in the way of explanations or consolation

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by tei

"I have to go," Lestat whispers frantically, the moment they are settled in a hollow of dirt underneath a tree, a protective covering of leaves and loam. Like they've reverted to something animalistic, in the midst of the chaos and destruction. They have. Lestat followed him here clutching his hand like a frightened child, but now he is agitated, writhing under Louis weakly, the strength he had always bragged of now a terrible weakness. "I have to go to her," he says again, teeth chattering, and Louis knows it's true, that Lestat doesn't want to, that he's only stating a biological fact, like a baby needs to be born, like a drained mortal needs to die. But it doesn't matter to him, right now, that Lestat is being compelled. Makes it worse, maybe, that it's always like this. Always someone else, no matter how much he swears otherwise, no matter how hard he tries. A finger in the palm of his hand, a portrait above their coffin, and now there's her. The Queen. Picked another one over me, he wants to shout, but it's not true, and Lestat wouldn't understand even if it were.

"I know," he says instead, soothingly, and tears pinch his eyes at the effort it takes, and at how real and solid Lestat feels here, right now, for once not shared with anyone, just for a moment. The anger creeps back in, just enough, when he says, "And you will. But you'll have something of me still inside you, when you go to her."

Lestat gasps. The desperation in him morphs, almost, into another kind of desperation. Not entirely; a part of his blood is still calling him away. But like he's always said, he has the blood of Akasha in him. It's in him, but it *isn't* him; he hadn't argued, after all, with the obvious proposition that it's not the blood, it's what you do with it. A laugh is as good as an admission, with Lestat. What he does, he chooses for himself. For better or worse. "Yes," he says, unnecessarily. "Please, Louis."

It's always nice to be asked, though, some good clear verbal consent, he's not above being reassured by it. And especially for this, for— this is not how he imagined it, with Lestat, for the first time since 1940. What is even left of his memory of this man's body? Dreams, fantasies, nightmares. Armand had always liked to take what he was given, whether it was a perfunctory slick with Louis' blood or his own or nothing. Lemuel liked it like a human, a jar on the nightstand, a plug to get comfortable first. Lestat, though, he bites his own fingers and then sticks Louis' hand with it, demanding. "My blood," he says. "Your spend. Mingled together."

Yes. Yes. Louis resists the urge to lick the blood right off his hand; he's been starving for it, like nothing but Lestat will do, ever since he got that little taste, sliding over his glass of beer like it was nothing. It wasn't nothing. It was like coming home and discovering a new land all at once. Something that you shouldn't talk up too much, because it might disappoint you, memory could fail you like it always has, except it's every bit as good as he remembered and better. Still, he uses it to coat his own cock, push with two fingers into Lestat's hole. Lestat closes his eyes, groans, lets him in. Louis pushes his hand deeper and drops his face lower, his mouth bumping the pink line of healing skin at Lestat's throat.

He hasn't been invited to bite. And he does need an invitation— and if he doesn't need one, he *wants* one. So instead he runs the flat of his tongue over the little raised bump, feeling where Armand— well, Daniel, but this one's on Armand— separated the flesh.

Lestat's eyes snap open. And he stares at Louis' own neck, the ring that still feels raw and somehow electric, like the sensors Fareed had hooked him up to had taken root in him and are still reminding him of what it was like to be back there, half a man, staring at himself, angry and frightened and trying desperately to come up with some way to get out of there. And then he had, and it had worked, and then he was only so, so sad.

Lestat runs a fingertip over it. "What did you say to him," he asks, "to convince him to let you go?"

Louis swallows. Twists his fingers inside of Lestat, trying to buy himself time, figure out what to say, what he *had* said, but Lestat just keeps looking at him, waiting.

"I was honest," he says finally. "He wasn't expecting that. Couldn't handle it. Liars never can."

Lestat's plush mouth is hanging open, his hips rolling with the pressure of Louis' hand and their groins pushing messily together, but his eyes are pink-tinged. "And did it make it better, between you?" he asks.

Louis laughs. He thought it was a laugh rising in him, anyway, but the sound comes out choked like a sob. "Could anything make Armand better?"

"I don't care about him," says Lestat. Lying. "I meant for you."

