

The several following days seemed twice as lonely in the spacious house, with Leonard being treated in the hospital. It turned out that the painful muscle contraction was likely caused by the exposure to powerful spells - the one Ryan used, and then the reversal of the effect - and the excitement afterwards contributed a little, too. The specialist said that the Angel was in an excellent health and a second artery spasm was unlikely to happen - if he was left alone by magic. Mostly left alone, anyway.

When Leonard finally returned, he was a little paler, a little thinner and a lot more quiet. Ryan also couldn't not notice that he grew a little less affectionate. Instead of seeking out his lover's embrace, he just took his medicines - they still prescribed him something, just in case - started doing early morning exercises aside his regular workout and became somewhat withdrawn, often holing up in his room for a few hours.

Ryan knew he blamed him. Why shouldn't he? If only he had managed to perform the right spell right from the start, none of this would have happened.

Not only had he made a poor attempt at giving Leonard his youth back, but he had endangered the Angel's own health even further.

He became obsessed with finding a cure, though he didn't dare test out anything on Leonard. Next time he did it, he'd have to be completely sure that it would work, that it wouldn't cause anything like last time.

Gradually, the doctor's days started merging one into another as he traced his steps, reread and re-learned the basics, studied crossovers between genetics and magic, magic and genetics.

In the early hours of the morning he'd leave to his office, only to return late at night and revise all that he had done.

He was the leading specialist in this sort of thing. There had to be cure. And if there was a cure, he would find it.

Something clinked at his elbow as he was sitting at his desk again, poring over papers and digital documents. He nearly jumped, then realized it was his faithful Lucy, bringing another cup of coffee. The strong scent lingered in the air.

She lingered, too, all polite, smart and pretty; she changed so much in such a short time. Now her hair was shorter and usually free, framing her cute face, and a touch of color accentuated her eyes. The top button of her blouse was undone, still not showing anything but lending her a touch of allure.

"How is Mr Sallows doing?"

At the interruption, Ryan sighed, taking off his glasses to rub his eyes. What time was it, even?

With a polite thanks, he took the cup of coffee.

"Better...? The same..." He sighed. "I... I'm not sure, honestly." Lucy had known about the heart attack, and she had been quite worried over Leonard. Ryan supposed it was natural as, while the blond had been a regular at his office, he and Lucy had interacted quite often.

He gazed down at his papers and data again. "Whenever I think I'll discover something helpful I just run against another wall."

"Maybe... I don't want to impose, sir, but isn't it possible that we just started from the wrong end...?" Lucy inquired quietly. "We keep trying to restore him and... Some things just can't be restored. Once the damage is done, it stays like that. We don't seem to be able to de-age people. Perhaps... we should just concentrate on trying to stop the process."

"I've thought about it, too." Ryan shook his head. "Trying to keep the process from going at the speed it's going, granting Leonard twenty or thirty more years... I've thought about it, but so far I still haven't found something that is viable. And I don't dare use him for an experiment again. I don't think his body could take it."

"Yes..." Lucy chewed on her lower lip. She wanted to do something for the lovely gentleman who did so much for her, but she was a scientist first and foremost, and studied little magic.

"How did he even end up with the condition?" she asked, not knowing much about Leonard's background. Neither him, nor Ryan were advertising the fact that the charming elderly man was in fact a contract killer.

Ryan glanced at her, before looking back down at his coffee cup. Should he tell her? Probably not. He didn't want her to think ill of Leonard, and it was something that was rather personal.

"He... he helped me a few years back. And was cursed because of it." He supposed that that wasn't too far from the truth.

"Oh," She winced a little. Curses were thankfully rare, but a lot of rumor surrounded them. They tended to be strong spells.

"I'm just running on speculations, but curses can be lifted, no? I think- some are like a ban on a person, or he needs to fulfill a task in order to remove it?" If that was the case, it shouldn't be hard to get rid of it, but the struggle that was going on for months suggested that it probably wasn't an easy task.

Ryan looked up. "Fulfil a task, some tradition, or ritual, yes..." Though Leo had said that no assassin had ever broken his contract willingly in years, the fact that they could break the contract had to mean that it had happened already, no? And if it had happened once, maybe it had happened in a situation alike Leonard's!

