

Narcosis

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Raoul has a meeting with the Council and Mars in the morning, so he deals with it the only way possible: Getting high.

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Chapter 1 - One

2

1 - One

Title: Narcosis

Warnings: Drug references. Sort of.

Author s Notes: Read the blurb at the end. Seriously. It explains how it s possible for nitrogen to have a narcotic effect. And it is possible.

Sitting at her mirror, Aubrey played with the end of a chunk of hair. With a soundless sigh, she looked up, regarding her reflection. One year locked away in Raoul s penthouse had paled her complexion considerably. The luminous bronze color of her skin had faded into a pasty whiteness that she covered as best she could with cake-like make-ups.

Tugging the same piece of black hair a final time, she released it and stood, her fingers running the circumference of the gem on her necklace almost habitually. She frowned sadly, feeling the cool metal of the pet ring that was lodged around the sapphire.

A knock rang against her door, and Aubrey turned. The door hissed open and Iis walked in, looking slightly nervous. His plain brown hair was mussed, and there were dark smudges under his brown eyes.

Master Raoul has taken to breathing on the arghile, the servant said, his hands fluttering as he went through the motions of hand speak at the same time.

Why? Aubrey signed back, unsure of what exactly the arghile was. Iis had mentioned it before. She remembered him saying something about it when Raoul s friend Demetrius had come to visit.

He can t sleep, Iis replied morosely, a peeved expression falling across his features.

Aubrey frowned. But why would he use the arghile? she asked, spelling out the word as Iis had. As soon as she figured out exactly what an arghile was, she would have to create a sign for it.

Iis shrugged. I guess he supposes the nitrogen high will keep him going tomorrow. He always gets like this before going to the Council and Mars, he said.

High? Aubrey inquired.

Not necessarily high. Just& restless, Iis replied. He s just going to give himself a vicious headache. Could you help? He likes your massages. That might relax him enough that he ll sleep the rest of the night.

Shrugging, Aubrey acquiesced. Iis looked grateful as he led her from her room to Raoul s.

When I left him, he was on the floor by his bed, Iis said, not bothering to sign as he reached for the console to open the door. I doubt he ll have gone too far. By now, he s probably so impaired it will be all he can do to lift the pipe to his lips.

Arching one eye brow, Aubrey stood quietly, waiting for Iis to open the door. Since he had his back to her, anything she said would be lost unless she got his attention. As nothing she could possibly say would add to the conversation, she left her hands at her sides.

Finally, the door hissed open as Iis muttered something about Raoul s damned locks. Without glancing at him, Aubrey stepped into the room, moving quickly to her master s bedside. She found him sitting between the wall and the side of the bed closest to it, a pipe in hand. The pipe was attached to a long hose which, in turn, was attached to a gold pot. Steam rose out of the pot from small grates, curling in the air.

Raoul didn't acknowledge her approach. His eyes remained closed, and the hand holding the pipe remained poised by his mouth. After a few seconds, he took a long drag on the pipe.

Crouching between Raoul's splayed legs, back pressed to the wall for support, Aubrey reached out and brushed her fingers over her master's shoulder. Raoul opened his eyes slowly, their usual brilliant green color muted. A smile crept across his lips.

Buri, he cooed.

Brows furrowed, Aubrey raised her hands so they were in his line of vision. She moved them slowly through the signs. What are you doing? she asked.

Enjoying myself, he replied, raising his free hand to brush a lock of red hair from his face. The action unbalanced him, and he would have fallen over had Aubrey not grabbed him to steady him.

You are drunk, Aubrey replied, not sure if drunk was the right word to use.

Raoul waved with the hand holding the pipe, dismissing her comment. No, he replied, his speech thick and lethargic. I'm inebriated.

There is a difference? she inquired, arching one eyebrow.

You have pretty eyes. Like the ocean.

Somewhat taken aback by the statement, Aubrey took a moment to recover herself. He sounded so foolish. Her eyes narrowed. There is a difference between being drunk and inebriated? she demanded, the harshness of her gestures elucidating her tone.

Sure, Raoul slurred, taking another long drag on his pipe. If I was drunk, I'd have consumed alcohol. This& He trailed off, losing hold of the words he wanted.

Quietly, Aubrey waited, her eyes watching him.

