

## penthouse nightmares

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by [immolxtion\\_stxtion](#)

### Summary

This was home, once. There was a time when Zam was younger and excited, pressing his hands against floor-to-ceiling glass walls and watching as clouds passed by below him. They had set up a life together, and here Zam is, watching it all fall apart.

here is zam. here is mapicc. here is a failing relationship and the desire to not let it go.

### Notes

This one goes out to Judas, with a massive thank you for putting up with my brainrot and enabling the shit out of me <3

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

It was not Zam's idea to take up residence in the penthouse. The sleek, modern architecture is not something he has ever found home in, preferring rooms full of decorations and warm colours over black and white and silver, shades of monochrome.

Mapicc wanted the penthouse, and all Zam wanted was for Mapicc to be happy. He said he liked the view over the city at night, liked looking down at the millions of lights and pretending he was a god. Zam may jokingly call himself a prince, but he's never wanted to feel like a god. That's too

much power for any one man to have, a feeling of *wrongness* curling in his gut at the mere thought.

They have spent months in this apartment, together and alone. From Zam's job at a convenience store to Mapicc's dubiously legal work with computers, the two of them have existed in the same space, collapsed over the same rigid black and white couches, used the same frying pan that always burns the bottom of their food.

This was home, once. There was a time when Zam was younger and excited, pressing his hands against floor-to-ceiling glass walls and watching as clouds passed by below him. There was a time where after bickering about the best way to set up the master bedroom, Zam had flopped down on the mattress thrown on the floor and grinned so wide it felt like his cheeks were going to fall off.

Mapicc had followed him down shortly afterwards, complaining about the lack of a bedframe before pressing a kiss to his cheek. Moving is always stressful, but in that moment, the stress felt worth it. What's a couple frustrating boxes compared to a future of small moments, of being able to move to the next room and being able to see your boyfriend there?

He had unpacked the plates and the pictures and all of the trinkets carefully tucked in the same box, wrapped up in as many soft things could be spared, putting them on shelves as Mapicc swore colourfully in the background, trying to put together furniture.

They had set up a life together, and here Zam is, watching it all fall apart. The open space of the apartment no longer feels freeing, becoming yet another space where Zam can listen to the reverberations of his racing thoughts, stare at the faint stains on the walls and wonder where it all went wrong.

Things no longer feel the same as they used to. Silent hallways watch with picture-frame eyes as Mapicc starts spending more time in his office, and Zam starts taking more shifts, looking for another job to take up his time. Slowly, the average number of people in the apartment goes from two to one.

It's not like Zam is trying to avoid Mapicc. Not intentionally, at least. He still loves him, loves the sharp mind and sharp tongue and sharp canines that make up Mapicc, but things are different. There's a lump in the back of his throat when he tries to ramble about how his day went, and the laughter that bubbles out of him like a fountain starts growing less and less frequent.

They still kiss each other good morning and good night, still trade shifts in the kitchen that end with Mapicc complaining about how Zam refuses to clean as he cooks and Zam teasing Mapicc for the obsessive way he goes about measuring things, but it's not the same. Obligation is not adoration, and both men are repeating the motions of a relationship and calling it love.

Sometimes, the state of things between him and Mapicc and the perfect, barely lived in apartment makes Zam want to burst into manic laughter, laughter that sounds far more like tears than it should. He's living like he's an inmate on death row, laughing at all the signs of impending doom as if it can save him from the ugly truth. Most relationships fail. It is easier on Zam to pretend that this one won't.

He finds he's been staring out the window far longer than expected when the bedroom door rattles, Mapicc finding his way into the room much like he does every night, close to two in the morning, bags prominent under his eyes. Usually Zam is asleep by now, or at least pretending to be, curled up on his side of the bed as he listens to Mapicc make his way around the room, getting ready to join him in bed.

Ever caught in Mapicc's gravity, Zam turns towards the doorway, taking in the messy hair, the

oversized hoodie bought during the move-in process, the rare appearance of reading glasses. It's rare to see Mapicc with glasses on because he considers them to be a flaw, a weakness in his carefully-constructed facade. Late nights are one of the few times he'll pull them out, no matter how much Zam tries to convince him that they look good on him, that they frame his face perfectly and bring out all the shades of brown in his eyes.

Mapicc doesn't acknowledge him until he's closed the door with a heavy *click*, eyebrows raising curiously. "It's late. You're usually asleep by now."