At once he got up from his seat, turning to Lucy with a wide smile and kissing her forehead. "Lucy, you are genius!" He congratulated her before dashing out of his office and grabbing his coat on the way out.

He had a brat to go pester.

Said brat still didn't look much like a fifty years old wise scholar, though the Pacman shirt and half an egg roll hanging from his mouth effectively covered the hacker genius part. He allowed Ryan in without a fuss, too. The usual arrogance was gone from his dark eyes as well. A welcome change.

"How's Leonard doing?" he inquired, almost politely.

Ryan had been pleasantly surprised with how he had been received, but he chose not to comment on it, lest it would make Cooper alter his behaviour.

"Not... good. I thought I had found a way to reverse it all, but it was ephemeral. And it placed a large strain on his body. Honestly, he seems to have lost interest in even attempting another procedure. Though it's not like I can blame him..."

"I know Leo, and he was never interested in any sort of cure to begin with," Cooper pointed out neutrally. "He just accepted it as a punishment for his betrayal. He always took everything in stride. However-" He settled down in his chair and steepled his fingers.

"What's happening to him isn't very just to begin with. Lawful, but not really just. Don't even open your mouth, I never liked it in the first place, but the law is what we live by. It binds us. But sometimes, the law can be wrong. I managed to contact every single Angel across the globe, informing them about the situation. I even managed to reach the Elders... Everybody agreed. This has never happened before, but the times are a-changing." He rolled his eyes with a grimace.

"Bottom line is... I was authorized to show you all the runes and rituals we use. You can even contact other scholars."

Ryan had indeed opened his mouth to protest about Cooper's definition of lawful, though soon he closed it as the younger looking guy kept on.

At the end of it, Ryan could only feel hopeful.

"Then I need to know just how far back your records go." He said at once. "It's impossible that you were granted the ability to break your contracts and Leo is the first to ever do so! And it's impossible that in all of your kind's existence, never once one of you came across someone who didn't deserve death! There has to be some ritual, some legend, anything about what to do when the termination of a contract is actually just!"

"The records go back to two thousand years at least, though obviously the farther we go back, the scarce the documentation becomes. And think about it for a while - we kill evildoers. Murderers mostly. All throughout history, those aren't known for their warring conscience. They'll sooner find a reason to justify themselves than to consider what they have actually done. People work like that." Cooper huffed.

"There are some two stories where the Angel broke the contract because the target seemed sorry - in both cases, the Angels were murdered by their targets while weakened. You can understand why we don't really believe in people anymore. Breaking the contract sure happens once in a while, but those Angels were traitors."

Ryan shook his head. "There has to be something more. Something not even you know." He said stubbornly. "I'm not going to let Leo die." That was final. "But I do need you to help me sift through your data and your documents." He admitted.

"Something not even *we* know," Cooper sneered. "Sure! Because it's not like we ARE the Angels of Justice! Sure you know better!" He pinched the bridge of his nose.

"You are trying to run so fast, you might just miss the finish line. Actually, one Elder suggested that maybe if we perform an initiation rite on Leonard, magic might recognize the failure. Not everybody can become an Angel. They need to possess a noble and just heart. It certainly never saves one from later corruption, but only people of clear conscience and the will to do right can gain the abilities of an Angel."

Ryan pursed his lips, but listened to the scholar. Honestly, sometimes he still had some difficulty believing that Cooper was, in fact, an Angel. He seemed like a spoiled brat with a devil-may-care attitude more often than not.

Still, if he could help him in getting Leo back in shape, he'd even believe him a saint, if he wished.

"What do you need for that initiation rite?" He asked at once.

"Two other Angels to begin with, but that can be taken care of. Aside that, not much. There's just one small catch... As far as I know, Leo never formally left the order. We are not sure the

initiation would work like that. The problem is, every ritual we have directly affects the individual's mana reserves, and considering Leonard did not react too well to that the last time..."

Ryan knit his eyebrows. Indeed. It could backfire on them and Leonard would be the one affected. Maybe even killed. Ryan wouldn't allow that. He couldn't. But this was by far their best chance.

