

They have all the time in the world.

It is what Hythlodæus tells himself when he first meets Hades, long before he knows the shape of who they will become, when the “Bureau of the Architect” and the “Convocation of Fourteen” are yet abstract and far away.

It is what Hades tells himself when he first notices that Hythlodæus unerringly draws his attention, long before he knows the shape of what they will become, when he realizes that he can pick Hythlodæus’s voice from a crowd and will always turn to seek him out.

It is what Hythlodæus tells himself when he first kisses Hades, with a small spark of hope that roars into an eternal flame when Hades shyly, tentatively, kisses him back.

It is what Hades tells himself when he first denies Hythlodæus’s hunger—that there is no need to rush, and they can take all the time necessary to explore every detail of themselves and their relationship.

They have all the time in the world.

If not today, then tomorrow; if not tomorrow, then the day after. Eternity is naught but a spool of endless time laid out before them, and they have all the days of their immortal lives to do with as they wish.

They have all the time in the world, and so Hythlodæus begins to make a list.

The first item in the list is “kiss Hades atop the tallest tower in the city, when the clock chimes midnight.”

The second item in the list is “fuck Hades under the bridge before the gates of Akadaemia Anyder.”

When Hades sees the list, he slams it back down atop the table and proclaims, “That will never happen.”

Hythlodæus remains unfazed. “You never know. We have all the time in the world.”

(The first item is checked off that weekend, when it’s a little too late and they’re a little too deep in their cups, and they decide there is nothing more romantic than to spend the darkest hours of the night together under the moon and stars.

The second is checked off the night of their graduation, a moment engraved in their memories as the pitch dark by the riverside, the familiar warmth of each other’s bodies, and the song of the rushing water over the sound of their voices.)

They have all the time in the world, and the world constantly changes around them. When Hythlodæus joins the Bureau of the Architect, first as an assistant and then later rising through the ranks to become Chief, his interests become more esoteric and his ambitions more mystifying. Though Hades has grown accustomed to deciphering Hythlodæus’s shorthand, that does not help him decipher his intentions.

When Hythlodæus returns home one night, snatches up a fresh notepad, and sets about scribbling feverishly, Hades moves to stand behind him. He props his elbows on the back of Hythlodæus’s chair and squints. After a minute or so

Hythlodæus pauses and flexes his hand; Hades takes that opportunity to say, "I don't know what half those things are."

"I should hope you don't know what any of them are," Hythlodæus says without looking up. "I found them in a box of prototypes whose development was abandoned for one reason or another. If they're circulating unapproved among the populace, then someone is in very deep trouble."

He dips his quill in the inkwell and begins writing again. Hades leans over Hythlodæus's head, arms draping across his shoulders. "Do you intend to tell me what they are before you use them on me?"

"Oh, absolutely not," Hythlodæus returns without missing a beat.

Hades clasps his hands together loosely. They block Hythlodæus's vision, and his quill comes to a stop. Leaning down, Hades murmurs in Hythlodæus's ear, "Nothing that requires exacting control of magick to manifest?"

"Hmm."

"Nothing that cannot be improved by a surplus of aether?"

At last Hythlodæus sets down the quill. He turns his head, brushing his lips across Hades's jawline, until Hades draws back far enough to look him in the eye. Hythlodæus is smiling, exasperated but fond. "Oh, very well. You may take my attempts as a demonstration and improve upon them as you wish. All in the name of research, of course."

"Of course," agrees Hades, who has never been as invested as Hythlodæus in seeing new concepts developed to their full potential.

Still he does not step away. Hythlodæus sighs, turning to face Hades fully. "Do you mean to tell me you cannot wait?"

Hades looks him in the eye and does not speak, willing Hythlodæus to understand without words. The list is for a future that they hope might yet come to pass, but the two of them are here now, together.

Hythlodæus's smile broadens. He reaches up and folds one of Hades's hands between his own, clasping it tight. "I've been neglecting you lately, what with the sudden increase in my responsibilities coincident with my elevated station."

"If that is how you feel, then I won't argue," Hades says.

"Poor Hades. You leave me no choice but to prove to you that you are now and ever my first priority."

Hythlodæus stands awkwardly, pushing aside the chair, as reluctant to release Hades as Hades is reluctant to release him. No sooner has he straightened than Hades's free hand is at his waist, pushing him back up against the table and into a kiss.

Neither notices when they overturn the inkwell and spill half of it across Hythlodæus's notes.

Neither minds. They are only suggestions, after all. There is no shortage of other ideas, and they have all the time in the world.

They have all the time in the world, and the world constantly changes around them. When Hades ascends to the Convocation of Fourteen, the name he has always used is shelved in favor of his new title. He is Emet-Selch, the Third Seat,

Keeper of the Underworld. So is he known; so shall he be called by all.

