their trembling, in the muscular twitches of the ass against his lap; frames his head of his bent arms. Stakh’s hands wander, one to the back of the thigh, the ass, the other to the wrist, the arm, squeezes needily. Under his mouth Peter feels Stanislav’s voice buzz and bubble, burn at the threshold of his lips. He groans; it thunders on.

Peter’s hair, damp with sweat, algae, ink, wet spun black silk, alive in its tender tendriltouch at the back of Stakh’s neck, nape, heralds the sweep of his open mouth after it. Peter pushes himself up on his elbows, his arms, his knees; bodies part with the slick noise of kiss. He watches as Stakh’s back pulses, pulsates, as the muscles firm and slack, as spinalis and illocostalis thoracis as the languid snake of the nuchal ligament accommodate the length of his cock as he pushes himself in.

Peter brings his knees forward he climbs — like a lover would a wall of ivy — until he straddles Stanislav’s upper back, tastes of his length the mechanisms the muscles and nerves, the tremors and twitches, the pulls, the undulation of scapula, infraspinatus, teres major and minor like there exist constellations. Stakh — under — Stakh below digs his feet into the sheet, braces himself on his insteps, the Achilles tendons-and-heels tense like the strings of a bow.

Peter (above) marvels at the sight of the dips, the furrows, the expanses and narrows, the riverbeds that scapulae and vertebrae draw, shimmering an opalescence of sudor and spit, and where — fit there his fingers, there his cock, there his tongue his mouth like the pr(a)ying beak of a stork — and, and... Peter pushes up slow into muscles and sinews entwined like a pit of snakes under Stakh's skin and Stakh hitches his head up until his cheek presses against Peter's stomach, against his chest as he thrusts back down, catching a heartbeat like one would a bird. Peter sweeps of the tip of his tongue the raised scar at Stakh's back of his neck, brushing it like of varnish, like if wishing to preserve it like that, woven white into the ruddy epidermis, healed, vulnerable. He catches the brown foggy gaze that Stanislav throws his way over his shoulder. He stares, gauges, incites—entices from inside out — finally the eye closes in surrender and he sighs, and he lays his arms down, and his grip on Peter's wrist softens with relish and relaxation. A pleased rumble like a flight of birds — a charge of cavalry — a hunting party crawls meekly out of him. Peter in turn grabs onto his shoulders, then lower his flanks, his hips. He tastes skin as he lowers himself down; savors but does not bite.

As Stakh reaches back and without any violence shoves him away, Peter offers only meek resistance; just enough to show the both of them that he did it. Indeed he thrills as he lets himself be pushed, falling to the side, offering the sight of his white belly like a beetle, like a sensitive hound. Stakh lunges at him and bites into the hollow of his cheek, his throat, clavicle, it tears out of Peter a trill of pleasure, the other one, the ripples of the upper ribs, not hard enough to hurt, not deep enough to mark, but enough to prove to the both of them he doesn't only have of the dog its abnegation. Stanislav breathes and huffs through flaring nostrils and Peter curls over—around—through the offered gaps of him like a pillbug, a tendril; hypha, -ae, he weaves through the ruddy clay of Stakh's grasp tender and malleable like it is; hydra, as Stakh catches one of his kisses, two more take its place. Stakh pushes his head against his sternum, catches of his keen ear the maddened heartbeat under the white hide. He steadies Peter writhing and wild—desire violent and vile as he tries to reel him back in the clammy spindles the tender needles of his flailing limbs, beads of sweat cling to the hairs on his arm, under them, between his thighs, thickened with semen like varnish, like tree sap. Stanislav lies him down, tenderly levers himself into Peter's arms wide like elytra; keeps him still and covers him, agitated to the marrow — from the marrow climbeth hunger, amphibian in that it breathes into blood and saliva alike, from amphibian it becomes quadrupedal, quadrupedal now, on all fours like an animal; Stakh presses his forehead to Peter's.

“Do you like looking the men you fuck in the eyes?” Peter asks, and does not recognize his voice: he knew (of) himself appetited, but him ravenous was a whole new bird. Stanislav's flesh calls to him like meat does a carrion bird. His pulse thunder at his ears. His whole body over him is heavy as a storm. Peter relishes as they fit together.

“And if I did?”

“How romantic,” Peter's eyes gleam.

“Only thing we have left for ourselves.”

Desperation makes Stakh keel – kneel – he throws himself gracelessly to Peter and digs his fingers with enough force to bruise the fuzzy flesh of a fruit into his hips – he knocks his legs apart – he presses their erections together.

