

## the fall of the damned, rubens, 1620

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/45512905) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/45512905>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Lifesteal SMP</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">ItzSubz &amp; Vitalasy (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">ItzSubz &amp; PrinceZam (Video Blogging RPF)</a>
Character:	<a href="#">ItzSubz (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">Vitalasy (Video Blogging RPF)</a> , <a href="#">PrinceZam (Video Blogging RPF)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Alternate Universe - Royalty</a> , <a href="#">Angst and Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Loss of Identity</a> , <a href="#">Origin Story</a> , <a href="#">Religious Imagery &amp; Symbolism</a> , <a href="#">Hopeful Ending</a> , <a href="#">The Mortifying Ordeal of Being Known</a> , <a href="#">fellas is it gay to want to die for someone?</a> , <a href="#">Not Really Character Death</a> , <a href="#">as in lots of death talk but no one actually dies</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 17 of <a href="#">coup de grâce</a>
Collections:	<a href="#">Anonymous</a>
Stats:	Published: 2023-03-05 Words: 3,040 Chapters: 1/1

## the fall of the damned, rubens, 1620

by Anonymous

### Summary

It's just a ceremony.

It's just Subz forfeiting his life, drawing blood upon a ceremonial blade and swearing an oath to bind himself to a boy he has never known, will never know, will die trying to protect, twin scars and twin fates.

Just a ceremony.

### Notes

inspired by bgtea's two truths and a lie (<- genshin fanfic jumpscare)

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

There is a game, meant to pass time for soldiers on boring shifts, or kids down in the slums with not enough money for toys but just enough time for boredom. Essentially, it goes a little like this – each person must tell two facts and one falsehood about themselves. If the other players can figure

out which is the falsehood, they win. If they can't, the other person wins.

It's simple. Soldiers play it until their shifts end. Kids play it until they get bored.

Subz plays it–

Well.

Subz doesn't quite know, himself. Playing by himself boils the game down into a boring, mindless thing; he, of course, knows the answers everytime.

Still, he keeps on playing. It is oddly calming, to recite the facts to himself, be assured that he is still himself. Still knows who he is enough to be confident in it.

So. Two truths, one lie. Let's start with something easy.

One; Subz grew up in the Bormethius Empire. His childhood was generally unremarkable.

Two; Vitalasy was Subz's childhood best friend. They're still close today.

Three; Subz never left the Bormethius Empire. He serves as a soldier guarding the city gates there.

See? He did say it was going to be easy.



The day Subz is exiled from the Bormethius Empire, the sun is golden and bright in the sky, mocking.

So here he is, on his knees, here is his penance – the burning sun, the golden glow of the city gates pushed shut, the sword at his throat.

There is no such thing as repentance for a sin so insurmountable. There is no such thing as forgiveness, here.

So Subz is kneeling, and his palms dig into the dry earth, and the pebbles cut deep into the skin, and it is all just loss, he thinks. All just loss and fear at the end of the day. All just sin.

Words are passed over his head, but they fall past him into meaninglessness. The sword finally cuts slightly into his neck, and it is such a relief, to feel the pain.

To sit here with more than the emptiness of himself, the hole punched right through his stomach, the horrifying silence.

He's no longer Subz of Bormethius. He's no longer anything at all.

In this story, he doesn't get a name.

In this story, he gets a new scar across his throat and another empty space somewhere beneath his sternum.

So Subz of Bormethius is killed on a sunny, dry road just outside the capital. It is a bloodless affair, really, silent and quick – someone rips the embroidered banner from his clothes and spits on it when it falls to the dirt. Someone laughs.

The sword against his throat moves, swift and precise.

It is only when his hair drifts to the ground that Subz comprehends that he has not died.

He has not died a death that matters, but it is all just loss, anyways, and it is all just shame, and he is not really anyone anymore, not without the banner or his hair or his country.

Someone pushes him into the dirt.

