

Varro had to repeat himself three whole times before Nikon finally caved and looked up from where he was tinkering with his latest invention. He'd been standing beside Nikon waving something in his face for at least twenty minutes by now, which meant Varro had already overstayed his welcome by fifteen entire minutes and all Nikon wanted to do was get back to attaching the knife to his roomba so he could set it free to take care of the weird creatures that had manifested under his pantry. Too many crumbs and too much time spent away, he guesses.

"Are you listening?" Varro repeated, once again — Nikon's already lost count of the number of times he's asked him. The answer is still no.

Nikon gives him an annoyed groan anyway. "Ughhh.... What?"

"For the last and final time, I'm asking you if you're free next week," Varro says, waving the papers in Nikon's face once again.

"Uhh... why?" Nikon asks slowly, not sure if he really wants to be asking at all. He knows Varro wants him to take the papers and look at them for himself. He also knows Varro won't leave him alone until he's heard everything, so he keeps his attention on the pink prince for now.

"Becaaaaauuuuuse~ I have two tickets for a week long all expenses paid luxury cruise to Ikonas, leaving from Vallasza on Monday afternoon, and *you're* coming with me!" Varro says proudly, puffing out his chest to emphasize his own self importance. "Paid for by yours truly, of course."

Nikon doesn't respond for a moment, stares incredulously at the idiot prince and furrows his brow. "Uh... you said that was the last time you'd ask, right? Does that mean I don't have to answer?"

"What!" Varro frowns. "What do you mean? I'm inviting you on a *luxury cruise*! It's going all the way to Nova Ara!"

"Take Olympus." Nikon turns back to his roomba. And Varro makes a low frustrated grunt.

"But I'm asking *you*," Varro says, quietly. "I'd like to take you with me. I think it'd be fun." He pauses for a moment, thinking carefully about his next words. "You can unwind and relax away from here, drink in hand, just you, me, and the ocean. How's that sound?"

"That sounds... the opposite of relaxing." Nikon groans again, slumping over his desk and looking defeated. Something tells him he's not going to be able to get any more work done today, not with Varro standing beside him trying to tug on his sleeve. "Why me?"

"I thought you could use a break," Varro says, canting a hip. "You know, what with saving the world and all. Come with me, come on, please? It will be fun!" He gives him an exceptionally

pathetic look, which — ugh, Nikon *hates* because sometimes if Varro gets the angle just right he can be particularly weak to the gods damn puppy dog Varro face and—

“Ughhh, fine,” Nikon groans again. “Fine! Just... aughhh, I don’t know. I know you’re not going to take no for an answer.”

“That’s right!” Varro beams at him. “But don’t worry, I made sure there’s something especially fun in it for you. The ship is full of fun engineering surprises, and I’ve already talked to the crew for a private tour and all that. That’s something you’d be interested in, yeah?”

“Oh,” Nikon begins, and finds he isn’t sure what to say. “Uh, I mean, I guess.”

“Great! Make sure you pack for a week in warm weather, and some things you can swim in. I’ll take you to Vallasza on Monday if you meet me by the East gate at 10am!”

And that’s how Nikon ended up standing on the beach, suitcase in hand, waiting for Varro to stop chatting up his fan club. He can’t *believe* he agreed to this, can’t believe he’s about to board a cruise and spend an entire week — seven whole days! — with *Varro*, isolated away from everyone else, anyone who could save him. He hopes Varro at least got them two separate rooms. No, Nikon knows he would never do that. He hopes Varro at least got them separate *beds*. He could at least do that, right?

“Come on, Varro, they’re boarding,” Nikon calls out to the prince, who is still flirting shamelessly with a group of girls who may or may not be trying to convince him to smuggle them on board with him.

“Ah, terribly sorry, ladies,” Varro feigns lament, taking a girl’s hand in his, “I am being called away. But you will be informed of my return, of course. I hope to see your smiling faces again soon. I will be thinking of you.” The girls giggle and blush and Nikon almost gags. *How* do those lines work on them?

Finally, Varro leaves them to join Nikon by the boarding line. “I’m here! I’m so glad you made it.”

“I know you’d show up at my door if I didn’t,” Nikon grumbles. “Do I really have a choice?”

“Nikon, don’t be such a downer.” Varro smacks him on the back, which doesn’t hurt at all, probably because Nikon is too used to Olympus’s bone crunching encouragement smacks, or because Varro is weak as hell, but deep down Nikon knows that’s not exactly true.

