

The events in Penacony had spiralled downward farther than anyone could have expected it. After Aventurine's grandest rehearsal, he figured that the task to check off of his *imaginary* to-do list was to resign from the IPC, or in better terms: rid himself of his last shackles.

Aventurine naïvely ignored the tedious processes that his blasted corporation really had when he was still in a position to do so, but he could swim in the amount of files and meetings he had to attend now.

It was all for the relief of his own liberty at the end of it, to embrace Kakavasha. he knew better than anyone else that he'd emerge the final victor, and stop at nothing to be just that, but he would need more than the blessing of Gaiathra Triclops to work towards this fate he wasn't even sure he deserved entirely.

Of course, Veritas had been more than adamant on laying the truth bare to him ever since he had collapsed on the door of their accommodation back in Penacony.

On nights like this, the gleaming of stars and nebulae brought nothing but distractions to his work. Kakavasha hissed as his back throbbed from the shrimp-like position he didn't even notice he was in for the past system hour.

He was one more file away from needing blue-light glasses, his eyes burned from his bi-hourly exposure to screens and overexerting to read the largest paragraphs of text he had probably read in his life, and even debating contracts tends to get lengthy at times. He could be likened to a child, but even the youngins of the latest generation were much more resilient than he was in terms of maintaining a screen time of over 7 hours. His pretty eyes, be damned.

A defeated huff left his lips before it turned into a dry chuckle with no mirth left to spare, as he peeled back his bangs with a tight grip. He truly has hit rock bottom if he has begun to compare himself to the Clockie Crusaders of today's children.

It is only when he felt his stomach being pressed into the front line of his home's desk, did his breath hitch. Actually, it was Veritas' home desk which he had borrowed and had been borrowing for the past week to rifle through all the necessary contracts.

The doctor's disapproval at the dishevelled state of his workspace was made imminent enough through the way Kakavasha's bangs fell onto his forehead once more after a long, drawn-out sigh.

"There are countless published studies that have scientifically proven that an organised environment can contribute greatly to one's productivity and mood, so it is no surprise that you have read *none* of them."

"Veritas," he pouted innocently, as he tilted his head back to lean on his pillar. Veritas' features had tensed. "I've done enough reading for a lifetime, don't you think? Unless you'd be willing to read this 136 page document for me, and put that accent to good use."

Despite the lunacy that Kakavasha can't help but spit out sometimes, Veritas never minds to wear the alabaster head. However, he does offer a scowl and looms over the desk as he scans the page of the document that's currently open.

Kakavasha scoffed, leaning forward to return to his eye strain. "Fine. The offer still sta—"

Thick muscle slipped under the column of Kakavasha's chin, Veritas' hand had rested on his shoulder, thumb rubbing circles into the silk of his house wear. The movement slightly forced him to look upward back at Veritas' molten eyes, the crown of his head pressed against the other's chest and he felt the rumble in the doctor's voice as he sighed. Again.

"I'll also have you know, *Kakavasha*, that letting your eyes deteriorate from sitting in front of a screen all day, not to mention in horrendous form, will not serve your own health any better either."

Veritas was all the more firm in the way he spoke, but the press of his arm on Kakavasha's neck was barely restricting. He only tightened it slightly, "You should be informed of this not just from *genuinely* educating yourself and using precious resources, but from common knowledge."

Long-winded, needlessly rude, all of it to basically say *I care about you and your health*. Kakavasha smiled, "From which of your eight doctorates did you pull that from? Seriously, you didn't need to be so clinical about it."

Veritas' gaze softened just a little, the molten pools of his eyes transformed into a warming sunset. His brows were knit tightly in *clear* concern, his lips curled around the edges to form a pout. A conniving thief he truly was, batting eyelashes and pouting was Kakavasha's thing!

But that was a technique he used to persuade others for the sake of a gamble, the doctor's worry was strong, and communicated so clearly just from a mere glance. Eyes were the windows to the soul, after all.

He couldn't help but sigh defeatedly, lightly tapping Veritas' bicep. "Fine, fine. Stop looking at me like that. You're starting to become just as insufferable as I am."

It didn't take long for that look to turn into annoyance, but Veritas didn't retort. He scoffed disappointedly before untangling himself from Kakavasha, he began to undo all of the complicated garments that clung to his outfit.

"I suppose if you truly aren't going to take my reminders seriously, it will just be me and Pythagoras—" the rubber duck that Veritas keeps in his tub. Ridiculous. "—In the tub tonight."

*This guy...* Kakavasha immediately stood up from his seat, the legs of the chair screeching as they scraped against the floor.

"Okay, I get it! Aeons, who knew you could stoop this low?" He feigned embarrassment. The ghost of a smirk lingered on Veritas' lips.

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All the evidence was there now. Kakavasha lost his blessing the moment he decided to leave the IPC.

After he was finally able to read through the last of his contracts the other day, time progressed slower when he had to wait in line to speak to the IPC's employee services. Once he opened that first file for his termination, he'd been stripped of all the other privileges he had while he was still one of the Stonehearts. Subjected to wait in a poorly conditioned room with people that *reeked* and absolutely no signal to make the perfect pair of capitalist suffering.

Kakavasha breathed in the familiar air of his flat when he got home, he immediately threw his hat off to the nearest table, discarded his coat on the sofa, and kicked off his shoes on the way to the bedroom.