But Hythlodæus has always positioned himself as an exception to the rules; but Hythlodæus has always taken great pleasure in taunting Emet-Selch whenever he is in danger of taking himself too seriously.

“Pay a visit to Emet-Selch,” and here he pauses, putting significant stress on the name that is still so foreign on his tongue and in his voice, “in the Capitol, while he should be attending to other responsibilities, and fuck him over his desk.”

Emet-Selch opens his mouth, closes it again. It is no more lewd than some of Hythlodæus’s other suggestions—a certain incident in Halmarut’s experimental gardens comes to mind—but he has not had time to grow accustomed to the thought of himself on the Convocation, much less consider any indiscretions that would result in a censure.

But Hythlodæus peers up through his eyelashes, a mischievous glint in his eye. He closes the notebook and pushes it across the table, stretching out his arms as he does. He says, “You have been Hades to me ever since you were the strange boy sitting at the front of the classroom, as if hoping that would shield you from having to speak to anyone.” Not that it ever worked on Hythlodæus, who has always taken it as his due right to speak to anyone anytime he wants, regardless of their thoughts on the matter. “It’s hard to think of you as someone else.”

“I’m not someone else,” Emet-Selch says. His words are quiet, but there is an undercurrent to them that might well be a plea. He is Emet-Selch now, one of those who oversee all of civilization, and yet that is only a title taken up in recent days. Who he is—what he values—has not changed.

“To the rest of the world, you are,” Hythlodæus counters. He rests one elbow on the table before him and leans forward, tilting Emet-Selch’s chin up with one finger. “And that is something I must learn. I can’t call you Hades so casually, or risk endangering your worth in the eyes of others. So I must teach myself that you are Emet-Selch now, and there is no faster way to do so than to acquaint myself with your new life and responsibilities.”

“By fucking me over my desk in the Capitol,” Emet-Selch says, with all the disdain he can muster. It is difficult as always when Hythlodæus speaks in that low, thoughtful voice.

“With the door unlocked,” Hythlodæus adds, with an angelic smile. “Adds to the fun, don’t you think?”

(Hythlodæus makes good on his threat later, when just enough time has passed for Emet-Selch to let down his guard. To Emet-Selch’s eternal relief, no one walks in on them during the act itself—though from the odd looks he receives over the next sennight, they did not go overlooked as he might have hoped.)

They have all the time in the world, and the entire world before them, and the list grows faster than items are checked off.

“There is no way we’ll ever get through all that,” Emet-Selch says one day. It

is half a bell past noon. They sit together at one of the outdoor tables of a pop-up café, and Hythlodaeus has just pulled out his very first, oldest notebook, grown thick with inserted leaflets and additional slips of paper adhered to the pages.

“We could, if only you would take leave from your duties instead of trying to singlehandedly solve all the star’s troubles,” Hythlodaeus says.

Emet-Selch snorts, partially because Hythlodaeus has a point, partially because the last time he tried to take leave, it ended with Azem summoning him across the star anyway. True, he spends far too many waking hours neck-deep in Convocation affairs, but sometimes it feels as if the universe itself conspires to keep him from a much-deserved rest.

Hythlodaeus waits for him to offer a retort; when he doesn’t, Hythlodaeus shrugs one shoulder and scribbles down his latest thought. He presses the cover of the book closed, though it is so stuffed with inserts it almost falls open again. “You may think of them as suggestions if you’d like, not requirements by any means.”

“A list of activities to consider for my ample free time?”

“Well. Yes.” Hythlodaeus gives a small, affected shrug. “Though it’s never really been about the list.”

“It hasn’t?” says Emet-Selch, who cannot fathom the reason for a list if not to use it.

Hythlodaeus nudges the book across the table with his fingertips, an open invitation, and Emet-Selch picks it up.

Everything on the first page was checked off long ago. A tower. A river. As he continues reading, the items on the list become more ambitious, and more of them are marked incomplete. A student play, which he remembers as being uniquely terrible. A folk concert in a village too small to be found on any map, which he remembers as being exquisitely beautiful. An office desk. Their own bed, on one of his rare days off, on the anniversary of a meeting decades earlier.

Emet-Selch looks up. Hythlodaeus’s smile is gentle; Emet-Selch matches it for affection.

He hands the book back to Hythlodaeus and says nothing more.

It is a list of things to try, but so too is it a scrapbook of memory. Even those activities they never quite got around to, even those activities which are now impossible, are a reminder of who they once were and what they’d wanted to do—together.

They have all the time in the world.

They have all the time in the world.

They have all the        in the world.

They have

they

in the world

no time.

They have all the time in the world—and so at the end, after Hythlodæus has added what will become the final item in the list, Emet-Selch does not move the notebook from where it has been left on the side table. He does not touch it; he does not try to look at it. There is little reason to, when everything contained within is a goal and a memory for the two of them together.

He will bring back Hythlodæus. He will make all right.

And then the two of them will share eternity, all the time in the world.