Louis shakes his head. He doesn't know. Why does he even remember it? Armand had said he wouldn't. He thinks he'd rather that it all be gone, even with the sneaking suspicion of where the lacuna in his memory came from, if he didn't have to think on it any more. The helplessness and then the sudden feeling of power as Armand snaps the laptop shut, stops being able to repeat Louis' words out loud. The realization that he wants to say this, deserves to say and have said it, for himself, whether Armand deserves to hear it or not. And what is it, to deserve? It's true. Truth isn't a matter of merit. Armand never understood that, which is why he was so fascinated and confused by Daniel. But perhaps he does now. Perhaps he felt it.

Perhaps Lestat feels the answer. Perhaps he understands it better than Louis does. And then he says, with something like grief, the matter-of-fact grief for something that has already happened or might as well have, "You'll go back to him."

Louis' head snaps up. Anger shooting through him like a lightning bolt from the join at his throat. "Like hell I will."

Lestat shakes his head. "You should. Who else will there be? I have the blood…." and he can't finish *of Akasha in me,* the sentence trails off into a low moan of misery. The inevitable end to this moment, and going on to the next one. When Lestat rises from the dirt and goes to her.

"Shut up," says Louis. He needs the sound to stop. "Shut the *fuck* up, I'm not yours to— to pass around, to take care of, find a new nanny for, or a new—"

He shoves his cock into Lestat instead. It works; the noise stops, Lestat giving a sharp inhale of pleasure or shock instead, and then a sob, and Louis is going to sob with him. He didn't mean to do that. He can't help that he's glad now that it's done. He touches Lestat's face, his hair, the soft skin behind his ear. "It's okay," he says, "you're okay," neither of them are okay, but Lestat nods, and tilts his head up to kiss him. Like just getting a kiss from Louis fixes everything.

He has to be so careful, with Lestat. He and Armand are like mirror images of each other; Lestat's hard, cool charm giving way to something malleable and tender, Armand's soft vulnerability concealing the snapping teeth of a wounded animal. They both make Louis want to protect himself and crack himself open at the same time.

"Where was the rest of you?" he asks desperately. "Your body— your body was with me in the butcher shop. Where were *you*?"

Lestat takes a deep breath. The air entering and leaving him is uneven, punctuated by the movement of their bodies against each other. "I went bowling," he says.

It feels like falling through endless chasms. He is always cracking himself open for Lestat, and for what? He had never had a choice about it, from the first; his maker inside his flustered mortal head, knowing him, understanding him, his misery and anger and yearning and awe. He never decided to give that to Lestat, he just did, all at once, a torrent of himself. And Lestat had every choice in the world, every chance to pick his words carefully, gesture at himself and say *I was Lélio, you know— I once loved a man who played the violin beautifully — this woman here, she is my mother.* And he never had. To be known so unequally makes Louis feel volatile, twists love into something lopsided and ugly. Makes the word *lover* sound like *fledgling*, and the word *fledgling*—

"Louis," Lestat whispers desperately. "Let me tell you after."

"After *what*?" Louis demands. Using Lestat's body too roughly, now, for what this is supposed to be. "There is no fucking *after*, isn't that the *point* of this?"

And Lestat shakes his head. "No," he says, and it's in the tone of voice that he used to say the *blood of Akasha* thing, ages ago, when he was saying it to himself and for himself only, a mantra affirming his own power, pushing back the fear of the world. "No. There will be an after. And I'll tell you about it then, my love, the long table, and my maker and my mother there, and you, and— I'll tell you. Let me promise to tell you after."

So he believes it. Lestat could always do that to him, make him believe in things he maybe shouldn't, a vision of the world and of himself so clear that he calls it into being. Sometimes. If he's lucky. He leans his head back down. Throat fitting into Lestat's mouth, now, one hand on the side of Lestat's face to tilt his head to where Lestat can slot one fang on either side of the join. "Swear it," Louis says. "Swear on my blood."

"I swear," says Lestat, and sinks his teeth in. And that, too, is just as good as he remembered and better. It hurts more, but hurts are an acquired taste, and Louis has sampled a wider and sweeter variety than he had ever imagined meeting. It's how love and a promise feels, and he

does as he said he would, snaps his hips into Lestat and leaves himself as deep in his body as he can.

Then Lestat bears his own throat, inviting, offering, what Louis has been waiting for, hoping for. Louis lowers his mouth, and places a gentle kiss at the base of Lestat's throat. His fangs dig into his own lip. He strokes Lestat's cock gently, sucks on the almost-healed skin, feels Lestat spill over his hand, and doesn't bite. Doesn't bite.

"After," he whispers. Lestat begins again to tremble. His Queen calls him, his blood tugs at him, he is lost to Louis and all he wants is one last taste of him. "I'll do it after."

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