It's for the best, Peter thinks as he looks down at the length of him, of them both, the flushed head of Stanislav's cock against the inside of his thigh, against his stomach, against his. Peter's tongue runs red and wet over his lips, they part, over his teeth, pearly white, his mouth opens; wet click, wet clack, wet tick or tack wet blue thunderstorm strike. Striking Stakh the whole way down, setting the trunk of him ablaze, hollowing him out under the bark. There is a restraint in him that borders on a chasteness endearing, heartfelt enough that Peter would for a moment forget his hands on his hips, the way he keeps and holds him steady and strong, the obscene and delightful manner he pushes their cocks together. Peter pries his mouth open with the lever – the chisel – the hook of his penetrating tongue, bites Stakh's.

“Now that's just silly,” Stanislav reprimands him so softly it barely feels like reprimanding at all, and he laughs, which is exactly why Peter does it again.

Stakh tilts his weight on his left elbow, and offers to Peter's mouth his palm open.

The paler the blacksmith's struck iron, the hotter it is – and Peter's gaze, a glacial greybluegreen that so strikingly cuts against the red of his face, looked white as ice and felt as burning as titanium molten.

“You mean it?” Peter whispers.

“I'd do it without. I just want to spare you the feeling of calluses.”

“I'd like it regardless.”

“As much as I can respect your resilience, this borders on self-harm. I have no desire to sand your dick raw with too rough of a hand.”

“You overestimate your ability to hurt me.”

Peter takes hold of the wrist. The pulse through it sings and thickens. Fingertips press into the meat of the palm and the hand gives away, opens itself to be seen and savored as Peter brings his mouth to its cup to its core. It is warm and the fingers tremble, it tastes like flesh, as one would have expected; like something close to nutmeg and its mace: the remnants of twyrine, as permeated through the flesh with sweat.

Peter rolls of his upper body onto his side so spit pools in the palm – into the grooves of the flesh; overfills the Lines of Love and of Fate; floods the Plain of Mars; washes against the slopes of the Mount of Venus. He spreads it of his tongue across the phalanges, to the fingertips, to the line of the wrist; over the hardened calluses, until Stakh tugs it away from his mouth.

He graceless shoves himself against Peter again and Peter drapes all the limbs he can muster around him, makes it harder even for Stanislav to reach a hand between them. He blindly palms at the lowest part of Peter's white belly, where the velvety skin shivers with breath, at the inside of the thighs that tremble quite the same, until his knuckles graze against thistleflower-thick coarse hairs; he grabs crudely as composure slips between his fingers, the space between them

replaced with pre-ejaculate, with a warmth red of jasper bubbling over with a rush of blood. He pins his forehead in hollow of Peter's shoulder and dives upon him like a bird of prey.

Peter loses, more than relinquishes, control; he melts thrashes whines high and hard in his throat, and he tries to regain control again, and to make Stakh lose his. Back and forth. Stakh is winning, except when Peter bucks against him pushes against him rolls his hips all the way up and tears out of him a wet gasp; and Peter is winning, except when Stakh smothers him of all of his weight and fucks against him and unravels him at once. Get inside get in-side through the side(s) the flanks, fingers across the ribs inside of its notches, seeking opening.

Saying "I love you" or "you feel good" feels useless, redundant — Peter knows, Peter only ever knows, because he's inside of Stakh, where all those thoughts shape and swell. He speaks them regardless. The words do not make it past his lips: Peter swallows, eats, laps them up right where they pool and well, savors them as he licks his chops like a predatory animal; carnivore praising the flesh, the flesh of another carnivore. He enters Stakh of his tongue, kisses wetly also over his chin and the corners of his mouth too and Stanislav's not sure if he's fucking up or it's on purpose. It's good regardless.

Stakh jerks him, himself, both of them at once, no room between both of them for even a breath, off — his hand is febrile, his frown pronounced, his thighs tremble. Peter's head spins and swims with fantasies of getting a better view, from a better angle, but he doesn't fantasize long.