"I'll... I'll talk to Leo about it. Maybe if we make sure he gets plenty of rest and doesn't exert himself, and if I keep a closer eye on him during the whole procedure we'll be able to keep the worst from happening."

"You do that," Cooper nodded. "You're his doctor, I know you can take good care of him. I'll inform the others and prepare what we need - little things mostly. When Leonard feels ready, he only has to call. The Leaving itself requires another Angel; I'm here or he can choose another. It's all about his wishes, his comfort now. The Order will supply whatever it can." All of a sudden, he looked older. Mature and solemn, like a real scholar of an ancient order of avengers. It probably came with the title.

Ryan nodded. At last they were all supportive of him... Well, if they cared so much why was it that only now was Leonard receiving their aid?!

Sighing, he swallowed his complaints. The past, after all, just couldn't be altered.

That night, when he finally reached home, it was with an already heavy heart. What if Leo refused to try again? What if he thought it too big a risk?

Ignoring all of those "what ifs" for the time being, he finally took in a deep breath before knocking on the Angel's door. "Leo? I... I need to talk to you."

"Ryan- I'll be out in a second." The sound was muffled through the door, but there was something in it... Leonard sounded startled. Not scared or in pain, just- surprised, maybe.

Soon enough, he emerged from his room, in a pair of soft sweatpants and a short bathrobe. His hair was drawn back into a ponytail which made him, if that was even possible, more attractive.

"Ryan-" He stopped, took a breath and smiled a little. "What is it?"

Ryan managed to smile at the blond. It felt like he hadn't seen him in days. And the thought saddened him. It wasn't like he had been there for him either.

"I... I talked with Cooper today. Apparently your order too thinks that what happened to you was unjust."

"Oh." Leonard's jaw fell. "Oh!" he clasped a hand over his mouth and looked away, trying to compose himself. "I- Oh. That's... good news!" He looked back at Ryan, eyes wide. "The entire Order? They all acknowledge me?"

Ryan's smile widened a little. "Yes. From what Cooper said they all do. And we talked, and he suggested that maybe if you went through a Leaving and an Initiation... you could go back to normal."

Leonard glanced around and finding no other suitable surface to lean against, he just draped himself over his lover.

"That... that means so much. Their acceptance. I was afraid... that they saw me as a traitor because of it." He mulled the proposal over then.

"I was thinking about leaving the order... My abilities are mostly gone anyway, and I hoped magic would have mercy... But the Initiation sounds reasonable." He pulled away, looking into Ryan's eyes. "I'll do that. I- want to stay with you as long as possible. Though I hope I'm not going to end up having another heart failure..."

Ryan relished that embrace more than he cared to admit, holding Leo close to him and sighing as he gently caressed his nape and back.

"We'll be careful. I'll be on standby if anything happens, and Cooper suggested that we don't perform both rituals back to back. So that you can rest in-between."

"Hm-mm. Yes, that does sound very reasonable." Leonard nodded and curled his hands around Ryan's waist. Then, he blinked. Frowned a little. Bit his lower lip.

"That... would mean no sex either, right?"

Ryan actually chuckled, raising a hand to brush off some wayward hair strands from the Angel's forehead.

"Looks like it. I honestly don't want to ever again feel aroused only to be frightened out of my wits right after..."

"But I just-" The sentence was bitten off, and Leonard blushed. "I mean... We still could have some beforehand? Or several? I'm just asking because it would be a sad waste to not use what I've worked for. There was a reason for me holing up in my room you know."

Ryan rose an eyebrow, at first confused by his words. When he finally understood their meaning, a blush tinted his cheeks. "Y-you... I..." He struggled for some clearance of mind, taking in a deep breath and sighing. "We really shouldn't risk your health, Leo..."

"As a wise man said once..." The Angel's grin was shameless. "Too late." He embraced his lover and nuzzled his temple.

"I want you. If not today, fine. But I want to be with you. I'm possibly having a midlife crisis, because I find myself craving you at the oddest times. That's when I close my door and start imagining your hands on me, whispering your name and trying to imagine what it'd feel like to become one with you..." His breath was hot against Ryan's ear.

