

The Intricacies and Eccentricities of Loving a Necromancer

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I cannot be held accountable for the situations I find myself in when tempted, for I am prone to dissociating, susceptible to sympathy, and plagued with intent.

The rabbit's head was flattened, only its ears intact, still erect. Brain matter framed its head like a halo, seeped into tar where it was hit, smeared to a halt. It was only a short burst of red, not enough to be alarming. Enough to spare.

It came home with me, the rabbit. Peeling it from the asphalt proved difficult, but I persevered. Unfortunately, the skull was not salvageable. Fortunately, I had a supplement.

My workspace is pristine. A bit too dark for my preferences, but a lamp suffices. Shadows lick and whisper against the wall as I work, peering over my shoulders as I operate on the being. I often have to bat them away. Their breathing distracts me, but they refuse to leave, and who am I to dictate over them?

Just a man, or something eerily similar to it.

Whoever committed the heinous crime, admittedly, has impeccable aim. They had managed only to ram into the head, leaving much potential leftover. With the body intact, I only must peel the skin from the ruins. Pick the bone shards from matted fur. The smell is quite wretched, but after much practice, I am able to distract my senses.

Reattaching a new skull to the spine is the easiest part, but having a head to press my lips to is the most exciting. With a mouth to breathe life into, I am capable of anything. Should this... ability have been bestowed on another, less ethical individual, one could raise an army of the dead. One could kill and revive and kill again; the most cruel form of torture. To be the first and last face a person sees. To be their savior and their demise.

The rabbit breathes without assistance. A furry body and an ivory head.

It will join the rest of them; the menagerie of Half-Beings. Mostly animals. I say "mostly" because I value honesty and integrity. I will not lie to you, I will not evade. They live here, inside this home and in the wilderness surrounding us, with me. Me and the shadows. I do not surround myself with humans. I also value my own time, and I do not have predilections towards wasting it.

Every once in a blue moon, my supplies will dwindle. There are only so many skeletons for one to find, though I do search ardently. For every decomposed animal I find, there are five currently dying. I am only one person, I am only one man. I cannot save them all. I do not have the means to do so.

I did endeavor. Once. To revive an incomplete being out of anguish.

I learned from this botched attempt that if the being dies with their bones intact, they must be brought back with them. Poachers are my worst foe. To kill an innocent one - to steal their autonomy for one's own pleasure - I find vile. But I digress.

Back when I was a boy, in the woods I found a buck horizontal on the leaves, its eyes glazed over, unblinking. The murderer had butchered it there; taken from it the parts they could eat. The antlers, only serrated stumps by an amateur wielder. Skinned and left to freeze in the winter chill.

It did not fight when I touched its wound; a single bullet hole in the temple. There, I kissed it. Blew into the cavity like one would exhale tobacco smoke.

It awoke violently, kicking and wailing in pain. A hoof landed a fatal blow to my left eye, squelching in the socket. I was not angry, simply shocked. Confused as to where the darkness erupted from. The pain did not register then, but the horror did.

The animal ran lopsided, a mutilation of lacerations and tendons. Uncoordinated legs, naked, pink flesh, unprotected from the cold. A ribcage on display, the wind slithering through the bones like it would a wind chime. The buck did not sing, however. It screamed until it collapsed again, twitching, then slumped into the snow.

Every day I learn something new about this ability of mine. I cannot find it in myself to be disconsolate anymore, only intrigued.

My research has shown that the body remembers the bones. The structure. It is my responsibility to restore that, however I must. Once, I was brought a three-legged dog. It was simply born that way, cast aside by the breeder as defective and taken in by a kind individual. Its passing was untimely, so it was brought to me. Because the body had never known the feeling of four legs, it did not need a fourth to be revived.

Over the years, I have been forced to make artistic choices I otherwise would prefer to not. I have learned that parts do not need to match; the importance is that it must be bone. An animal with a crushed skull requires a head. A forcibly

shed buck needs antlers. If I am lucky, I may find some naturally shed, otherwise I am forced to practice creativity.

Desperate times have often forced my hand. I have strengthened my sleuthing skills over many years of practice. Graveyards have provided ample stock, and bone carving has become a hobby out of necessity. I was able to bestow new antlers to the buck that blinded me and, as I screwed its skeletal frame together again, pride imploded within me.

My artform is disturbing to many, despite those who pay handsomely for my services. My excursions into town are scarce and brief, but the rumors persist nonetheless. I loathed the idea that I was only a curiosity to the town. A blank canvas to cast aspirations onto.