And then it is over – the execution, the whole terrible reality of it, that Subz has lost everything he ever was outside of the city he has given everything for, and that he is dead, now. Subz of Bormethius is dead.

That leaves a stranger on the road, a stranger under an unknown sky, in front of an unknown city.

That leaves nothing at all.

Subz gets up. He dusts off his pants.

When he walks away, he doesn't look back.



One; The first time Subz beat a man in sword combat he was twelve, and the man twenty-five. The fight was not one of glory, and neither of them walked away any better for it.

Two; Subz does not remember the face of the man he fought. He does not remember the fight. He does remember the feeling of being all alone, of being so sure he was going to die. He remembers the feeling of pushing steel into soft flesh and not regretting a thing.

Three; Subz doesn't care that he cannot remember. He has never regretted what he did that day, because he lived. That's that.



Vitalasy catches up to him somewhere in a nameless forest east of the capitol. He has a duffel bag over his shoulder and some potions hung on his hip, and he regards the stranger in front of him with a kindness that seems almost unfathomable.

His eyes glow a little under his hood.

The stranger does not know what to do with that, with it all – his uneven hair or his bleeding hands or the empty space on his back where a sword should be. The stranger does not know how to say that he is all alone, or that he is the man he was no longer, or that there is no reason for Vitalasy to keep following him.

He is but a rusty coin, a broken thing that has made itself worthless in pursuit of some intangible goal, to be discarded and forgotten.

He is no longer that boy who they called a prodigy, no longer that man who thought he may one day have the world; all the little pieces of it that matter – sunshine and laughter and purpose. He is without them all, now.

Vitalasy seems to read it all on his face, though.

"It was getting boring there, anyway!" He says, with the same chipper tone as always. With the same unshakeable belief in his words as always.

The stranger does not say anything. He keeps walking, and Vitalasy keeps following, and somehow the hole just underneath his sternum widens a little.

Bereft of purpose, he has now stolen it from his friend too, it seems.

And Vitalasy had been doing so well for himself.

They don't stop even when the lush trees of the forest turn into great green monsters in the darkness, and the ever humid wind like the blood-sniffing breath of it; because Subz is trying to run from the blood on his hands and Vitalasy is trying to run from his own choice, and because there is no word dark enough to describe the realization that they can return to their old lives no longer. That their old selves will forever stay buried in this forest or on that road in the sunshine.

They are all going forward. None of them are going back.

Subz doesn't collapse as much as he crumbles, when the sun peeks through the fangs of the beast

and makes them tree branches once more.

His hands are bloody, and his hair is uneven, and his eyes are like a wasteland, and he looks at Vitalasy like they don't know each other at all.

"I killed someone." He says, and it is hollow, and he is hollow, and there is nothing of him left anymore.

"I know." Vitalasy replies. His eyes shine like twin stars, and he doesn't look at Subz like he is a murderer. Only like he's a childhood friend. Only like he is loved.

"He would've killed me if I didn't."

"I know."

Something in the emptiness of Subz's expression tightens.

"No!", he roars suddenly, "No, you don't know! If you knew, you wouldn't— You wouldn't keep looking at me like that!"

Vitalasy doesn't say anything. He puts his hand in between Subz's shoulder blades like a promise, and he does not say anything at all.

He knows, of course.

They told him the story just outside of the throne room – Subz kneeling inside, crucified by his own powerlessness, and he had not wanted to believe it, but looking at Subz in the light of the stained glass windows, made so terribly small by the shadows cast upon him, he had known.

He had known the terrible truth of it and made his decision without thinking twice.

So, this is how the story goes – Subz is twelve years old and the youngest knight to be in the entire empire, and he inspires envy as much as awe. It is a quiet night, then, when it happens – an attack, an unfair fight from the get-go; some viscount or other upset by the fact that a commoner could rise up so high, resorting to drawing his sword. Subz is still young, and he is not yet aware of his own strength, and he strikes the man and flees. It kills him. Subz doesn't know, but it kills him.