"Yeah, I am," Zam acknowledges, trying to ignore how his heart flutters at being known. It's not like his preference for an early bedtime is a secret, but for Mapicc to admit that he is more than well aware of it means he cares in some small way. "Was looking at the city."

"You ever going to take up my offer about pretending to be a god?" Slowly, he walks over, footsteps soft against the laminate floor. The room is not small by any means, but Mapicc manages to make it feel that way, make Zam feel like he is nothing but a prey animal being stalked. "It'd suit you well."

Godhood may never suit Zam, pretend or not. He's not good enough to hold that kind of power, not when he'll gladly sit in the remnants of a burning house and hold onto the ashes like they can keep him warm. Despite this, he can pretend for one night.

"Yeah," he says, voice dangerously soft, close to giving away just how much he'd do to gain back the love that's been slowly slipping away from him. "Yeah, I think I might. We'd make a good set of gods."

As if Mapicc is rewarding him for his statement, for pushing aside his reservations about the concept of power, he tucks himself against Zam's side, touching but not *holding*. They're close, but there's no holding of hands, no leaning completely against each other like a rock in a storm. Zam will take what he can get regardless.

"You can be the hand of mercy, with your soft heart. I'll keep everyone in line for you. It wouldn't be hard."

That... would be one of the most romantic things Zam has heard in a while, if it wasn't laced with a soft sort of venom, one that sounds like love but tastes like violence. It's Mapicc loving him. It's Mapicc loving violence. It's Mapicc punishing him for not having dagger-sharp edges, for not *wanting* those edges. It's Mapicc saying he would give Zam the world, give him the loyalty of everyone in reach, and that sentiment is what matters.

"Thank you," is what he ends up saying, following it up immediately after with a yawn. It's been a while since he's stayed up this late, and his body does not like it one bit. "I'll make sure they all love you. It wouldn't be hard."

He shoots a grin at Mapicc, who looks softer than usual when backlit by the dim night table lamps, dark eyes reflecting the ever-bright lights of the city. A pleasant feeling bubbles up in his gut when Mapicc smiles back, rocking up just barely onto the balls of his feet to press a kiss to Zam's cheek.

Silent communication has never been their forte, full of mixed signals and misinterpreted messages, but the way Mapicc tips his head in the general direction of the bed is easy enough to read. It's his way of saying *go to bed*, his way of saying *you need some sleep*. Zam is not prone to disagree, but he doesn't want to sleep alone. Reaching out his hand is easy, though it's always hit or miss if Mapicc will choose to take it.

Tonight, he accepts the offer, slipping his hand into Zam's open one, letting Zam pull him towards the bed and under the covers, pausing only to drop his sweater on the floor. It makes Zam want to giggle, to open up a window and declare to the entire world that Mapicc is his just as much as he is Mapicc's, regardless of their struggles. Things are not perfect, but their bedroom is dark, and Zam's legs tangle with Mapicc's under the covers, shoulders pressed together.

"I love you," he finds himself saying into the dark of the room, pulse jumping slightly. It's been a while since the last time he admitted it, because Mapicc is not one to return the statement, having said something about how it makes him feel like he has to vomit ages ago. It's whatever, it's fine, because Mapicc doesn't have to say it back. He never does. "It's you and me against the world, right?"

"You could say that," Mapicc confirms, breathing far steadier than Zam's could ever be. "We've made it this far, and I haven't killed you yet."

He has a point, but it still stings, because who wants their boyfriend to talk about potentially killing them instead of just saying that he cares? Nobody sane, that's for sure. Regardless, Mapicc is confirming that he does care about Zam, even if it's in his own convoluted and slightly cruel way. The way he moves to rest his head on Zam's chest only confirms that, tapping each beat of Zam's heart on his hand, not mentioning how fast it's racing.

Zam doesn't bother with a response, soaking up the physical contact like a sponge. It's been a while since they've been this close at night. Usually, Mapicc crawls into bed with his back to Zam's, facing the opposite way without bothering to reach out. Zam is the one who closes the gap between them most times, even if it gets him shrugged off.

Despite the moments of heartbreak, the bittersweetness that seems to follow every interaction with Mapicc, Zam thinks that it's all worth it, if he can have moments like these. He's willing to put up with every one of Mapicc's sharp edges, willing to pick up shards of glass with his bare hands and painstakingly put them back together. He can handle the pain, because it's only with the pain that he can have this brand of happiness.

## End Notes

Chronic illness may work hard, but I work harder. The idea of a penthouse apartment and the many stories that can be told in one setting took over, so now I have a series to work on. Pray for me.

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