He likes fucking Stanislav's hand with resolute, determined thrusts of his hips, and he likes when Stanislav overpowers him — without force, without precipitation — and bears all of his weight upon him, pulling out of him with instinctual—more than knowledgeable—hands noises and sensations all the newer, bringing him right to the edge, teetering, teeth-tittering, one strand away, one long black strand slicked against Peter's cheek away, curl upwards body and tongue, curve inward-around hand fingers brittle hungry nails —

Can be felt around inside under beneath inside again twice this time the pulsing of the c(l)ock of things alright of things real good on the right angle the steady sturdy edge, a great long squirming snake a man's size, that from amphibian in the blood in the spit had become quadrupedal, that from quadrupedal like a bull like a dog had become crawling, writhing, against, into. Shiver of the chine of the spine, tackiness saplike of the taut the taunting skin and then can be felt the ebbing less than the flowing, the push rather than the retreat like a hunt, can be tasted open-mouthed; a graceless groan tears itself out of Peter's mouth that Stakh's closes his around, swallows whole without chewing, without biting. Everything writhes around in the same way they do and Peter, who quite frankly hadn't come in months-if-not-years, thinks the room is too. A buzz hum thunder rumble groan a hoarse croaky moan from one of them surely, or from so deep inside it was from the Peter-below, Peter chthonic subterranean, that Stakh has this horrible and gorgeous tendency to tear out of his burrow.

Peter is kissing him — the front of his face, his forehead, his cheeks. The back of his head. How? Kisses the arabesques of his ears, his nape, licks the root of his shoulder. Peter-behind like a shadow. Stakh feels the brush of his wet hair. The touch of damp strands like fingertips, their snaking of weeping laminaria. A drop, the pearl. The bead. Salt comes to his mouth, to the ripples

of his palate; sediments, deposits; finger slithers in, razor shell of pharidae, spindle-length of fasciolaridae, fingerprint on the tongue delicate like the ribbing on a nacre shell. Salt of sweat of sea of semen, nervous ocean spume, salvelike in texture; Peter pulls out, ebbing; flows. He watches keenly as Stakh's face unravels, as he tries to rein it back into composure and falters, and fails, so beautifully fails, loses. How his eyes close, shut, close harder. How his jaw grows slack, how spits snakes down Peter's fingers then wrist like a delicate tendril, phyllotactic, serpentine parastichy. In a strike of fortitude, Stakh finds the aplomb to begin measuredly moving his tongue up and down the flesh, over the hardened knots of the knuckles, to the fingertips tapered like paintbrushes. Peter's mouth trembles with a groan never closer to a whimper than to something that borders on pain, not from pain itself but from the searing grasp of vulnerability around his heart like a fist around a pomegranate.

"You're good," he praises in a voice so thin it could slither into Stakh through his pores; "you're good."

Stakh closes his eyes so hard he feels all the muscles in his face could burst into flames. He pants — some kind of terribly embarrassing type of pant, whimpery at the edges where it frays, as if balancing on the rope-crest over the drop of orgasm already and maybe he is, and his whole forehead and nape are flushed, as if he was terribly embarrassed. Peter delights in seeing how everywhere but Stakh's cheeks and chests grows this pretty ruddy color, everywhere but where he himself usually blushes. Stakh's grip tightens like he was in the habit of hurting himself while jerking off but could not bring himself to hurt Peter with him.

He bites as he cums.

Peter draws his tongue over his upper row of teeth, from fang to fang.

"Subdued," he whispers.

"Yeah," grunts Stanislav in response. "Sorry if you were expecting something else."

"I did not say this out of a vexed expectation," Peter muses, "more as... an observation."

Peter does not say *"I'd like to see if I can get you to come in ways that have you slobbering over yourself and whining out wrung words that I could not make sense of even if I lived inside"*, but he thinks it nonetheless. He is equally amused to notice that, after five years of no drive beyond drinking himself to sleep and considering defenestration, he felt very, very driven.

Once his head stops spinning and blood flows back into his legs instead of his dick, he will want to paint again.

He'll want to paint; he'll want to sculpt and model. His fingertips still itch with the feeling of Stakh's face. The pulp of them, in the labyrinths of their lines, feels strewn of the sensation of his pores, lodged in the flesh like pebbles in riverbeds. He'll want to take clay and make of it his lover's face; he'll want to so carefully carve ivory or bone of a cameo of his hooded eyes, of the crooked row of his lower teeth, for he remembers their wave, over them a bubbling seafoam-spit. He remembers the limb-loosener of voice and breath, feels how it has unraveled the knots of his sprained fingers.

Once they crawl out of under the blankets, Peter will insist to walk Stakh home, and when he'll

ask of its necessity, Peter will say they'll just "*take turns*". Stanislav, still groggy, chuckles low about it already.