And that is all it is; a moment of desperation, a wide-eyed kid with a bloody sword and everything to lose.

An eye witness steps up just weeks after Subz is appointed head of the royal guard.

And now they are here in this forest with the darkness, and the grief, and the corpses of their past selves strung high for all to see – traitors and murderers and kids, that's all. Scared kids trying to run from themselves.

So Vitalasy knows, even though he may never understand, and Subz carries the cross of choosing to live when it would have been so much kinder to die; and then dawn breaks on a world that is hopeless and they are both still breathing.

"Y'know, I heard Soluna is supposed to be beautiful." Vitalasy says once Subz has stopped screaming his anguish into the fire-bright redness of a new dawn.

He doesn't say *Did you know I would've killed him for you?* or *We're all just killers trying to be holy* or *The people of Soluna are convinced of second chances, can you believe that?*

Instead, he helps Subz get on his feet, and though they both keep looking back, they move on.

Maybe that's all they can ever do.



One; Subz steps through the city gates of Soluna's Castle Town and does not feel holy, or saved, or better, but free. It's something about the fact that no one knows him here, maybe. That he is not a stranger with a friend's face but just a stranger. He feels invisible, and unknown, and free.

Two; They settle somewhere quiet, pay off the inn rooms with the last of Vitalasy's gold and breathe. Subz gets a job hunting monsters and Vitalasy joins a guild, and they settle. It's peaceful. It borders on happiness.

Three; Vitalasy keeps his damn mouth shut.



Subz kneels, and his hands are bloody and his arms tremble and he is scared.

It's his own personal rapture, here, in this throne room, so filled with light, with all the voices echoing, with his desperation drowned in heavy incense and candle smoke.

They have the Prince recite the words.

"Whether adrift in darkness, steeped in glowing twilight, or bound for the light, the life of the knight will forever be bound to that of the prince." His voice does not shake, standing before a crowd to forfeit his life, but his hands tremble. Subz pretends he cannot see it, but horribly, selfishly, he is almost happy for it.

"Henceforth, you shall be known as Sir Subz, protector of His Royal Highness and the realm. May the Gods bless you and your noble endeavour."

Subz wonders if it seems cruel to him, handing over his life to a boy that has fallen so easily, that couldn't fight in the face of his friend, in the face of futility.

Wonders if he, too, wishes they could ordain their own fate, could choose anything at all.

But the stained glass windows wreath him in shadow, and the light blinds him, and he cannot see anyone's face.

So it is unknown, and he is unknowable, inconceivable, and it is all so horribly wrong.

He cannot see the Prince's face, only the shadows thrown across it, only the halo of his hair, the blade in his hand.

He's holding it all wrong, gripped so lightly.

It's all so wrong. It's all so tragic.

Subz, here in the light, trapped.

There is blood on his hands and no one should bless him for it, and no sword should kiss the top of his head without the intention of cleaving his skull in half, and violence is the only language Subz has ever been taught to speak, so the gentle touch of the Prince laying a sword at his feet has him reeling, desperate for familiarity.

His fists clench around nothing at all.

Vitalasy is up there somewhere, in the royal retinue, purple eyes glowing like embers, and he could never understand the desperation of offering yourself on an altar in front of people who could never know.

He can never understand.

And that leaves Subz, kneeling, dying, falling, over and over.

That leaves Subz, a protector who only knows how to destroy.

*A ceremony, Vitalasy had said, It's just a ceremony. He hadn't said Sorry or I know you think this will kill you or I wonder if this will ruin us but he had fastened Subz's boots and fixed his hair and led him right to the doors of the throne room, and left anyway.*

It's just a ceremony.

It's just Subz forfeiting his life, drawing blood upon a ceremonial blade and swearing an oath to bind himself to a boy he has never known, will never know, will die trying to protect, twin scars and twin fates.