Frowning, Raoul thought. Oh! he exclaimed suddenly. Yes. This is nitrogen. Not alcohol. When one is inebriated, one is exhilarated or stupefied as *if* with alcohol.

It amazes me that you maintain such a level of cognizance when completely smashed, Aubrey told him, quite succinctly, her expression bland and clearly annoyed.

Raoul frowned again. I didn't know you could say that in hand speak, he replied, sounding like a petulant child.

Aubrey reached forward, intending to pluck the pipe from Raoul's hand. Right before her fingers closed on the metal contraption, her master pulled his hand out of her reach. That's not nice, he muttered. Giving him her most virulent look, one she would never have given him if he was even remotely sober, she signed back, You are going to have a hangover in the morning. How will you function at your meeting with the Council and Mars?

The fact that Raoul had a very important meeting in the morning didn't seem to bother him. You have pretty eyes, he told her again.

And you're a blithering fool! she exclaimed, lunging for the pipe as soon as the last word was signed. Her fingers grazed the metal as Raoul once again pulled it away from her. Falling gracelessly on top of him, Aubrey silently growled every expletive she knew. Just for good measure, she ground out a few she made up. Putting her hands on his chest, Aubrey shifted so she could push herself off him, but Raoul prevented this by wrapping one arm around her waist.

Don't go, he murmured, his warm breath caressing her ear. Aubrey shivered, pressing a bit insistently at his shoulders. Stop that, he told her, slurring his words as the hand holding the pipe came down and gathered her wrists, pinning them.

Having no choice, and no ability to protest, Aubrey did as told. Stilling, she took a deep breath, falling into herself as she reached for the Fire that she controlled. She took the fire loosely in hand as she waited for her master to make another move.

You're warm, he told her, pressing his cheek to hers.

A smile flickered across her lips. Her sudden warmth was caused by the Fire that simmered just beneath

her skin, ready to pour out of her flesh and burn him should he decide to do anything she thought was going too far. Her Fire bubbled beneath her skin often when she was near him, though she had only once unleashed it upon him. He had beaten her severely, during their early months together, when she hadn't responded to a question. He had been, at the time, unaware that she was incapable of speech. To protect herself, she had burned him severely, although medications and his industrious immune system had healed him quickly with no scars.

You become warm when nervous, Raoul continued. He bent his head, taking a drag from his pipe, his eyes on hers. Like you're on fire.

Hoping her eyes didn't betray her surprise, Aubrey turned her head. Raoul's warm laugh washed over her and she frowned, realizing that her lips were inches away from his pipe.

Take a sip, he encouraged, the hand holding her waist loosening and caressing her through her shirt. Go on.

She regarded the pipe of the argyle with disdain. The thought of breathing the nitrogen like one breathed in tobacco nauseated her. But the fear of displeasing her master was greater than her distaste. Leaning forward the small bit necessary, she wrapped her lips around the thin end of the pipe and took a slow breath in.

Heated gas swirled down her airway, and she found it a somewhat pleasant sensation. Releasing the pipe, Aubrey exhaled, suddenly feeling a bit light-headed. She closed her eyes as the room seemed to spin about her.

What do you think? Raoul asked, laying his head on the edge of his bed.

Since she could not sign to him, she shrugged. She didn't like the way she felt powerless over her own body.

Raoul released her hands, breathing in the nitrogen through his pipe. It takes some getting used to, he admitted. I didn't like it when Lusca first had me try.

Hands free, Aubrey sat upright on Raoul's lap, signing rapidly.

Her master chuckled, covering her hands with his. I know full well your opinion of Lusca. You think he is a terrible person.

Aubrey narrowed her eyes. If she had been entirely truthful with her master, she would have corrected him. She didn't think that Lusca was a terrible person; she would never classify someone as repulsive as him as a person. But Aubrey said nothing, keeping her own confidence instead.

His hand caressing her hip drew her attention from her thoughts. Looking down, she frowned, wondering what he was doing.

You're soft, Raoul murmured, watching Aubrey through glazed eyes. Warm. And soft. Just like a woman should be.

A stone settled in Aubrey's stomach and she straightened slightly, not liking the way her master was speaking. Doubtless, he was gorgeous and attractive, but she didn't want him flirting with her like he was. She didn't want him to use her and discard her.