He follows Varro up into the ship, silently saying goodbye to any chance of peace he’ll have for the next seven days, and walks inside. He could turn around and back out now, maybe it’s not too late. Varro would be upset but he’d get over it. Maybe this isn’t a good idea, maybe he

should just tell Varro he's sorry and message Olympus to tell him to take his place instead. He's sure maybe Ralith would want to go, he would appreciate this better than Nikon can. Nikon trembles and gears himself up like he's about to open his mouth to suggest it before Varro stops in front of a large door in a hallway and smiles at him.

"I'm really glad you came," he says, and Nikon closes his mouth. "It's been a while since we could hang out together, just the two of us. I know cruises aren't really your thing, so it means a lot that you're here."

"...Yeah," is all Nikon can say. Now he feels bad he was thinking about backing out. And he appreciates the moment for a grand total of the ten seconds it takes for Varro to finally open the door with the room key, and the second he sees the fatal flaw of their enormous, giant suite, Nikon almost screams.

Through the hall from the door leading to the bedroom is one singular king sized bed.

Nikon drops his suitcase at the entryway and darts into the other rooms looking for another bed. Closet. Closet. Bathroom. Den area. No other bedroom.

"Oh, that's strange," Varro says innocuously, like nothing is wrong here. "I thought there'd be another bedroom. Well, at least it's a large bed."

"Ughhhhh," Nikon groans, "No. I'm taking the couch in this room." He dumps his stuff on the floor in the den and sits down on the couch. It's not very comfortable.

"What? No, don't be silly, Nikon. It's a huge bed," Varro says, neatly unpacking his stuff and then turning to wink at Nikon. "Perfect for the both of us to roll around in."

"I'm leaving." Nikon gets up and tries to make a dash for the door. "I'll tell Olympus to come or I'll see what Ralith is doing, I'm sure they'd like this a lot better than me!"

"Nikon!" Varro dashes after him and grabs his arm, "You said you'd stay!"

"I said I'd come on a cruise, I didn't agree to sharing a bed with you!"

"Okay, take the couch then!" Varro stumbles over his words, "Just... don't leave. Please?" Nikon stops pulling against his grip at the sound of Varro sounding so pathetic again. Ugh. Awful. He yanks his arm away.

"Ugh, fine. I'll set up on the couch," he mumbles, walking back into the room. At least it's a huge room, and despite the open concept floor plan, Nikon could at least have some privacy away from Varro. Varro gives him some space to unpack and set up his things. There's a small balcony in the bedroom, so Varro steps out to check out the view. The weather is nice, and he's

out there long enough for the ship to begin sailing. The departure horn sounds, and the ship's engine kicks in, pulling away from shore. Varro leans over the balcony to see the people on the beach waving after the ship, looking small from how far down they are in comparison. The breeze as the ship starts to pick up speed is refreshing.

"Nikon, you should come out here," Varro steps back inside, "The breeze feels really— what are you doing?"

Nikon pokes his head out from where he's built an impressive blanket fort with things he's found in the den and in the closet. "What?"

"That's fun. Can I come in?"

"Not enough room." Nikon retreats back inside. Varro sighs.

"I'm going to explore the ship, then," Varro says, heading for the door. "Promise you won't jump off the balcony and fly away or something?"

"No promises," Nikon says from the blanket fort. Varro doesn't respond, and Nikon can hear the door open and shut. He sighs inside his cozy blanket haven. This was a safe space. Varro would not be allowed in here. Whenever the idiot prince would try to pull something, Nikon could just escape in here. Okay, good game plan.

Nikon doesn't remember dozing off but he must have, because when he wakes up, it's dark. He yawns and pokes his head out of the blanket fort. "Varro?" No answer. Nikon crawls out and gets up to look around the suite. No sign of Varro. He must be still out, and Nikon was starting to get hungry, so he supposes it's time to find something to eat too.

The cruise ship is massive. Nikon walks through a grand hallway and down two sets of stairs before he even enters the main room. There are several restaurants and a cafeteria with plates of food, so Nikon takes a few to eat at an empty table. The food is pretty good, not the best he's ever had, he's sure the food at the restaurants might be better, but this way he doesn't have to talk to anyone. When he's done, he puts the plates away and resumes his search for Varro. He passes by groups of people enjoying drinks and conversation on his way out, shying away from anyone who got too close to him, before entering another room with a massive bar. And that's when he hears the cheering, and his heart drops into his stomach with dread, because in the distance he sees a group of people laughing and clapping and Nikon *hopes* to every higher power that it's not Varro, but deep down he knows it's going to be him in the center of that group.