As he opened the door, he had gained Idrila's gaze.

On the bed was Veritas obviously, the covers hung lazily off of his mid-thigh on his right left, but left every other part of his body for Kakavasha to gawk at in pure admiration. He adorned a robe that left very little to the imagination, the window in Veritas' regular attire was put to absolute shame with how the garb left his entire chest exposed.

It's tied tightly around his tapered waist and covers the *necessary* parts, but there is nothing modest, almost a little sinful, in the way he has his legs crossed and Kakavasha could feel the meatiness of his thighs even from where he was standing.

Distracting! Scandalous! So much so that he doesn't notice Veritas' stare burning holes into his skull.

"*Good evening to you too, Kakavasha.*" Then he goes back to immersing himself in his codex, the thickness in his voice in only what he could assume was sleep quickly warp jumped back into reality. Right, this was real. This was a real man. A real man that was wholly and truly *his*.

To claim his prize, Kakavasha had released the breath he didn't even know he was holding before he climbed over Veritas without letting him get even an inch of a complaint in. He felt the doctor tense out of pure shock as he nestled his cheek against the plump yet soft skin of his chest, heaving long (over dramatic), but content sighs.

Veritas wanted to be mad, he *should* be. Though when he moved to scold Kakavasha for getting in bed without showering when he just came from outside or even demand an explanation for treating him like a pillow, his traitorous body draped a hand over the small of his back. He rubbed up and down the length of Kakavasha's spine, it elicited a shudder from the blonde, and Veritas hummed in observation.

"I might as well discard the rest of the pillows on our bed," is the only snide remark he made, but there isn't the usual stoney firmness whenever they had banter like this. Kakavasha chuckled, as he shifted. He repositioned his head, tilting his cheek up to properly glance at his lover now that they're in a more intimate position.

Navy strands slightly obscure his vision, but Veritas does not take the initiative to brush them entirely out of his face. He's clearly occupied with very important matters right now, so Kakavasha will. He tenderly swept Veritas' hair to the side, without his laurels in place, it did seem to pose a challenge to read properly. Either way, messy hair or not, accented with gold or scantily clad in a robe, Kakavasha will offer his thanks to Idrila for crafting the doctor's pristine physique. He rests his hand on the column between shoulder and neck once he's done.

Words aren't Kakavasha's strong suit, not in this area at least. Despite how anal Veritas is about absolutely everything, that man finds a way to twist his comments into proclamations of love. It's a talent, it sounds so genuine, and it makes Kakavasha crack a tear every single time too. So the best he can muster is, "You're the hottest man to ever live."

"Wrong," Veritas replied tersely, moving his hand from the other's back and suddenly thick fingers brushing through blonde locks. "To support my claim, the evidence is right under my nose and it has been for a very long time."

Kakavasha flushed, "Is that humour I'm hearing? Funny, but corny. Five points!"

Oddly enough, no retort this time either. However, Veritas does grab his chin and gently capture his lips in a slow, languid kiss. Kakavasha catches his breath before lying down on his pillow once more, where sleep does eventually catch up to him.

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Night terrors had gotten easier to deal with as time passed since Penacony.

Well, he did *fine* with them on his own, but since moving in with Veritas, he never noticed how much he had improved. How they had become less of an open wound and more of a scar that's healing, genuinely healing.

When he jolts awake this time, his breathing is fast, his heart is pounding, but he breathes. He takes a moment and *breathes*, before weaselling his way out of Veritas' inviting arms for a moment to finally change out of the clothes he'd been wearing since morning. Yesterday morning, considering what time it was now.

As much as he wants to go back to sleep, the dark crevices of his mind tell him not to, that there is a danger lurking in the shadows, even in the comfort of his bedroom with the love of his life, that he will forever be unsafe, forever be hunted down by whoever for whatever. *It'll do more harm than good to force yourself*, he remembers Veritas telling him so he listens. He opens his phone, equips the blue light glasses he actually recalled to buy yesterday, and browses for new job listings.

It's very mundane, but it's enough to keep Kakavasha thinking. He doesn't think to text back anyone who could have contacted him while he was sleeping, but once he finishes up with looking for today, his mind wanders.

Sometimes, he can't believe this is all real.

He truly wonders if he woke up from that sweet dream, if all of this is the reality that he gets to experience moving forward. The idea of him *moving forward* seems a little unbelievable to himself, but he's doing so much now, so much that Aventurine couldn't do, but *Kakavasha* can, and he's proud. Wow, proud.

Not to mention, Veritas.

He glances over, it's almost comedic how peaceful he looks right now. That scowl that he's so familiar with whenever he's picked up Veritas after a class has been replaced with what he could describe as the most blissful he's ever seen anyone. He could definitely believe that Veritas is real, despite his... Quirks, he has a good heart and has been working endlessly hard to serve everyone with many accomplishments under his belt.

What seems unreal to Kakavasha is the fact that he's here right now because of Veritas, all because of a slip of paper, he found his way out of the gaping black hole of Nihilism and back to where his heart always belonged.

He attaches himself back to Veritas' side, interlacing their fingers. When he observes the small rise and fall of his chest, how he digs the pads of his fingers into Kakavasha's knuckles, with a peeved utterance of "You think too loud"...

In celebration, he kisses Veritas' forehead and wakes up with his lips searing hot against his beloved's skin.

... He knows for sure that this is real. It rivals the shadows and quells his hurting.