You think I would discard you? he asked, seeming to read her thoughts. He offered her the pipe and, not knowing how to decline without inciting his rage, Aubrey accepted. She watched him as she took a breath, gauging his reaction. A smile spread across his face, and he took the pipe back, taking a breath of his own. It is like we've kissed, he said idly.

Aubrey stiffened more.

Raoul chuckled, running his free hand through the curly locks of her hair. I offend you, he murmured, watching her. To think a pet would have such delicate sensibilities.

I am a special pet, Aubrey told him, not quite lying, but not quite telling the truth. I was trained to have such sensibilities.

It is illegal for one of the Select to take his own pet.

The abrupt change in topic startled Aubrey. She frowned, settling her hands on his shoulders once again, wondering why Raoul would say such a thing.

Does that not reassure you? he inquired, running his knuckles over her cheek.

Her eyes widened. He thought she was afraid he would take her. The idea had crossed her mind, but she had never been too worried about him trying to get her in his bed. If she ever felt truly endangered, all she had to do was unleash her Fire. That would deter him quickly enough.

You do not obey many of the rules, Aubrey signed slowly, hesitantly.

Raoul chuckled once again. You are feisty, my Buri, he said to her, leaning his face close to hers. I enjoy that spark in you.

She frowned at him. I don't like that name, she reminded him.

And you have no say in what I decide to call you, he replied.

Aubrey turned her eyes away, cheeks burning at the subtle rebuke. He was her master. He could call her whatever he pleased.

Again, he commanded, placing the pipe at her lips.

With a silent, bitter snarl, Aubrey took a drag on the pipe. Her limbs were beginning to turn leaden. The fact that she was sitting on her master's lap, brushing against him so inappropriately, was quickly gaining more appeal in her fuzzy mind. Disgusted at how quickly she was becoming intoxicated, Aubrey turned away.

Lips brushed her ear and a shiver of surprise and pleasure shot down her spine. Are you embarrassed? Raoul asked. His tongue traced the edge of her ear. For once, Aubrey was grateful for her inability to speak. She was sure, had she her voice, she would have moaned. Does it bother you that you are so quickly affected?

She wasn't sure what he meant. She didn't know if he was talking about the nitrogen or his kisses.

You are. Do not be. There is no reason, her master told her. His lips pressed against the skin behind her earlobe and Aubrey gasped. I find you quite attractive like this.

Like what? she wanted ask. *You like me inebriated? Or aroused? Because I m both.*

Flushed& He brushed his lips over her cheek bone. From both intoxication and arousal.

Well, that answers that, she thought bitterly. Bitterness melted away when his lips found the corner of her own.

You are beautiful, Raoul whispered against her lips. Exotic. You, yourself, are a drug, Aubrey.

The sound of her name on his lips nearly undid her. He never called her by her name, instead opting to use the hated pet name Buri or the loathed appellation pet.

I want to inhale you.

You are not in your right mind, she wanted to say as his lips brushed over her neck and the hand on her waist circled around, splaying against her stomach under her shirt.

I want to bring you into me.

His lips found the hollow at the base of her neck and his tongue dipped into it. Aubrey's eyes slid shut and her lips parted as heat coursed through her body. The hand on her stomach traveled upward, finding one of her breasts.

Aubrey& he breathed against her neck. I want all of you& my sweet pet&

The spell of heat and seduction he was weaving around her suddenly shattered and her anger at being referred to as pet burned away the nitrogen clouding her mind. Pushing away from him before he could respond, Aubrey snatched the pipe from his hand.

No more! she snapped with her free hand, her movements sharp and jerky. She wasn't sure if she was refusing his advances or the possibility of more of the nitrogen.

Raoul merely sat on the floor, watching her.

With a silent growl of exasperation, Aubrey bent, grabbing the argyle. Straightening, she hauled the

contraption off to one corner, poking at it for a minute before finally discovering how to stop the steam from coming out of it. Wrenching out the lower basin, filled with hot water, she stormed over to the door to Raoul's room. The door slid open as she approached it, revealing Lis. She shoved the basin into Lis's hands, signing quickly "Dump it out" before spinning back around and stomping over to Raoul. Aubrey crossed her arms, thoroughly in a downright cantankerous mood. "You," she signed, "are an @\$\$.

Raoul gave her a goofy grin. "I want my nitrogen back," he told her, sounding very much like a child whose favorite toy had just been taken away.