"Should I tell you about my fantasies, Mr Stafford?"

"Leonard." The husky, longing whisper was meant to be a warning, a reminder that he shouldn't risk his life for the sake of something like having sex with Ryan. As soon as he was healthy, they could lock themselves up and not even leave the house for days if Leo so wished.

But with Leo whispering such things and holding him so close, it became too hard to summon the strength of will required to deny the blond what he was proposing.

"I'm in perfect health," Leonard pressed on, sensing the warning. "I exercise, I eat well, I lead a relaxed life, I should be fine. Until there's no magic wreaking havoc on me, I'll probably be okay. Even if you drape me over the bed, pulling up my legs and slowly, very slowly push your hot, hard erection into my body..."

Ryan honestly wondered if it was Leo's heart he should be worried about. By how his own tossed against his ribcage at such suggestions, he wouldn't be all that surprised if it suddenly gave out.

And after such stressful weeks, always fearing, always worrying, there was nothing that enticed him more than the prospect of Leo at his mercy.

Suddenly, he pressed the Angel against the nearest wall, taking his lips in a searing kiss.

"Goddamnit, Leo." He breathed out as he placed his hands on either side of the blonde's head. "I should be looking after your health."

"I think blue balls are actually a medical condition?" Leonard shot back with a huge, silly grin and responded to the kiss eagerly, fisting into Ryan's hair although gently.

"I never-" He flushed again. "I never had the chance to try my little kinks. Trust issues, and more-or-less-immortal contract killers tend to keep their relationships brief. I could die tomorrow. I want to enjoy every moment of life."

"It's not..." Ryan grunted. "And you aren't going to die tomorrow, you idiot." He sighed, cupping Leonard's cheek in his hand. "I haven't done half of the things I want to do to you. But tell me..." He mused in a low voice as he pecked and nibbled on Leo's lower lip. "What would you like me to do to you?"

"Tie my hands up," Leo whispered. "Or pretend I'm unconscious and just do to me whatever you feel like. Put a cock ring on me until I beg for release." He licked his lips, green eyes blazing.

"There are a few more things I could think of, but let's save those for later."

A breathless chuckle actually left the doctor's lips. "You have no idea for how long I have wanted to tie you up." He mused in a seductive whisper, kissing him again just because he could. Who would have known that their kinks would be so complimentary?

"Now's the time, then! Let's pretend you're a wealthy and utterly corrupted doctor who managed to best the assassin sent to kill him for selling dream powder to youngsters," Leonard suggested readily. He loved fiction and history. And giving up control. He always had to be on the top of things, be prepared, be ready, twist every situation to his advantage. It was tiring, and for quite some time, he wished if somebody else would take charge for once. It's just, being a magic-infused contract killer did things to one's love life.

Ryan couldn't help but find the suggestion amusing, as well as the proposition very sexy... He did like to have the upper hand. It was just how he was. At his best he was pondered, at his worst he was a control freak. But maybe... maybe Leo wouldn't mind it as much.

Still smiling, he leaned in to kiss the neck of his lover, letting one hand caress him from his chest to the curve of his waist and back up.

"What an awful man I am then." He mused lowly, before flicking his thumb over the one of the blonde's nipple.

"Do I need a safeword?" Leonard grinned with his eyelids lowered halfway, shuddering from the contact. "And now that I think about it, I still have my khm, work clothes stashed away, if you swing that way. But I'd rather if you didn't cut them off me."

"No, I don't think you will." Ryan mused as he caressed his chest, his lips describing a descending trail. "I think you'll find my punishment quite pleasurable." He pointed out with a chuckle. "And though you look very sexy in your assassin's clothes, Leo, I'd loathe to have your



skin covered in any way, at the moment.” As he whispered, his lips brushed the skin in a sensual caress.

“Perhaps another time then... When you have more patience.” The Angel shrugged and took a step back to pull the belt from his robe. He let the fabric slip off his shoulders, then looped the belt around Ryan’s neck. “Let’s go then, so I could finally get out of the pants, too... I don’t mind if you keep your clothes on.” He began to gently tug his lover toward the bedroom. The door closed behind them with a soft click.