Luckily I was sensible in my desires, and did not dilute my focus with want.

Until he appeared.

Panting, breathless, staggering from behind the tree that supported his weight. His face brightened with recognition as he mouthed, "*Help me,*" then collapsed at my feet.

As mentioned earlier, I cannot be held accountable for the measures I take when tempted, as extemporaneous as they may be.

My turmoil was palpable, but I noticed his blood. Smelled it. I could not turn my back, let alone the fact that I knew this man.

His parents were herbalists, and he had been raised in their family apothecary. One I frequent on my necessary trips into town. I had seen him on occasion, but never concerned myself with toddling through conversation, though he frequently attempted. As one who derives pleasure from isolation, my social adeptness lacked exponentially. My contributions to conversation were nods and half hearted grunts.

The Half-Beings are notoriously curious, flocking to the door to tilt their heads inquisitively. To walk on the stomach of the deceased man while I pulled the door closed. To sniff his clothes, his hair, his bleeding wound. Nosing at it and staring at me until I validate their concerns.

The shadows are helpful when they choose to be. They shoo the animals. Assist me in dragging the man to my workspace, hauling him onto the table.

I did not have to operate. He only required a breath to a bullet hole.

My name is cursed throughout the city, conglomerated with blasphemy and debauchery - and while I do quite enjoy those things, I do not wholeheartedly agree that those words encompass who I am - but the man smiled up at me when he awoke.

The man did not leave after that. I did not ask him to.

The words simply did not exist in my vocabulary. I had never involved myself in scenarios of requesting another to extricate themselves from my life, and the invocation of such emotions - tenderness - towards another person were unfamiliar and eerie. It made speech all the more difficult. How had such a disposition been quaked by one smile?

At first, I asked him to stay for observation. Having never revived a human before, my knowledge of recovery was scant. Animals spring awake, sprinting, like a child from an afternoon nap, but he woke slowly. Unhurried, he wiped his own blood from my upper lip.

From our first conversation, he enamored me, and simultaneously unmoored me from the lifestyle I had grown accustomed to. My self-imposed exile had reached an expiration.

For a long while, I agonized that he felt somehow indebted to me. Never have I indulged myself in the fantasies of romance. I had no desire to, let alone to manipulate a person into false attraction towards me.

Perhaps it was his unyielding trust as he laid, dying at my feet. I did not know the story of how he had entrapped himself in such a dilemma; shot dead in the wilderness. My cabin was miles from civilization, and I lied perturbed at the narrative that he had sought me out. I have since learned that it was an unfortunate hunting accident, thus furthering my distaste for the sport.

He laughs freely. Despite my incompetence towards comedy, I have never once felt belittled or secluded, though I do at times catch him and the shadows in gesticulating conversation.

He possesses a childlike eagerness to learn, fingering through my books and journals, crowding me in my workspace and hiding grimaces as I breathe life.

He once asked me, *“Must you place your mouth on the gaping wound?”* To which I responded, *“If I recall correctly, my mouth on your gaping wound did not result in such disgust,”* and he cackled, scaring the squirrel from the dead. It clattered about the room as I fought to open the window. With genuine interest, and to my deepest surprise, he requested I enlighten him on my talents.

I learned that he is a painter.

At the beginning of his second week, I designed an easel. On my next trip to town, I purchased brushes. He created paints from clay, leaves, berries, and flowers.

The house seemed to brighten once he became integral to the foundation. The shadows delight in him, and did not seem perturbed by the lack of shade. I hypothesized that they require more stimulation than I could provide, and he supplies it easily and without reservation. That, or they were constantly bored of my notions.

I am a metaphysical man. A man of poetry, and an avid reader. I am a man of many thoughts, but they falter in his presence. I have ample opinion and have no qualms with sharing them loudly and with vehemence, but that was mostly reserved for the shadows, and they are barely sentient. Or so I had thought. Sharing such intimate details with another person, watching them as they processed and formed their own responses to my words was strange, and I had not expected it required such preparation. Simple conversation often left me exhausted, but his devotion to me, of all people, never wavered.

Desire was no longer sour, it was the berries he crushed for paint. It was the tea he made every night after supper. It was a hesitant kiss to my unseeing eye. It was fresh baked bread with herbs from his family's shop. It was native flowers blooming in pinks and yellows. Blues and oranges.

Despair was red.

The effects of my abilities revealed themselves with a shout, and a cry of my name in a tone that resembled the one he used as he lay dying.

