Dear readers, I hope you enjoy this fanfic while AO3 is down <3
This is a SFW Orufrey piece, Spoiler Free!
When AO3 is back, you can find this work on my AO3 @ archonsoflove
(I'm also posting/uploading my works slowly on Tumblr)

Love, Dan

Tender Love & Care

Olruggio is quiet as he slips into the kitchen well past midnight. These night owlish hours are commonplace for him, but he has skipped dinner one too many times this week already and he fears if he does not eat now, he will collapse.

The fireplace still crackles with life, ash glimmering in the dark, and he moves to the pantry, carefully opening it, to find leftovers from dinner; a hearty spread of cheese, cured meats and fresh bread. Soup still simmers on the stove, left for him to find. Qifrey knows him far too well. With Silver Eve so close, Olruggio works himself to a standstill with preparations, and so, no one disturbs him, lest they break his concentration.

Stars knows what happens when he loses his thoughts—he throws all sense to the wind and flees to the grassy hills outside the atelier, questioning his very purpose in life. And then he'll return, deflated and ready to lie down for a few days, before returning to his office.

Really, he is well aware it is not the best work ethic, but don't all great witches go through such periods of turmoil?

Olruggio sighs, leaning against the countertop. Lifting the lid of the pot, he takes in a deep breath. Chicken soup; something mild for the stomach. He smells pepper, garnishing the soft aroma of vegetables, harvested fresh from their garden, as he ladles soup into the deep bowl left out for him, and his stomach growls.

When last had he eaten? This morning? Well, that couldn't be right—

"Up late again?"

Olruggio startles at Qifrey's voice, coming from just over his shoulder, entirely unexpected. He fumbles the ladle, and soup spills across his hand and the countertop.

"*Stars*, that is hot." Olruggio steps away from the stove, and knocks into Qifrey. The back of his hand throbs, scalded, and he turns to the basin, to turn on the common tap. Water is cool, cleansing, and he sighs again, closing his eyes. "Sorry, I didn't know you were awake."

Qifrey, bless his heart, stands still, watching Olruggio, eye wide for a moment, before he comes over to help. He finds a small pack of ice from the cooling boxes stowed away beneath the sink, and wraps it in a dishtowel.

"Here." He passes it to Olruggio once he's dried his hands. "This should help. Does it hurt very badly?"

"No, no." Olruggio brushes it off, but it *does* hurt. He flexes his fingers. Bends them. At the very least, he can still work, despite what will be a few days of discomfort. "It shouldn't be all too bad with a proper wrapping."

"And all you wanted was dinner," Qifrey's smile is a sad one, and those blue eyes are dark with what seems to be guilt. "If I'd come to your rooms with food earlier, this wouldn't've happened."

"You're not at fault. When it's this late, something disastrous is bound to happen." Olruggio shakes water off his hand, and holds it up to the light. "It wasn't hot enough to blister, at least."

"Good." Qifrey cleans the counter and turns the stove off. Dishing soup, he carefully works on stowing the rest away, all while Olruggio finds the medicine cabinet, to wrap his hand. "Ah, let me do that."

"I can manage just fine," Olruggio tries to protest, but Qifrey is already sitting him down on one of the rickety wooden chairs by the dining table, taking his hand in his own.

Qifrey's touch is tender, and his attention keen, as he gently takes salve and dabs it onto the burn. Olruggio hisses a little, sucking air between teeth, but he stays still, letting Qifrey work. His fingers are light, and his touch soft—it has a gentle unfurling of affection blooming heavy in his gut.

Oh, desire is so hard to quell. Longing has always been hard to extinguish, and this closeness does nothing to abate the ache in Olruggio's heart.

"All done." Qifrey secures the gauze with a small clip. Olruggio doesn't miss the way his fingers linger, tracing his wrist and the rise of bone there. It sends a small shudder through him, and for a moment, their eyes meet, and all seems clear as day.

Why is love so very daunting to make itself known? Olruggio's tongue holds each word he wants to say, but the syllables catch in his throat before they can be uttered.