They did enjoy that night immensely. Knowing that after it, they’d both have to adhere to celibacy. Ryan technically didn’t have to, but out of companionship to his lover he also forewent any sexual pleasure.

He and Leo started meeting Cooper more regularly in the meantime, asking and setting the details for Leo’s leaving.

At last, the night for it came. Upon arriving to the address Cooper had given him, though, Ryan couldn’t help but wonder if he hadn’t gotten it wrong. The place was an abandoned warehouse in a shady part of the city. The doctor made sure to double check the address.

"No matter how you look at it, the note will say the same," Leonard assured him. He leaned forward to take in the building through the windshield of Ryan's car.

"The old schemer knows me well. This is as cool as it gets. Come, no point in wasting time. Worry for me if you'd like something to worry about." He opened the door and slipped out, admiring the hulking mass of the deserted storage facility. "Perfection. On with the lightshow."

Ryan supposed there was truth to Leonard's words. Still, what the hell was with the strange setting? And with Leonard's obvious delight in it...

"You like this place?" He couldn't help but ask as they approached the behemoth of a construction.

"It's kinda classy," the Angel shrugged cheerfully. "We old guys have a lot of nostalgia. Doesn't this look like someplace where mysterious things happen? Murders, secret meetings, magic? Before you say anything, we're safe. I'm sure Alex is in there waiting already, and he checked the building from roof to cellar, if it has any. And, I brought a gun." His teeth flashed in the darkness.

"Urban decay has a peculiar type of beauty. Seeing manmade places crumbling to dust can get you into a philosophical mood." Leonard started up at the missing windows.

"I've been around for five decades. You have no idea how much the world changed ever since I was a kid."

Ryan rose a skeptical brow. From where he stood, Leonard just liked places that had a dramatic flair to it. He loved putting on a show.

Though still he wasn't particularly worried. He knew that no matter how bratty Cooper might be he'd never place him and Leo in danger while meaning to perform an already dangerous enough ritual for the blond.

"Yes, I guess it is a little nostalgic." He admitted, trying to eye the thing through Leo's eyes, even if it was considerably harder for him.

"Probably built before you were even born," Leonard guessed, then he reached into his jacket and fished out a flashlight. "Let's go."

The light lined up their path as they advanced further into the warehouse. It was mostly empty, save for some forgotten and probably already decapitated equipment and trashed furniture. The inside space was separated to several rooms and seemingly nothing signaled where Cooper could be. Leonard glanced around, then stopped and switched off the flashlight.

Now, the glowing markings on the floor became a lot more noticeable.

The Angel crouched down next to the first one and chuckled, following the trail with his eyes. "He's waiting already. Just as I knew he would."

Ryan rose an eyebrow at the markings, but didn't comment on them. His work would be to watch over Leo's health. He had with him a backpack with a first aid kit when it came to heart attacks and the like, and he sure as hell wasn't going to let Leo die. But the magic part of it would all have to do with the assassins.

He just hoped everything would turn out ok.

The glowing trail lead unerringly to their maker, up some stairs and into a spacious area. This place was clean, only the peeling painting, dust and some dried leaves littering the ground.

Except for the very middle where, with a large, elaborate and glowing spell-circle beneath his feet, a dark figure stood shrouded in a hooded cloak that swept the ground. In a wider circle, tea lights were lit that illuminated the surroundings somewhat

"I have been waiting for a long time for your arrival," he said, and Ryan honestly couldn't tell if it was Cooper's voice or not. It sounded familiar, but a lot older, more mature.

Leonard didn't seem to have doubts, though. He walked closer and bowed deeply. "My apologies, Master. My skills have faded through the years."

"Lies and slander. You enjoy making me wait." The figure strolled forth and once he stepped out of the circle, Leo hugged him tight.

Standing a step behind Leo, Ryan witnessed the whole exchange. So... was that really Cooper? It seemed like it, but his voice was so different...

Still, if it was Cooper, didn't he and Leo go way back? It would be natural that Leonard obviously trusted the other assassin so much.