"You can have it back on third-day," she replied, certain his capacity to comprehend time was useless. "Now get in bed."

"I'm wearing my boots," he said, pointing at his shoes.

With a vicious glare, Aubrey kneeled by her master's feet and wrenched the boots off his body. He made a small noise, clearly surprised by her callous regard to his person, but said nothing.

Discarding his boots to one side, Aubrey turned back to him. "Bed. Now."

"I'm not tired," he replied petulantly.

"Yes, you are. You are a very tired Select who is going to have a massive hangover in the morning," she told him, urging him to his feet and then down on his bed.

"You don't get a hangover from nitrogen," Raoul informed her.

"I don't care," Aubrey snapped. She tucked the bedclothes around Raoul's body. "Go to sleep."

"I want a goodnight kiss."

Aubrey paused, wondering if his request was actually an order in disguise. Finally, she decided it didn't matter, and bent down to press a kiss to his forehead. At the last moment, Raoul reached up, pulling her lips to his. Her eyes widened in surprise, but she suppressed her urge to pull back because of her shock. His lips were soft on hers, gentle and undemanding. He gave her what he chose to, but didn't demand anything in return. When he released her, he smiled.

"Thank you, Aubrey," Raoul murmured.

"You're welcome, Raoul," she replied, spelling out his name instead of using the usual sign.

His smile grew. "We should come up with another sign," he said to her. "One that doesn't carry the weight of 'master' with it."

Another day, Aubrey told him, pressing a finger to his lips when she was done speaking.

Another day, he agreed. "Go to bed."

With a little bow, Aubrey turned and walked to his door, passing her hand over the light panel to turn them off as she went. The door slid open and she stepped out, sighing.

"Aubrey!" Lis exclaimed in a hushed tone. "What happened? Why did you

"I'm tired," she signed. "I just spent two hours dealing with an intoxicated Select three times my size and twice as cunning. I feel like I'm going to be ill."

Brushing by him, Aubrey made her way to her room. Once inside, she collapsed on her bed, breathing hard. She was exhausted from holding her Fire for so long and from the after-effects of the nitrogen she had breathed in. Rolling onto her back, Aubrey covered her eyes with her hands and resigned herself to the fact that she wouldn't be able to keep her nightmares at bay. She was too weak to hold back the memories of the ones who had come before her, and she would suffer a night of ill rest.

Curling on her side, Aubrey pressed her fingers to her lips, remembering Raoul's kiss. Perhaps it was worth it, trading a kiss with him for a night of terrible sleep. A small smile spread across her face when she recalled the way her lips had tingled at the contact. Then again, perhaps it had only been an effect of the nitrogen.

Author's Notes: In this story, Raoul gets high from inhaling compressed nitrogen through an argyle (hookah-like contraption). Scuba divers experience this narcotic effect when breathing compressed air (normally 21% oxygen, 79% nitrogen) at a depth of about 100 feet and an ambient pressure of 4.03 atmospheres (at sea level, we're under one atmosphere). They call this effect *nitrogen narcosis*. Nitrogen narcosis isn't deadly until you reach 300 feet (at which point you're dead from oxygen poisoning), however it can severely impair one's judgment, coordination, and decision-making abilities. It also gives people a sense of euphoria and giddiness; causes vertigo, tingling in the fingers, lips, and mouth; and produces feelings of anxiety and paranoia. There are several stories of divers under the influence of nitrogen narcosis giving fish their alternate air source (thinking the fish is another diver in need of air).

It is, however, impossible to experience nitrogen narcosis at the surface, even though I've pretended it works in this story. Why is it impossible? Simple. In order to breathe compressed nitrogen, the hose and pipe of the argyle would have to function like the second stage and primary stage on a scuba diving regulator. In the hose (second stage), the pressure of the nitrogen would rapidly decrease from about 205 atmospheres (average fill for a scuba tank) to about 11.2 atmospheres. In the pipe itself (primary stage), the pressure would drop from 11.2 atmospheres to the ambient pressure. In this case, ambient pressure is one atmosphere since Raoul is at sea level. Since narcosis generally appears at about 4 atmospheres, Raoul, and Aubrey, are both safe from its effects.

Argon, hydrogen, and helium can also cause narcosis. The only cure for narcosis in any form is to simply ascend a few feet and wait for the effects to wear off. This can take anywhere from a few minutes to a half hour.