It's just loss. It's just fear. It's just everything, all the time.

It's just Subz, becoming.

The faceless crowd erupts into cheers at the sight of his blood, and at least this is familiar, safe, continuous.

At least his pain will always be another's joy.



One; Subz takes to his new duty with grace, and fear, and doubt. Maybe it is his nature to be scared; maybe it is his fate to never believe in his own worth. Maybe the absence of something can only ever be proof of its presence. Maybe being seen, once again, is the pinnacle of his penance, his true cross, his sisyphian task. Maybe he thinks dying for someone can absolve him.

Two; He keeps his distance. Looking at the Prince, all Subz can see is the mocking sun on the dry road, his own tired eyes in the mirror, all the blood spilled by his blade. The emptiness flowing out of him hurts less than cracking open his ribcage and letting someone else crawl inside and make a home in his blood, under his skin. It is better to not be known, and not know in return.

Three; Subz keeps his vow, and his distance. His interactions with the Prince remain distant and professional at best.



"You must hate me." The Prince says, in a voice too small to befit an heir, like it is torn out of him, like he has no choice but this – words uttered into silence, balancing the whole terrifying reality on Subz's shoulders; if he wanted, he could crush him right now. Reach out and tear everything asunder.

But Subz doesn't know. Standing in an unkempt garden like in an arena, clothed in the finest silks and heavy armor with a sword strapped to his back and new boots, he doesn't know. There is a scar



across his throat, twin to the one on Zam's abdomen, still a little pink. His hair's been cut evenly, his skin scrubbed clean, and Subz of Bormethius is dead, and Subz of nowhere at all is gone, and Subz of Soluna is not yet ready to be born.

So here he is, halfway from the grave to the womb, not yet conceived, not yet a whole person again, twin in deathless death to the prince he has sworn to protect, wholly unsure.

Maybe Subz does hate him.

Maybe Subz hates the fancy clothes and bright rooms and his clean nails and the stench of blood that follows him everywhere, maybe he hates his duty, maybe he hates that he will never be whole on his own, will never serve his purpose as a sole person; always part of a bigger machination, always bound to a greater cause, Subz is not deserving of singularity.

To be seen is to be interpreted. To be a knight is to be duty-bound, and without duty, a knight will always be just a fragment.

Maybe Subz has not quite learned what it means to be gentle. That protection means love, and love, in turn, is the greatest shield one can give.

And that is all it is; a single breath, like a sigh, a realization that trickles steadily like summer rain.

"No."

"No?" The Prince asks, wide-eyed and breathless like a little kid, like he is scared.

"I don't hate you." Subz says, scuffing his new boots in the dirt. He feels stupid for it almost immediately.

He doesn't say, *How could I hate you? You, the only person who could ever know me? or To hate you would be to hate myself, and to hate you would be my worst sin yet or I will die for you, and that will be all I could ever wish for.*

The Prince looks at him, and Subz would do it all again just to be lead here once more, into this garden, into the light, into his salvation; they call him the Sunshine Prince, down in the slums, because he was born just at the end of a solar eclipse, into the rebirth of an entire country. Daybreaker, dawn-bringer, child of the sun, the Prince Subz knows he will die for. It feels wrong to be standing, then.

So Subz kneels, worshipper and worshipped, steeped in twilight and adrift in darkness, lightseeker, forever bound to someone else. Half a person, half a tragedy.

So – here's the solution. Cracking open his ribcage, letting the light pour in, being, for once, understood, not just known. Being bloodied and known and free, being not Subz of anywhere but just Subz.

Subz of Bormethius is not dead, nor is Subz of the Road and the Forest – they all make up the fractures of what makes Subz, whole and solitary. They all make space for one more person under his skin, in his blood.

"Won't you call me Zam?" His Prince asks.

And Subz can't do anything but agree.

## End Notes

shoutout to richard siken for the vibes and chip for the incredible amount of mental illness stored in this fic

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!