Or at least that was how the doctor explained such affection between the two of them.

The 'master' threw his hood back, and even in the low light, Ryan could make out Cooper's boyish face, though it was lit by a genuine smile he never saw before. Possibly for a valid reason though.

The scholar caught the tip of Leonard's chin between his fingers, stroking the small goatee the Angel still left even after shaving his beard.

"I like this thing. Glad you kept it."

"It was part of my image," Leonard shrugged, smiling back. "I looked weird with my young face and a full beard, but couldn't just shave it all off. I'd have felt naked."

Cooper nodded and glanced at Ryan. "I see you brought the doctor along."

Ryan couldn't help the frown and the narrowing of his eyes at the familiarity between both assassins.

Who cared if Cooper liked the goatee or not?! And what was it with the sudden caring atmosphere here?!

He sighed at such thoughts, telling himself to calm down. Cooper was the one who'd hopefully make Leo alright again. Succeed where Ryan had failed. And right now, they should all be worried about Leonard.

They didn't have all to caress his Angel's face, though.

As he was mentioned, he turned away from his thoughts to nodd. "I'll feel more at ease if I know I'm close by and can intervene if something happens." He said as calmly as he managed.

"Naturally," Cooper said evenly, then turned back to Leonard.

"Come. The sooner it is over, the more time you have to recover."

Leonard obeyed with a small sigh, taking his place at the middle of the circle, while Cooper stayed outside. They both nodded, crouched down to touch the lines with closed eyes; blue flames lit up under their hands. They both straightened and Leonard began to speak.

"I stand here as an Angel but my wings became a burden. I plead thee, take them from me. I forfeit the ability to soar so I would walk; I return the treasures I was gifted with. Take this burden from me."

Cooper drew forth a dagger - Ryan could recognize the curve of the blade - and held it out.

"I will lift your burden because Angels are not bound to their duties forever. I have witnessed your life and struggles; you served the Order well and your blade and heart remained unstained. Pay the final tribute to us."

Leonard reached for the blade and pressed the tip of his finger against the edge. He let a drop of blood fall into the blue ghost fire.

"My tribute is paid and now I shall be released from my duty."

"In the name of our Order, I release you from your duties, Leonard Sallows."

The flames arched up, wrapping around Leonard who tipped his head back with his eyes closed, letting magic was over him and bleach the remaining traces of his abilities from his system. In the bright light, the tears rolling down Cooper's cheeks glittered like diamonds.

Ryan witnessed the whole thing, staying far enough away from the circle so that his presence would not disturb the ritual. There was an ancient magic in the air and the atmosphere was heavy and thick.

The curved blade brought him memories from his past, ten years ago, when he had first met Leonard, but they were soon dispelled from his thoughts as the flames flared at once, almost as if covering the blonde angel, though they were not burning him.

Slowly, after what felt like hours but could not have been more than a few minutes, the flames died out.

The circle still glowed on the floor and Leonard brushed his hair behind his ear in the slightly awkward silence. He glanced around, took a deep breath and rolled his shoulders as if testing his body if it still worked right.

Then, he stepped to the scholar and gently wiped his face with his thumbs. Cooper turned his head away.

"M not crying..." he grumbled, pouting. Leonard chuckled and hugged him.

"Thank you."

Ryan looked away as he let the two assassins have some sort of privacy. Still, when Leo stepped away, he watched him closely. He seemed alright. Fine. Like nothing had changed.

"How are you feeling?" He still asked, as he approached him and Cooper.

It was hard to notice, but Leonard's shoulders dropped slightly.

"Empty," he admitted quietly. Cooper tilted his head up sharply - that wasn't hard to notice.

"But I think I'm alright," Leonard continued. "No pain, nothing unusual. A little fatigue, but otherwise, I'm alright. What do you think, how long until we can try the next ritual?"

Ryan took out a stethoscope from his coat's pocket, using it to check Leo's heartrate and heartbeat, assessing his overall state himself.

"You seem fine for now... But maybe we should way three weeks or so before trying the next ritual."