He was kneeling in the garden, our half-skeletal cat limp in his lap.

"I kissed it," he breathed. *"I only kissed it and it..."*

He did not need to finish, he only raised the corpse to my own treacherous mouth, his eyes frantic and confused. I cannot speculate my expression was an image of anything different, though our reasonings were, drastically.

The cat did not wake.

Despite my uneducated state of comforting another person, I attempted archly. It did not last long because to my surprise, he, with vehemence, apologized to *me* for the death of the cat.

His concerns for my well being floored me. I recollect a soft hand on my chin, manually shutting my mouth as my jaw had unhinged in shock.

He dejectedly, not for his own sake, but mine, resigned himself to the wilderness for hours at a time, foraging for mushrooms and miscellaneous bones, transplanting what he had found miles out into my own yard. He mixed new paints and surprised me with a mourning portrait of the deceased animal; our unforeseen collaboration.

His niceties were suffocating. His loquacious tendencies, despite the recent events, persisted. His forgiveness and hankering to spoil me with small gifts was undeserved. Guilt was foreign and grotesque; a miasma of filth polluting the air of our home, darkening the space he brightened so effortlessly. A fortnight after the death of the Half-Being, I confidently deduced that my abilities catered to humans as well, with harrowing caveats.

I had begun preparing for his absence. For the chasm it would create in my soul. I wondered if another shadow would spore from my melancholy. I had spoken to the shadows in whispers and apologies. I had even folded his easel and tinkered a case for his paints, but he did not gather belongings when I requested his dreaded departure.

He appeared crestfallen, but left.

He reappeared a few short hours later, bearing gifts of bones. Saying he found them in a clearing, and the sun was shining over them; a beacon. Saying he will leave if that is my true desire, but if the difference is to be made, his choice is to stay.

I opened the door.

“I cannot allow you to kiss me,” he stressed. *“I cannot bear the thought. I will not take the chance.”*

Our lives intertwined quickly, vining around one another like the ivy after winter frost. Over time, it brought to the surface my outdated fears; that he stayed out of misguided obligation, not a genuine love for me, as I had for him. The urge to conclude our relationship for his own health nagged me; a worm digging its way through the core of an apple.

Instead of allowing it to consume me, I asked him why he chose to stay. He had stared at me in disbelief for an uncomfortable minute, before his omnipresent smile returned. *“You truly do not believe my affections?”* to which I argued, *“I do, of course.”*

“You entered the apothecary, skulking. It was quite endearing. Rumors of you flitted about the town, but I am a stubborn man, as you’ve come to know,” he said, leaning back on his palms, the grass cushioning him. *“Do you recall my attempts at courting?”*

“Courting?” I balked. *“Me?”*

He laughed. *“Do you know how difficult it is to find echinacea year-round? I either procured from growers out of county, or bought out another shop’s inventory of it. You did not think that to be odd? Only one business in town having the ingredients for your favorite teas?”*

I flushed. He sighed fondly, shaking his head.

“And all it took was a painful death to covet your attention. You do love to make me work for it.”

I need not ask again.

Our intimacy did not lack because of the absence of corporeal closeness. My inexperience and disinterest in the physicality of partnerships did not deter him. He expressed many times that it put him at ease; knowing I was not dissatisfied. I was quite the opposite, in fact.

When my anxieties gripped my bronchial tract and squeezed, he loosened the fist with a warm fire and tea, or a passage from the book he read, or sometimes a kiss to my left eye as we danced in the center of the room, my ear to his heart-beat. The one beating because of me, he so often loved to remind me. He often pressed my hand over it, telling me to *listen, listen*.

I cannot be held accountable for the decisions I make when desperate, even when I am uncertain of the outcome when the decision is made.

On the last day of his life, I prepare for a kiss.

His hair is now grey. The hand that hovers over mine, tracing the bulging veins, is unsteady. The heart inside of him stutters, his breaths labor. His form is sunken; skin, papery. I am aware of my own reflection, but I do not concern myself with the vastness of aging. It is simply too large for me.

My love for him is greater. Visceral. Since the day I met him, I feared the inevitable day I would lose him. The longevity of our lives I am immensely grateful for, but the life we have grown is naught without him to plant seeds with.

Our love is perennial, that I know.

I was once a man who did not waste time with wanting. Because of him, I am now a man who values dreaming, and the importance of living.

I can only yearn to reunite, whether it is in this life, or our next.