And sure enough, what is the idiot prince doing but laughing in the center of the circle, lying on a table with his shirt unbuttoned as someone pours tequila onto his stomach so someone else can

lap it off him. Nikon's face pales for a moment when Varro looks up and makes eye contact, and Nikon can tell that the prince is absolutely shit-faced drunk.

"Nikon!" he yells out from the crowd, "take a shot with me!" He laughs, and Nikon frowns.

"Absolutely not," he yells back, because it's hard to grumble audibly over the sound of drunk people cheering. Someone bumps into him and Nikon recoils into himself. Varro sits up on the table, looking like he's about to get off and go over to Nikon, but he gets distracted by a shirtless hot blonde girl who walks up with a full shot glass nestled in the center of her bra.

"Take a shot with *me*, Prince Varro~" Her voice is teasing and sultry, and Nikon sees the way Varro's eyes light up when she places a lime wedge between her lips, holding the rind with her teeth. She tilts her head to show Varro the way she's salted her neck in a messy stripe. Varro hops off the table, teetering a bit as he drunkenly finds his footing, and then reaches out to gently cup her face.

"What's your name?" he asks with a charming smile. He's a lot taller than her standing up, so he has to lean down to hear her over the crowd.

She giggles, "It's Natasha, my prince~" And Nikon almost heaves at the way Varro turns his head to lick the salt off Natasha's neck in a long, slow swipe, and then bends down to take the shot glass from her chest with his teeth. He knocks back the shot as the group around him applauds and yells, and when Varro takes the shot glass out of his mouth he just tosses it behind him for someone to catch. Natasha leans in and Varro takes the lime wedge from her lips with his in what looks like a slow kiss, and Nikon swears they could be making out until Varro pulls away with the lime rind in his mouth. Something inside Nikon flares up and he doesn't like it.

Varro tosses the rind away carelessly and Nikon retreats into the corner of the room. There's too many people drunkenly screaming around him. Varro seems to notice this and manages to wander his way over to where Nikon sits alone with a drink in his hand, far away from the commotion.

"Hey," Varro greets him, needing to lean against the table just to balance himself. "You shouldn't drink anything given to you, might be drugged."

"I ordered this, idiot," Nikon responds harshly. "And you're one to talk, you're licking people."

Varro laughs, and even his laugh sounds slurred. "I'm just looking out for this cute face," he reaches over to pinch Nikon's cheek playfully, but Nikon swats him away.

“Are you done? You’re drunk and you should stop,” Nikon says, trying not to sound *too* worried about him. The question is lost on him however because in that moment, music starts to play, and Varro leans in closer to hear him.

“What? I can’t hear you,” Varro says, and Nikon slides him his water.

“Drink water! You’re drunk!” he tries to yell, and Varro leans in even closer, the combination of the music and the cheering around him as well as his blatant drunkenness making it hard to hear Nikon’s already quiet voice. Nikon is about to repeat himself *again* when he realizes how close Varro is to him, how a flushed red overtakes his features and his eyes are half lidded, lips slightly parted, and oh *no* Nikon needs to pull away from him.

“Come drink with me,” Varro manages, and Nikon just shoves the glass of water at him. Varro takes it on reflex but doesn’t drink it.

“I’ll drink water with you.” Nikon says, “But that’s it. And you’ve had enough!”

Varro only laughs and leans away from him to head back to the party, but Nikon grabs his wrist before he can stop himself. Varro looks back, expectant but a bit confused, with some wonder in his eye as Nikon somehow holds his gaze (it’s the alcohol, he swears!) before he realizes that’s what he’s doing, and promptly looks away and lets him go. Varro smiles at him again, and says, “I’ll be good.” Before he disappears back into the crowd again.

Nikon groans, buries his face in his hands for a minute, before downing his drink and sliding off the chair. He sees Varro standing on the table now about to show off to the crowd how fast he can drink, which already makes Nikon panic and means he’s going to have to babysit him all night.

Ugh, how does Olympus do this? Nikon smacks himself in the face to gear himself up for a long night and goes to chase down his idiot prince.