

I watch him dip in and out of consciousness, smiling that sleepy smile when he sees me, before drifting off again. My heart is full as he fights to stay lucid; he wants to look a little longer. I am wrapped up tight in his arms as he sleeps, as I have been since the day we met. He is here for me.

His hands are warm and strong... powerful. He doesn't have to say it for me to know it; these hands have wreaked destruction. The suffering met at his hands shows in his many scars, the creases in his face, and the way his smile never reached his eyes - not until he found me. The hardships of the past melted away as he reached out to touch me, wordlessly enamored. Love at first sight, he always says, and we have spent every moment together since. He is *here* for me.

Being seen this way by a man used to strike me with a deep, terrible fear. That look holds so much more than lust. It's an expectation, a demand. *I will have you, or no one will.* I never wanted a man to desire me again. Slowly I realized that it's in their nature. Even stripped of beauty, fairness, softness, they want me because I do not want them. It will never stop. But I am different now. I have changed, molded by... Fate? Grand design? Did being wronged in such a dreadful way birth a drive for power too great to be stopped even by death? Or perhaps I am truly gone and none of it is real. It doesn't matter. I am in control now. *He* is here for me.

I have grown to find comfort in the way he holds me too tightly, cutting his skin as he thanks me for it. His hands bleed for me, and my heart dances. I have found a way to love that expectant, demanding look in his eyes, the way it holds steady as he sits with me for days, weeks. Not sleeping except when he must, not eating at all. Seeing him grow thin and weak is a ritual. I cannot speak, nor can he understand me, but he must be able to sense how happy it makes me - he is at peace, even as his bones show hollowly beneath his skin. It must be painful; the thought brings me joy.

Sometimes I think he must hear a voice and believe it to be me - he asks me for reassurance. *You'll never leave me, will you? Please stay with me. I've never known anyone like you. I love you.* I don't enjoy the way he fawns, but it tells me that his time is almost up, which thrills me. I watch the light leave his eyes, and my heart sings. I sit with him as the blood dries, and the flesh rots and begins to fall away. The room reeks of magnificent death as the flies and rodents pick him over, and he becomes as revolting in body as he was in soul. I know that no one will look for him. There will be no honors, no mourning, no redemption for him. He is here for me.

*This episode, Here for Me, was written by Ezra J. Wayne and performed by Meredith Nudo. Audio editing and sound design by Ezra J. Wayne. Produced by Ezra J. Wayne and Tal Minear.*