"Three weeks..." Leonard made a face. "Alright, I think I'll be able to live with that. Barely, but I will." He squeezed Ryan's shoulder and ran a hand along his arm.

"We should probably go home-?" He glanced at Cooper, who nodded.

"I'll gather the candles and mop the floor. Glowstick paint tends to get noticed, and I still don't fancy giving out our runes to anybody."

Ryan rolled his eyes. "I was trying to help one of your own right from the start." He pointed out. He could have given him the runes already. But that was water under the bridge.

He still wrapped an arm around the blonde's shoulders, squeezing ever so slightly. He had been an assassin for so long, of course he'd feel somewhat strange after giving that up, even if it was just for a while.

"It's enough, Ryan," Leonard said quietly, calmly. "We have traditions, regulations and laws we swear to keep a secret once we become Angels. Alex was merely acting according to tradition.

It's not that the delay caused any significant setback." He leaned his head on his lover's shoulder.

"Just take me home. I'd like to- rest."

Ryan looked down at him, and nodded. "Alright." Indeed, right now the most important thing was having Leo recover as soon as possible.

After they bid Cooper goodbye, Ryan helped Leonard to the car, proving to be as helpful as any caretaker.

The drive back was mostly silent. Leonard reclined in the passenger seat and gazed out into the distance with one arm propped on the door, leaning his head into his hand. The street lights flashed over him rhythmically and now and then, a traffic light painted him in vibrant green or blood red.

Ryan respected his silence. Sometimes he forgot Leonard had seen and done a whole lot more than him. That he was a whole lot older. Even now when his age showed, sometimes he still had a vibrant energy about him.

But in these moments, the weight of the years on him was obvious.

At last they reached home.

"Do you want me to prepare something? You're obviously the best cook but I can do some chicken soup or eggs or..." Ryan offered.

"I'm not hungry," Leonard said softly, shaking his head slowly. "It's fine. I-" He paused for a moment.

"I just don't want to be alone tonight, if that's possible. I'd like to sleep in your bed."

Ryan leaned in to kiss his lover tenderly and lovingly. "Of course." He said gently. Honestly, he was glad Leonard had proposed such a thing... Even if he seemed fine, for the most part, Ryan still feared something might happen. He wanted to have Leonard close...

They took their turns in the shower, carefully avoiding to glimpse each other in the state of undress. When they finally snuggled close under the blanket, Leonard kissed Ryan's forehead.

"Thank you for loving me."

Ryan smiled a little, softly combing Leo's long hair back.

"You deserve to be loved, Leo... And I love you. I'm just glad you allow me to show it to you." He whispered.

The tears started so quietly, he couldn't tell when Leonard started to cry, only when his shoulders began to shook.

Ryan was momentarily at a loss, but he ushered him, wiping his tears away only to hold him closer. "Everything will turn out fine, Leonard... you'll see."

"I'm n-not crying over the future..." the older man sniffed. "It's the past-"

As if a dam had broken inside him, his trembling, hurried words spilled forth, whispered against Ryan's collarbone.

"I feel so empty, as if there would be nothing beneath my skin. I've always thought I'll leave the Order one day, but being an Angel was so- so like me. I loved it. I was so proud when I was initiated and I enjoyed the abilities, being able to run through the entire city with my feet barely touching the ground... I thought the allure would fade over the years, that I'll tire of it but- It never happened." He swallowed thickly. "I wasn't ready."

Ryan gently caressed Leonard's head and shoulders, giving him all the time he might need to get everything out of his chest.

"But you can still be an Angel, Leonard... If the Initiation works, and you are granted all of the attributes you once had-" He sighed. "And you are an Angel not because of what powers you have. Your powers and your occupation do not make you who you are, love."

Blazing green eyes bore into his.

"What would you do if you couldn't heal?"

Ryan rose an eyebrow. "I'd search some other thing to be useful in." Ryan said in earnest.

The flames quieted.

"It's not that easy... And it's meaningless too. I'll just wait until the next ritual." He wiped the wetness off his cheeks.

"Let us rest."

Ryan sighed, but said nothing. They'd wait. There was little else that they could do right now, but wait.