"Right."

"You wanted me to come with you?" Qifrey turns his gaze down as he asks, overcome. Even in the low candlelight, Olruggio notices the soft flush gracing the sharp angles of Qifrey's face. "Perhaps I can help."

"I'd like that." And Olruggio truly means it. He may be a shutaway when working, deeply focused and ready to bat away unwarranted interruptions, but Qifrey's presence has always calmed him. Moored him. "Do you remember when we were in the Great Hall, and Master Beldaruit told us to impress him?"

"Just as he asked of our girls?" Qifrey smiles then, a soft, quick upturn of the lips. He's beautiful when he smiles. "Yes, I do remember. We stayed up until dawn for a week. I think we slept incredibly well after that."

"When I work like this, I remember what we were like back then."

"Young?"

"Wet behind the ears," Olruggio laughs, a hushed thing. "And counting down the days until we'd be able to leave and make something of ourselves."

"I think we've done quite well in that regard, haven't we?" Something foreign turns Qifrey's tone, saddened. "Even if the girls are a handful, and even if the world seems to be changing so startingly quick, we have managed."

"Aye." Olruggio searches Qifrey's gaze. How he wishes he could lose himself in those eyes. He wishes he could kiss the soft from between those delicate brows away, if only to see him smile again. "Come. I don't have all night to finish my work."

"It's well past midnight, already, Olruggio," comes Qifrey's exasperated reply.

The moment breaks, and the spell lifts. They take dinner with them to Olruggio's part of the atelier, snuffing candles as they go, lest they wake the girls.

Qifrey settles beside Olruggio, and pours over his work. He picks up a pen, and drafts the spell with common ink, to feel its shape and purpose over casting it.

All the while, Olruggio cannot seem to focus. Instead, he places his chin in a hand, and watches candlelight dance across the sharp lines of Qifrey's face. The arch of his brow, the curve of his jaw, and the bow of his lips; all of it is a terrible distraction.

For once, Olruggio hopes Qifrey will notice, too.

"I'm starting to think I can't be of much help, really." Qifrey places his pen in the inkwell, and sits back, crossing his arms. "A kain piece for your thoughts?"

"You are a terrible distraction."

Perhaps exhaustion is what fuels boldness.

"Really?" Qifrey shakes his head a little. His fingers busy themselves with the hem of his robes, and Olruggio finds he pulls at a loose thread; a nervous habit. "Then I doubt we'll get much done tonight. We should rest."

"We should." But Olruggio makes no move to stand. They sit close enough for their knees to bump, and Olruggio feels the warmth of Qifrey's body through their robes. "Qifrey, I—"

"—Let's not say it."

Olruggio's heart may as well be upon the floor, dark red sullying the tiles.

"We haven't said a thing of this," Olruggio sits back, and waves a hand between them, "in all the time we've known each other."

But love has always been here, settled in our very bones and this home we now call ours.

"Oh, I know." There's something deeply mournful in Qifrey's tone that Olruggio can't quite place—Regret? Guilt? "You would think it'd be easy for us to speak of it all plainly, yet here we are."

Love makes itself known in touches, and the way we care for one another, doesn't it?

"Here we are." Olruggio takes in a breath. Mulls over his words, feeling them out, before speaking. "Qifrey, you can always confide in me. I'll always listen."

Qifrey looks up, finally. "I know that, too."

"Then," Olruggio reaches out, and takes Qifrey's hand in his own. He holds it tightly, knowing Qifrey will recoil—why does he avoid touch so ardently? "Allow me this?"

"What?" Breathlessness takes Qifrey, and Olruggio has never seen a prettier shade overcome another's complexion.

How many questions they have for each other.

"You care for me. For this Atelier, but so rarely do you let others care for you." Olruggio shifts closer, chair creaking as he does. He smells ink and parchment on Qifrey, and as he lifts that willow-boned hand to his lips, he swears he tastes conjuring ink upon the tips of fingers.

He swears he tastes magic.