

Church had always been proud of his horns. Hard not to be, sin aside. Even as a babe, they were the cut above the rest of the litter Murmur had been nurturing, nubs where the rest still had smooth little tops, waiting for that fateful little day when the first sign of their own would come on in, bumps beneath velveteen softness.

Destined to grow big and elegant, smug in satisfaction when the rest kits didn't develop the hallmark precursors to a grand crown. Even as a youngling, he'd tended to them with the sort of ardor one might a most treasured possession. One of a kind. Precious beyond comprehension. Mindful not to catch them on doorways or snag them on clothing, even built an entire nightly routine around them. Curated soft brushes and coarse ones to buff and file away any loose horn that had begun to peel and shed. Splashed out on lotions that he'd diligently and carefully, massage into the sensitive base of them and work out toward the tips.

Again, and again. As candles in their ornate, peculiar holders he collected, burned and waned and finally burned low. Dipping long, thin fingers into various pots and smearing the wax into his palms before he applied it to the ridged curves. Humming a nondescript melody he'd heard a while ago, and could never quite get out of his head. As much as he'd tried, but there was something terrible in a good song wasn't there? They had their fair share of talent down here.

In a way, it was a reverent sort of self-care. An intimate moment of privacy without any explicit connotations attached. He lived a strange and precarious life, high strung and highly charged. Where he was judged to be a living, breathing work of art as much as an unattainable dream one could rent, if only for a night. But this, this was all for him. A form of love. Beyond all the oils and lotions he massaged into his pale skin, to keep it soft and perfumed, for the pleasure and delight of others.

His horns, and their ornamentation were just for him, really. Anyone else's enjoyment of them was a secondary, irrelevant thought.

Perhaps it was ridiculous to put so much self-worth into something that could, with one fatal misstep of hooved feet or an incensed and out of control patron or stranger, become cracked beyond repair. Taking with it whatever measure of peace and tranquility Church kept under lock and key. But then, the artist was predisposed to tangle their entire identity into both canvas and brush, as much as the musician made their ribcage the harp and violin. The silky, enchanting melody a second heartbeat filled to the brim with their very soul.

How many had come apart when the masterpiece of their mind translated poorly to paint, the shreds and scraps of canvas and broken wood a bitter, manic reflection of an artist's unraveling. Or when there was no standing ovation at the end of the performance of a lifetime?

A performer putting condensing their worth into their appearance seemed an arbitrary point to take a stand against. Or begrudge themselves on.

He was much the same way, when it came to preparation and care, to their decoration. The final part of his morning routine, once he'd agonized over makeup and outfits. Gone through the tedious, but enjoyable, motions of squeezing himself into them and applied the last lick of eyeliner.

Clasps and pointed horn caps that were tight but not too tight, lest they bite into the keratin a little too hard and left a mark he couldn't quite buff out. Rich gold glittering a certain way in the low light, that'd render the precious almost molten to the eye beneath the haze of fire and dazzling stage lights. Dripping with large beguiling purple amethysts, and haunting yellow diamonds to match his eyes. Looping chains which tinkled softly when he tilted his head, or moved across a much venerated stage with feline, liquid grace. Sometimes he attached engraved coins or other small, innocuous trinkets to them, to add to the music they created.

Occasionally, his clients would bring him horn decorations as proof of their mercantile devotion, along with equally dazzling tiered necklaces, bespoke rings and dainty bangles for both wrist and feet. Some would tailor to his tastes, hoping to earn a coveted moment of true, unfiltered adoration — while others would pick things that they'd like to see him in, mostly their own colors and preferences, a little piece of ownership and possession carefully affixed to him for so long as the money could counter the ticking clock.

He had sets for special occasions too. Pink quartz and crimson rubies for Matentines, set in gleaming rose gold. Moonstone and cornflower blue sapphires for Mochi Moon, trimmed with frosted silver. Obsidian and Garnet for All Sinner's Day, set in polished black precious metal. Carefully coordinated with outfits and make up to match. Most might've assumed that Church placed emphasis on his outfits and built around them. And, Church wouldn't begrudge them that. It was a truth for most who lived in Burrowgatory, they lived and died by fabric choice and the cut of the cloth.

But, for Church, the outfit was more of an accessory. His horns were the statement, the main attraction. His most beloved and adored feature.