



In Harmony

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The lounge after hours sings with a quiet prelude of jazz, left on long after the live players have gone. One pair of heels clicks to the beat as their owner glides across the length of the room. Round sways to the melody with a soft, off-key hum of their own, fingers wrapped around the neck of a broom as they lead it about the tile floor.

If they knew how to dance, really knew how, they would say maybe this is how it feels to sweep across the ballroom — giddy, lighthearted, one half of a perfect pair, bathed in dimming light and quieting laughter and the gaze of tens of thousands looking on. Flowing into position as the players ready their instruments, waiting with bated breath for the first, striking chord.

Round dreams of it — one hand feather-light at their waist, then fingers interlacing. Their back straightens, visualising it, their partner in place of the plain, inanimate broom — they entertain the idea of the immobile length of wood straightening as well, but already it is too stiff, tense. Really no good for a dancer — but then again, they aren't much of one either.

They would appreciate the attempt, if it were to happen, and they say so under their breath, in the perplexing case that the broom knows what their wandering mind has been thinking. In the case that it, too, overflows with feeling.

It takes only a moment for them to fall into a comfortable rhythm, twirling to the melody of a song so sweet that they entirely forget the responsibilities at hand, if just for a single, simple moment. The dustpan they had carried out becomes but a speck in the corner of their world, forgotten to time and tune. Dust spills haphazardly about the ground instead, scattering around their footwork like starlight.

They aren't sure how long they allow the song to take them until

they're fully aware of the other in the room, their eyes just grazing his silhouette as it rounds their periphery and glows warm at their back. A pair of polished wingtips enters into the empty land that had surrounded their dance, footfalls light, hazy, like the entrance of someone within a dream. Their broom clatters to the floor; where it had played substitute beautifully before, it slips from their mind now like a gimmick illusion, fading, shimmering away to reveal something more, and when the music soars into its peak of crescendo and one half of a pair reunites with its other, Round flings out their hands with a wide, laughing smile and tips joyously back into the arms that await their fall.

"You've made even more of a mess than when you started," he huffs. Despite his words, his voice is impossibly fond.

They dip down low, the strength of the world a faithful support beneath them, and raise their fingers skyward to touch the smooth porcelain of his skin like it would turn to gold — and for a single, timeless moment they hold in their hands the universe on full display, Queen's eyes brilliant where they meet Round's, silver that swims shining beneath the lights. Brilliant as in intelligent, genius; unmatched by any other from the day they met. Brilliant as in magnificent, splendid, glorious.

Brilliant. *Theirs*.

They don't think themselves the possessive one of the two — their own collection of finery, both literal and metaphorical, runs diaphanous and sparse, where Queen, with avarice as his native tongue, will take and take all that's offered and more — but with him dearly in their grasp, they are loath to ever let go. They cradle his face and brush a thumb across his cheekbone, smile honey-sweet, and raise themselves to whisper so into his ear.

Queen reacts with a small puff of breath; his gaze softens beautifully, silver wavering, molten, vulnerable, pliable at its edges. Round thinks to when they had first met, Round unassuming and unexpected and Queen all walls and masks, built on stress and

tension and the ruler-backed façade of power. Pretty words, thinly veiled threats, had flowed like venom from his lips, and maybe that deadly ease should have meant he should have been able to move snake-like too, slithering about you and wrapping within a dreadfully charming coil. But he couldn't, can't, the *more, more, more* nature of someone who takes with giving only as an inconvenient afterthought to keep you shallowly in his favor simply too rigid and brittle to grant him the ability to bend and sway like someone with the freedom to waltz across a star-spilled floor.

He bends here, now, though, and it fleetingly astounds them just how different the Queen before them has become — he bends and sways and yields to Round's ministrations, like they could do to him anything in the world and he would welcome it with a burning warmth they only recently have come to know. Queen's eyes are still shining when Round returns to them, present again, and he is pliant and giving and they, this time they so greedily take and take.

They wonder, only briefly, if they're giving something, anything, in return — if someone like Queen would want someone like them if nothing tangibly valuable comes of this clumsy ballroom dance. They trip over a step with the worrisome thought, but it slips away from them when Queen catches them in his arms with such ease it may as well have been choreographed, kisses them, melts into them all the same. Their concern flounders within the wave of adoration that clouds them anew, disappearing into a little locked box of what if whispers that hurries to seal itself shut and secure.

Maybe they'll revisit it, on a day that is not today, a moment that isn't right now. In the here and now, they clutch at all they can of Queen, brand mistily into their memory every gossamer line, and it's that same deadly *more, more, more* that fuels them both as they move as one across the floor, fire chasing passion and dance and roaring so loud Round can't hear anything but the synchronized beating of their hearts and the music that ties them together, in the death of night, like a

beautiful satin-string bow.

They are forced apart only when someone slams the door open and complains that the music is ruining his nap, so can you please turn it down and get a room? It is an abrupt reminder of their setting, of the time, of the dustpan and broom that lie dormant off to the side. Queen splutters, weak and disoriented at first, to scold Rook for forgetting his most basic of manners, that too-familiar edge to him returning. Round watches, through a daze, as he reprimands Rook and bites back that had he been there to help Round rather than skipping his duties entirely, then perhaps the music would be of no issue at all to him now.

Almost, Round wants to apologize, but the apology that hangs off the tip of their tongue tastes so utterly false and impure, drunken still on how magically their dance has twirled the two about. Red strings loop about them in the pattern of their choreography, drowning them in its sea, too interlaced now for a *so sorry* to make them so easily disappear.

Rook leaves eventually, jaded, with a grumble about at least being invited next time that Round pays little mind, not when Queen turns to them shortly after with a thick blush of pink so high on his cheeks, sweet apology glowing in his eyes. It makes them feel so heady with adoration that they worry, breath catching in their throat, that its sheer force will make them absolutely fall apart. They surge forward, throwing out their arms about his shoulders with a laugh that sparkles like diamonds in the light of the lounge, and when they feel his warmth encircle them too, they sink into the crook of his neck like it has been created just to cup them close, until the world around them loses where he begins and they end.

They stay intertwined and whole this way until the song that has filled the lounge comes to its last notes, slowing to its finale and slipping away into the silent night. He so tenderly strokes their hair where it has fallen from its tie and presses the gentlest of kisses to their temple; one, two, three. Angelically.

They hiccup, overcome with emotion, nearly childlike all of a sudden now that the mature music leading them around the lounge has left them with nothing but the aftermath of raw *feeling*. The tears weeping over their lashes cannot come anywhere close to expressing just how much the heart that fits perfect between their ribs has taken his shape in its whole; how much they yearn to be his everything forever and ever even in the now, where their own greed seeps wet spots into the purple silk at his shoulder and spreads its claim like wildfire and chants *mine, mine, mine*.



When Knight comes to wake them in the morning and informs them with quiet amusement that they had forgotten, in the end, to wind down the music in the lounge (to Rook's displeasure, loudly-voiced all through the rest of their night), it is Round whose eyes he meets, blues that simultaneously sing of romance yet say absolutely nothing of the love letter secrets they share with their darling sound asleep.

Round offers their half-hearted apology this time. They politely appease him with prim words they both know neither of them will really care about come tomorrow — not when Queen is as happy as he is, like this. 